

Sunday 20th February 2022. Resurrection hope!

WELCOME God invites us into His Holy Presence to worship Him today here in the church and online. This is the God who in the words of Jesus says, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die;*" *John 11:25*. The title for this service is Resurrection hope and what a hope that is; one that we as Christians should be offering to our world. As our first hymn points out Jesus SHALL reign where'er the sun...

HYMN 470 Jesus shall reign

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does His successive journeys run
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more

People and realms of every tongue
Declare His love in sweetest song
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on His Name

Blessings abound where Jesus reigns
The prisoners leap to lose their chains
The weary find eternal rest
And all who suffer want are blessed

Let every creature rise and bring
The highest honours to our King
Angels descend with songs again
And earth repeat the loud Amen.

*Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

God of all creation, You have given us so much and we are truly blessed. Thank You for Your constant guidance throughout our lives; for Your wisdom in all things, for the way in which Your Word encourages, inspires, feeds us and sustains us in our daily spiritual lives.

You Lord, speak to us through so many different ways: through the seasons, the landscape and even the weather, through the stories of old and the word of the prophets. But most of all you speak to us in and

through the life of Jesus, Your Son, our Lord and Saviour. For His willingness to come to earth to show us the way back to You we bring You our praise. For His willingness to intercede on our behalf in heaven, for the way in which Your Spirit guides our spirits and for the promise He's made to return one day to bring Your kingdom in, in all its fullness and glory, we bring You our praise.

For all the ways You have guided us, supported us and for all the ways You continue to lead us through life we give You our heartfelt thanks.

Yet all too often we recognise we have failed You, we have not followed You, we have ignored You our lives have been too busy to notice You. We come in humility to You Lord God asking that You would hear our sorrow for the things we have done which are wrong, for the things that we have not done which should have happened. Thank You from the bottom of our hearts that You say, "My child your sins are forgiven, come follow me once more." In a token of our willingness to do that we offer You ourselves, our time, our talents and our money to be used by You to bring Your kingdom here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray saying together the family prayer, Our Father who art in Heaven Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done On earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever. Amen

READING 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Read by Andrew Laing (Selkirk)

The Resurrection Body

35 Someone will ask, "How can the dead be raised to life? What kind of body will they have?" 36 You fool! When you plant a seed in the ground, it does not sprout to life unless it dies. 37 And what you plant is a bare seed, perhaps a grain of wheat or some other grain, not the full-bodied plant that will later grow up. 38 God provides that seed with the body he wishes; he gives each seed its own proper body.

42 This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised, it will be immortal. 43 When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised, it will be beautiful and strong. 44 When buried, it is a physical body; when raised, it will be a spiritual body. There is, of course, a physical body, so there has to be a spiritual body. 45 For the scripture says, "The first man, Adam, was created a living being"; but the last Adam is the life-giving Spirit. 46 It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. 47 The first Adam, made of earth, came from the earth; the second Adam came from heaven. 48 Those who belong to the earth are like the one who was made of earth; those who are of heaven are like the one who came from heaven. 49 Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth, so we will wear[a] the likeness of the Man from heaven.

50 What I mean, friends, is that what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's Kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality.

REFLECTION

1 Corinthians 15⁴⁹ *Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth, so we will wear the likeness of the Man from heaven.*

What a powerful statement that is. We've been thinking about the Marks of Mission which will allow us to engage with our community here in the 21st century. We've seen from last week that spiritual renewal is the key to new life and here in the Lectionary passage for today we find ourselves with the statement above – wearing the likeness of the Man from heaven. Ponder that for a moment.

The Bible describes two states of existence. One is the natural body that we have here on earth. Because we chose not to follow God's way of living these have become temporary and subject to decay. But there is still hope – the hope of a new body in the life to come following life here on earth one which will enable us to wear the likeness of the Man from heaven. The one stems from the other, the latter beginning in the here and now.

The Greeks had problems thinking of the resurrection of the body - they believed wholeheartedly in the resurrection of the spirit for they believed that a divine spark of fire came into the body at birth and left it at death returning to God and being absorbed by him again.

The Jews came into two categories - the Sadducees - who did not believe in life after death in any form at all. Sheol or Hades was the other predominant belief - a belief in a grey place where the dead lived in a shadowy ghostly existence without strength, without light, cut off from people and from God. You see this in the Old Testament though hope did develop, hope in immortal life with God - the God of the nation to begin with, then in the God of the individual - the God of relationship - a relationship which would survive death.

Following Jesus rising from the dead came the belief that there would be a personal relationship lasting beyond death and for this to happen we would need a body of some description.

Paul doesn't go into detail about the exact nature of our risen bodies but he does make comparisons. He tells us that the evidence surrounds us - almost saying how blind can you be? The creator has already written into nature the principle of death and resurrection. Think of a seed, tiny, brown, shrivelled – placed into the ground and in a while up pops a beautiful flower. The seed pod dissolves, the green shoot grows and then the flower emerges. The seed has gone, but it remains the same plant. A different world emerges. There is no visual likeness between seed and plant. You could never guess what a tomato would look like by looking at a tomato seed. What we plant in the soil and what grows out of it doesn't look anything alike. The dead body that we bury in the ground and the resurrection body that comes from it will be dramatically different.

Think too of our own lives, the small embryo growing into a foetus, lovely and warm well fed and cared for, not having any work to do at all except just being. Then one day your world caves in quite literally

CCLI: (A) 600239, (E&Y) 634212, (S) 27185 One License hymns reprinted with permission under: (A) A738334, (E&Y) A 738278. (S)

the walls that surround you squeeze you and squeeze you and squeeze you until out you pop into a new life, a life where you have to fend for yourself, a life where your body grows and develops, matures and then ages. Till another journey awaits you. The foetus has no notion whatsoever of another world outside the womb until it is born. That obviously doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. I remember reading the following in Keynotes in 2015 – a conversation between twins in the womb.

