

## EASTER SUNDAY (B)

**READINGS:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8  
Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1,2,14-24

### Bible foundations

**Aim: to celebrate the amazing effect of the resurrection on the first disciples.**

To say that the world is a little crazy could be an understatement. On Easter Day Christians celebrate the culmination of the Easter story, the resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, shops pile their shelves high with chocolate Easter bunnies.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians was probably written during the ad 50s, about twenty years after the events of the first Easter. In today's passage Paul is appealing to the tradition that was central to the Corinthian church, namely that Jesus had died, was buried and was then raised to life. What's more, many people still alive at the time of his writing had seen Jesus. It was this belief that had saved them. Possibly the only creedal saying that was common to the whole church can be found in verses 3-5. Notice the importance that Paul places on the fact that these events were the fulfilment of the Scriptures. He wanted them to be confident in their faith. But unfortunately the Corinthians were wavering in their understanding. Paul points out in verse 2 that salvation is found in the gospel which he has received and passed on. This resurrection is a real fact.

From the moment of his resurrection (strengthened by the events of Pentecost), Jesus' followers were transformed from being scared and reticent. Mark's account of the empty tomb is important because the empty tomb was crucial in convincing them that Jesus was alive! Without it, all accounts of the resurrection appearances could be interpreted as ghost stories. Remarkably it is initially the account of women which adds authenticity. Anyone seeking to cover up the truth would not have relied on women whose testimony in court would not be accepted.

Belief in the resurrection transforms lives. May that be true for all those worshipping with you this Easter Day, just as the lives of the first disciples were transformed!

### Beginning the service

Introduce the fourth Easter Day prayer station and share how the stations have been used this week. See page 117 for details.

Easter Day calls for everyone to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead! Stand for a proclamation 'praise shout'. Split the congregation into two, one half to read the first bold 'shout' followed by the others with the second bold 'shout'. The leader reads the first line. This is also available as a download (YearB.Easter1\_2),

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, conquered death for us!

**Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose triumphant from the grave.

**Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is seated in heaven at the Father's side.

**Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will return in power and majesty,

**Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!**

### Easter Day station

**With;** objects that will make this into a garden; short-stemmed spring flowers each wrapped in a damp kitchen towel (to make them last as long as possible); large boulder (made out of cardboard); Easter/paschal candle; tea lights (be aware of safety issues: provide a firm, heatproof base for them!); a

basket of small chocolate eggs. This could be made more interactive by putting this inside a tent with a wide entrance or a side chapel or a baptistery used for adult immersion.

The following Bible verses reproduced and placed on the station:

Very early on Sunday morning, just as the sun was coming up, [the women] went to the tomb ... they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. And it was a huge stone! The women went into the tomb, and on the right side they saw a young man in a white robe sitting there. They were alarmed. The man said ... 'God has raised [Jesus] to life and he isn't here.' *Mark 16:2,4-6 (CEV)*

### **An instruction card for visitors:**

Jesus came alive again and that brings new life and hope to everyone. Take a spring flower and think of a sad place where you would like God to bring hope. Speak to God about this.

At first the women were afraid. When they had met Jesus and really knew he was alive they did not need to fear. Light a tea light and ask God to shine his light and take away fear.

Take an Easter egg to remind you that, just as an egg stands for new life, so Jesus came alive again.

Note that the instructions for visitors do not assume any commitment to the Christian faith. You might want to amend that if only members of the church community are going to visit.

### **Bible reading**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 using CEV or TNIV. The reader could learn this by heart to present to the congregation as if he is the apostle Paul and they are his friends. He wants them to remember the message that Jesus is alive! introduce as follows: The apostle Paul sent this long letter to the Christians who lived in Corinth. They were a group of believers who had had lots of growing pains as Christians but Paul had helped them. Above all, he wanted them to be absolutely certain that Jesus had died but was now alive.

Alternatively, it could be read as a Statement of faith.

Mark 16:1 -8 could be read as a drama script, available with music suggestions as a download (YearB.Easter1\_1). Allow a short time to reflect, after the music has finished. Comment that even after they had heard Jesus was alive, people were afraid or unbelieving, as the reading points out. You could refer to Thomas too. It was only after people had met Jesus that their fear changed.

### **Bible talk**

**With:** three groups of witnesses to the fact that Jesus is alive; a witness box-conversation with the witnesses should be as natural as possible and a rehearsal is strongly recommended

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 should be read as suggested above to introduce the Bible talk. Make sure that people know who the apostle Paul is. Remind everyone about the sadness of Good Friday. Two days later everything had changed. Jesus had come alive! Over the next few weeks loads of people met Jesus so they were witnesses to that fact that he was alive. We are going to meet some of them. Invite the groups of witnesses to the witness box. Each could place their hand on the Bible to promise to tell the truth. Interview each of them asking them the following questions:

Who are you?

What is your connection to Jesus?

How do you know he is alive?

How has your life been changed as result?

Check that everyone knows what a witness is. Expect responses along the lines of 'someone who was there', 'someone who has seen the evidence'.

