

Call to Worship

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who long for your saving help always say, "The Lord is great!" Psalm 70:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4

Prayer

Lord, as I worship you now, I pray I will find you afresh, be awake to your majesty, your goodness to me. Give me a heart to rejoice in you. Open my eyes to all you have done in me and in your people. I lift my heart and my hands to you Almighty God. Amen

Song: "Only a Holy God" (by Farren, Thompson, Smith, Robinson)

1. Who else commands all the hosts of heaven? Who else could make every king bow
Who else can whisper and darkness trembles? Only a Holy God. /down?
2. What other beauty demands such praises? What other splendour outshines the sun?
What other majesty rules with justice? Only a Holy God.
*Come and behold him, the One and the Holy. Cry out, sing holy.
Forever a Holy God. Come and worship the Holy God.*
3. What other glory consumes like fire? What other power can raise the dead?
What other name remains undefeated? Only a Holy God.
4. Who else could rescue me from my failing? Who else would offer His only Son?
Who else invites me to call Him Father? Only a Holy God. Only my Holy God.

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Prayer of Intercession

Father God, I pray with your children in the nation of Iran. As the clouds of war surround them, give them peace. As their lives are threatened by the weapons of war, give them hope that others can see and seek. Give them strength as they face persecution for their faith, as they face fear and grief and loss. Give them the assurance of the life that they have in you. Thank you for those who put Bibles in their hands.

I pray also with those who suffer from the civil war in Sudan and Nigeria and who lose homes, livelihoods and lives in brutal Islamist attacks.

And I pray for Christians in Myanmar who are driven from their villages by aerial bombing raids.

They are my brothers and sisters in the Lord – help me to continue to pray for them and learn from them the depth of faith they have in you.

Lord, hear my prayer. In the name of Jesus. Amen

Song: MHB 211 “Up from the Grave He Arose” (by Robert Lowry)

1. Low in the grave He lay, Jesus, my Saviour;
Waiting the coming day, Jesus, my Lord
*Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign;
He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*
2. Vainly they watched His bed, Jesus, my Saviour;
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus, my Lord...
3. Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away, Jesus, my Lord...

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Bible Reading:

- John 19:17-18
So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.
- John 19:25-27
Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.
- John 19:28-30
Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on the stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Message: “And the Big Question is.....”

It's three weeks since Easter, the highlight of the Christian year. So, it's over for another 12 months or so? I hope not, it is so central to our salvation and discipleship. This year, as I read and thought through the story as it unfolded through the Easter week, I wondered what the characters in the story were thinking and feeling, what was driving them? Here are some of the questions that exercised my mind and soul as I contemplated Jesus dragging his cross through the streets of Jerusalem and up the hill they called Golgotha. In the last few hours he had been slapped, punched, spat on and flogged. Roman soldiers walked by his side. Crowds of people watched from the sidelines. When they reached the top of the hill, they laid him naked on the cross and drove nails through his hands and feet and lifted the cross up.

And the Big Question is.....?

- **Did the people, the crowd, have an understanding of why this was happening?** No, but their idea and hopes were for a Messiah who would rid them of the Romans. Disappointed by their unfulfilled hopes they had cried, "Crucify him!" I wonder how many of them were in the crowd six weeks later when Peter spoke and 3000 people believed and were baptised. Hope in the Messiah restored!
- **Did the religious leaders have an understanding of why this was happening?** No, they hated him, slapped him and spat on him (what an undignified, ugly, abhorrent thing done by the upholders of God's law). They wanted him dead, crucified, and they incited the crowd to demand that. But there was a bright spot in that darkest of days, and darkest of governing bodies. Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, courageously asked for Jesus body, and along with a fellow member, Nicodemus, interred him in the tomb. Hope in the Messiah restored? For these two currently? Maybe not at that point, but Sunday changed all that.
- **Did the disciples understand why all this was happening?** No, not completely. They struggled for three years to come to grips with what Jesus was telling them would happen. In the back of their minds, they had the traditional Jewish view of the Messiah and could not come to grips with dying being the mark of the Messiah. In the last hours they were scared, ran away, lost hope, and laid low.
- **And why did Peter bring a sword to the Garden of Gethsemane?** A last-ditch attempt to restore the Roman-defeating Messiah? **Why did Peter come back to the Sanhedrin's trial?** To demonstrate his devotion to Jesus was greater than the other's? To look for an opportunity to spring Jesus from captivity and do the expected Messiah thing? Regardless of his motives, he was humiliated by his betrayal of Jesus and thereby took the first steps to his own redemption and restoration. And Sunday morning restored hope for him, and all the others, in the real Messiah.
- His Mum was there at the crucifixion. **Did she understand why all this was happening?** Perhaps she understood more than anyone. Angels had declared to her and Joseph, when she fell pregnant, that Jesus was God's Son and his purpose was to save God's people from their sins. But this way? She must have been heartbroken. There were lots of Mary's around on Sunday morning and although Jesus' mother is not mentioned by name she must have been overjoyed. Hope restored!
- **Did Jesus understand what was happening?** Absolutely! The time spent with his disciples was filled with teaching about his purpose. For three years he revealed bit by bit the extent of the role of the Messiah, and that involved his death and resurrection, but it wasn't until dawn on the Sunday that it dawned on his followers what it meant. Two dawns in one day! And Jesus wasn't a *victim* of the Romans, or the crowd, or the religious leaders. He was in control at every stage. He orchestrated the Last Supper. He controlled the confrontation in the garden. He dictated the conduct of the investigations by the Sanhedrin,