One asked the other: "Do you believe in life after delivery?" The other replied, "Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense" said the first. "There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?"

The second said, "I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now."

The first replied, "That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded."

The second insisted, "Well I think there is something and maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore."

The first replied, "Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one has ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere."

"Well, I don't know," said the second, "but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us."

The first replied "Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That's laughable. If Mother exists then where is She now?"

The second said, "She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of Her. It is in Her that we live. Without Her this world would not and could not exist."

Said the first: "Well I don't see Her, so it is only logical that She doesn't exist."

To which the second replied, "Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive Her presence, and you can hear Her loving voice, calling down from above."

The Christian belief is that there is another dimension to our lives once we die and the living we do in the here and now equips us for the new life and new world to come.

Think too of a chrysalis, a caterpillar, a pupa limited by its body until one day the butterfly flies soars away from freedom and constraint into a new way of living.

Paul says look at nature with all its different types of bodies for different habitats - fish for the water, animals for the ground, birds for the air so why can't there be a different type of body for heaven. One which we wear as the likeness of the Man from heaven.

First and foremost it is a body that will never fade or decay as happens in this world. There's plenty adverts and a multi million pound industry to prove it! But in the next life our bodies will never fade. He goes on and this is in the NIV. It is sown in dishonour it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness it is raised in power. Glory and power -doxa and dynamis - the end of the Lord's prayer. ***Philippians 3:21 says He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule.*** Just think, a body capable of experiencing God's glory and God's power in all its might. Our physical bodies are incapable of coping with the glory of God. If we are going to be like the risen Christ then we need to be transformed into His likeness. This body weak, our future body full of glory and power. What a thrilling prospect.

Wearing the likeness of the Man from heaven means allowing the risen Jesus to transform our whole lives as we invite His Spirit in so that He might grow His fruit in our lives, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

How much time do we spend thinking about what we are going to wear day by day? How often do we shop for new clothes and how much do we spend?

We were talking about spiritual renewal last week – that takes time and effort. It means opening ourselves up to the creator of the universe, the creator who made me, me in order to allow Him to transform what I've become into what He originally planned.

Benjamin Franklin evidently wrote his own epitaph. Here's what he wrote: "The Body of B. Franklin, Printer like the cover of an old book its contents torn out, and stripped of its Lettering and Gilding, lies here, Food for Worms, but the Work shall not be wholly lost: For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more in a new and more perfect Edition, Corrected and amended by the Author."

Do we not often long for that "new and more perfect Edition, Corrected and amended by the Author"? That is the Christian hope – a hope which starts in the here and now just as the seed sprouts and grows we too bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Christ within us empowers and embraces us. Let us pray;

The Present Tense.

Thank you O God for the time that is now

for all the newness your minutes allow

Keep us alert with your presence of mind

to fears and longings that move humankind

Thank you for hopes of the day that will come
for all the change that will happen in time
God for the future our spirits prepare
Hallow our doubts and redeem us from fear.

Make us afraid of the thoughts that delay
faithful in all the affairs of today
keep us Creator from playing it safe
thank you that now is the time of our life.

Fred Kaan Wisdom Calling © 1999 The Canterbury Press Norwich page 388

HYMN In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love
what depths of peace
When fears are stilled
when strivings cease
My comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fulness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save.

'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay

Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again.

And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell no scheme of man.
Can ever pluck me from His hand.
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Stuart Townend K Grave

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

By: Gordon Junor (Ashkirk)

As we have heard in our reading this morning Paul wrote of the "Resurrection Body" - and that when our body may be buried it is mortal but when raised it will become immortal.

We have those ultimately portentous words in verse 49 "Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth so we will wear the likeness of the man from heaven"

When mortal is changed to immortal death , he writes , will be destroyed and victory will be complete

" Where Death is your victory

Where Death is your power to hurt ?"

We can all speculate on what existence after mortal death there may be - but we do not - and cannot - know how or what that may be ?

Many , of course , have given thought to these possibilities - and have done so over centuries - but without nearing any resolution of Paul's "Mystery".

CCLI: (A) 600239, (E&Y) 634212, (S) 27185 One License hymns reprinted with permission under: (A) A738334, (E&Y) A 738278. (S)

A-738322 All rights reserved.

Here is the offering of Kahlil Gilbran , from "The Prophet"

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;

And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.

Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour. Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king? Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

Let us pray both for those who have died and those of us all from this earth who remain bound to so die.

Meantime let us pray to God the Father,

who has reconciled all things to himself in Christ.

For peace among the nations,

that God may rid the world of violence, cruelty and selfishness

and help people to grow in justice and harmony,

while working together to protect the beautiful but broken natural world that we share;

For Christian people everywhere,

that we may joyfully proclaim and live out our faith in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world;

For those who suffer from hunger, sickness, poverty,

unemployment or loneliness,

that the presence of the Holy Spirit may bring them health, rest and comfort.

We take a few moments to remember quietly those of especial concern to us today;

For us and our dear ones,

Let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,

to the mercy and protection of God, today and forever.

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, God's Son our Saviour.

AMEN

HYMN 727 In the bulb there is a flower

In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree;

In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,

Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody.

There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me.

From the past will come the future, what it holds a mystery.

Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning: in our time, infinity,

In our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity.

In our death a resurrection, at the last a victory,

Unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

Natalie Allyn Wakeley Sleeth (1930-1992)

BENEDICTION

The strength of God be your support

The light of God be your guide

The love of God be your joy

Go, knowing the Eternal Presence of Almighty God Father Son and Spirit in your life today and always. Amen