### **First witnesses: the three women in the Bible reading.**

Who are you? (Mary Magdalene, Salome, Mary the mother of James)

What is your connection to Jesus? (Friends and relatives of Jesus)

How do you know he is alive? (They watched him die on the cross, they knew he was buried in the tomb in the garden, it was a rush to get him buried because the Sabbath began, and his body was not properly prepared.)

Recount in their own words what happened according to Mark 16:1-8 (and not any other Gospel!).)

How has your life been changed as result? (Initially they were afraid until after they met Jesus. Then they walked and talked with him. He is alive, for ever. That means he is always with them.)

### **Second witness: Peter**

Who are you? (Simon, but Jesus renamed<sup>[11]</sup>him Peter or Cephas which means 'Rock')

What Is your connection to Jesus? (One of Jesus' closest followers, who saw him feed thousands, walk on water (even help Peter walk on water), saw him arrested and then denied knowing who Jesus was three times (said shamefacedly).

How do you know he is alive? (The women said that an angel had specifically told them to tell Peter that Jesus was alive, he met Jesus on the day he came alive, on the beach early in the morning and other times. He knew it was Jesus and not a ghost!)

How has your life been changed as a result? (Jesus has forgiven him for letting him down and has given him a new task to help others become followers of Jesus.)

Briefly, comment that Paul had also mentioned the 'Twelve' in his letter. The 'Twelve' were identified as Jesus' companions which included Peter. Comment that the identity of the 'more than five hundred' is uncertain but they may have been the followers Jesus met in Galilee. Mention 'James', the half-brother of Jesus who did not believe until after the resurrection. 'All the apostles' was an inclusive term taking in the twelve and others involved in the spread of Christianity.

### **Third witness: Paul**

Who are you? (Known as Saul who had a name change, came from Tarsus in Syria)

What is your connection to Jesus? (A very intelligent and religious man who persecuted the early Christians)

How do you know he is alive? (Briefly<sup>[11]</sup>recount Saul/Paul's encounter with Jesus<sup>[11]</sup>on the road to Damascus.)

How has your life been changed as a result? (Refer back to the Bible reading verses 10,1 I. His life has been transformed!)

All these people had met Jesus and were convinced that he was alive. None of them was expecting this. But after they met Jesus, they were never the same again. We do not meet Jesus in quite the same way as they did but this church is full of people who have met Jesus and have been changed. We can have hope and need not be afraid. Invite someone to share how meeting Jesus has changed them. Make sure they have prepared what they say, not using jargon but child-friendly language, making sense to those who have not yet met Jesus themselves. This leads into the Prayer activity.

### **Prayer Activity**

**With:** the flowers on the prayer station; Easter eggs; small candles which could be lit from the paschal candle (be safety conscious!)

Give people a choice of what they bring to the prayer station - a daffodil to be put in the 'garden' or a tea light they can light and leave on the table in front of the empty cross. They can either ask God to bring hope to a place where the hope of Jesus is needed such as a country where there is hunger or someone they know who is sad, or they can light/hold a candle and ask God to take away fear, thinking of someone

they know who is scared or is facing something difficult in the future. Give some specific suggestions. Everyone takes an egg as they leave the station as a sign of new life and hope.

Conclude by reading Isaiah 25:6-9 and then 1 Corinthians 15:3b,4. Musicians play/sing as people come forward to make their prayer requests.

### **Ending the service**

Conclude with the declaration used at Beginning the service, followed by a celebratory song. 'Peace to you' (see Music and song ideas) could be a benediction to sing to each other.

A feast after the service would continue the celebratory theme. If this is not practical, offer some special things to eat with tea and coffee - chocolate cake is always a winner!

### **Helpful extras**

#### **Music and song ideas**

Suitable songs and hymns include:

'Thine be the glory';

'Christ the Lord is risen today, Hallelujah';

'From heaven you came';

'There is a redeemer';

'Sing a song, sing a joyful song (Celebrate)';

'Low in the grave he lay';

'Here is love vast as the ocean';

'How deep the Father's love for us';

'King of kings, majesty';

'Above all powers';

'Light of the world';

'Oh to see the dawn';

'Peace to you' (Graham Kendrick) could be sung as a blessing to each other at the end as this echoes Jesus' words when he appears after his resurrection.

#### **Statement of Faith**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3b-7 as a statement of the things that we are sure about. It could be read antiphonally or each section could be read and then repeated

#### **Notes and comments**

The **Prayer** activity flows from the **Bible talk**. Some supervision will be needed to give out flowers and candles, light candles and hand out eggs. You could fix the daffodils to the cross itself (using chicken wire). This is *very* effective but will also need supervision.

If the service includes a baptism, draw comparisons between Jesus' death and resurrection and the symbolism of baptism - the baptised person witnesses that they have died to sin and live in the resurrection power of Christ. A child is being baptised on the basis of what Jesus has done.

Incorporate the words of the praise shout or the **Prayer** activity into a Communion service.

#### **Alternative online options**

All suggested downloads are available at [www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/light). Visit [www.lightlive.org](http://www.lightlive.org) for additional activities for children, young people and adults.