And the Big Question is.....?

by Pilate, by Herod. By what he said and didn't say, he maintained the purpose of his Father at every step. He did not allow anyone to state or assume his Messiahship to be anything other than what his Father had planned. Anything that would imply guilt for some action or take away from his innocence he would not say or do. **And speaking of Jesus' innocence, who were the participants in the Easter story who declared his innocence to others?** Surprisingly it was Judas (Matthew 27:4), Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:41), and the centurion at the cross (Luke 23:47).

- **How did the man Jesus manage the task of fulfilling his Father's purpose on the cross?** With extreme difficulty! He was so overwhelmed and filled with anguish at what he was facing that his sweat was like drops of blood. **Did God always answer Jesus' prayers?** No! Jesus offered perhaps the greatest unanswered prayer of all time. "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." But what a wonderful lesson for us as we deal with unanswered prayer. "Yet not my will but yours be done," Jesus said.
- **Did God abandon Jesus in his greatest need?** "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus cried. I am tempted to think, of course not. God is with us even when we think he is not. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. But the answer to the question is a resounding "Yes"! The Father could do nothing else because at that moment of death Jesus *became* sin, he embodied the whole world's sin. God, by his very nature, could not embrace sin. I don't understand how the Trinity could be fractured at this time, but the "why" is clear. Jesus suffered the judgment of death, separation from God, for my sin, so that I am free. Praise God that Jesus fulfilled his purpose! For by that, I live!
- **Did Jesus rise from the dead?** The answer is "No"! He *was raised* from death by his Father. Jesus was powerless. He was dead. But his resurrection was a demonstration of God's majesty and power in a final victory over the death which each of us share! Death, where is your sting! Jesus' resurrection was Good News at that historical moment. It is Good News for us now.
- Which leads us to the final question. **If I understand what happened at that Easter time, if I understand why Good Friday was good, am I eager and excited to share this Good News with others?** Jesus appeared, spoke with, ate with his disciples (hundreds of them), and the last words he spoke before his ascension stay with us, motivate us, excite us. What a command! What a promise! What an assurance! **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:18-20)

No question about that!

And the Big Question is.....?

Song: MHB 316 "Jesus Saves!" (Priscilla Jane Owens)

1. We have heard the joyful sound: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Bear the news to ev'ry land, climb the steeps and cross the waves;
onward! 'tis our Lord's command: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
2. Waft it on the rolling tide: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Tell to sinners far and wide: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Sing ye islands of the sea! Echo back, ye ocean caves!
Earth shall keep her jubilee: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
3. Sing above the battle strife: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
By His death and endless life: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Sing it softly through the gloom, when the heart for mercy craves;
sing in triumph o'er the tomb: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
4. Give the winds a mighty voice: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Let the nations now rejoice: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Shout salvation full and free, highest hills and deepest caves;
this our song of victory: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

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Benediction

Go out from this place, wherever you are, with God's blessing and the promise that he is with you always. Go out into the world, even to those of other nations, declaring that "He is Risen", and living in obedience to his commands.

In Jesus' name and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA