

Morning Service of the Word

Easter 4 - Sunday 25 April 2021

Welcome and Opening Prayer

SONG

Introduction

O Lord, open our lips:  
**and our mouth shall sing your praise.**

O God, make speed to save us  
**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
**as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

Praise the Lord:  
**The Lord's name be praised.**

Confession

A moment of silence:

Christ our Passover Lamb has been offered for us. So, let us rejoice by putting away all malice and evil and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

**God our Father, we are sorry for the times when we have used your gifts carelessly and acted ungratefully.**

**We are sorry when we enjoy the fruits of the harvest but forget that you have given them to us.**

**We are sorry that, while we belong to a people who are full and satisfied, we ignore the cry of the hungry.**

**We are sorry that we are thoughtless and do not care enough for the world you have made.**

**We are sorry that we store up goods for ourselves alone as if there were no God in heaven.**

**Father, in your mercy, forgive us and help us. Amen.**

Absolution

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins and restore us in his service to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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## **Bible Reading**

### **Acts 4: 5-12 - New International Version**

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **SONG**

### **Gospel Reading**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to..... **Glory to you O Lord.**

### **John 10: 11-18**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## Sermon

### Easter 4

In Acts chapter 3, before our Acts reading for today from chapter 4, Peter heals a beggar who had been crippled from birth. This man was begging at the temple gates and asked Peter and John for money as they walked by. Peter tells him that he doesn't have any silver or gold but will give him what he does have. He then says, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'; after which he takes the beggar by the right hand and helps him up. Instantly, the man's feet and ankles became strong – so much so that he jumps to his feet and walks and jumps into the temple with them praising God!

As we can imagine, news of such an occurrence spread like wildfire; and very quickly Peter is in trouble with the authorities. It is this incident which the authorities refer to in verse 7 of our reading today. 'By what power or name did you do this?'

If we look at Peter in the Gospels, I would say that he could be described as outspoken (although he didn't always engage the brain before words came out of his mouth!); and, when it came to the bit, he didn't always live up to his word – his denying knowing Jesus after Jesus had been arrested when he'd previously bragged that he would stand by Jesus through thick and thin is a good example. Whatever bravado he had shown previously completely evaporated when he saw the strength of the opposition.

What a very different Peter we see in our passage today! In fact, here he is facing the same opposition that Jesus faced – the same council that condemned Jesus to death; so he knew what they were capable of! This council, made up of rulers, elders and teachers of the law, had 70 members, plus the current high priest who presided over the group – a big group to face whatever the circumstances. The Sadducees held the majority within the group, and they were the wealthy, intellectual, and powerful men of Jerusalem. As we know, Peter had been a lowly fisherman.

Annas and Caiaphas had played significant roles in Jesus' trial: and they were not at all pleased that the man they thought they had sacrificed for the good of the nation had followers who were just as persistent and who promised to be just as troublesome as he was!

This Peter is no longer cringing and sculking away in tears. This is the 'Post Pentecost Peter'! When God anointed Peter with the Holy Spirit, he transformed his natural, but often unwise, outspokenness into a bold, fearless weapon for the spreading of the Gospel and the glorifying of God!

In other words, when Peter surrendered to God and allowed the Holy Spirit to work in him, his natural God-given personality, which I think had probably always been big and loud, was given a supernatural quality and power which God could then use mightily to create an effective, straight talking evangelist.

So, instead of being defensive, which the council would have expected as their presence was very intimidating to most people, Peter went straight on the offensive, confidently speaking out for God and presenting the Gospel to these high-powered leaders: leaders who were far more interested in their reputations and positions than in God.

The actions and words of Peter (and I guess John speaks as well) threatened these religious leaders. Peter was the spokesperson, but God would still have been using the other disciples and their personalities to win lives for salvation.

Many people can be afraid, or at least apprehensive, about allowing the Holy Spirit into their lives. Some people even go so far as to think that they will be 'possessed' in a completely negative way!

Will I still be me? The answer is yes and no!

The reality is that God creates all of us with unique personalities and he knows how he wants those personalities to grow and develop. After all he holds the blueprint of who we are. Allowing Jesus to reign in us will mean that he will enhance and develop us as he designed us to be.....and then add so much more.

A bit like a wedding cake. Initially after it's made it's covered in plain icing – usually white – maybe more than one tier – very plain and ordinary. But then a magical transformation begins as all sorts of intricate shapes and patterns and decorations are added to it until it reaches its final beautiful, 'wow factor' state. Even if it's not to our taste, we will almost certainly appreciate and be impressed with the craftsmanship, time, patience and originality that's gone into it. The wedding cake, in all its glory, will be ready in time for the wedding.

One of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to get us ready for a wedding – the wedding of the Lamb, Jesus Christ when he returns to earth in splendour. This preparation, changing us from one degree of glory to another, takes a lifetime. So, we may have been following Jesus for years and years, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform all sorts of things in us to make us more beautiful for our wedding with Jesus, but he's never finished with us till the day we die. We must never think that because we're in our 70s, or 80s, or 90s even, that God's completed his work in us, because that won't happen until we take our final breath!

Like Peter we should be 'Post Pentecost People'.

In many ways that will look different in each one of us, because God has given us different personalities, but in other ways we should be out and out identical: and Peter's final comment is one which we should be utterly and completely united in.

'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved.'

If we give the Holy Spirit free reign in our lives this will be our absolute, solid, firm Christian conviction, regardless of how many other faiths are out there.....but that's a whole other sermon!

## **The Creed**

**We believe in God the Father, by whose plan earth and heaven sprang into being and all created things began.**

**We believe in Christ the Saviour, Son of God in human frame, virgin-born, the child of Mary, upon whom the Spirit came.**

**Christ, who on the cross forsaken, like a lamb to slaughter led; suffered under Pontius Pilate and descended to the dead.**

**We believe in Jesus risen, heaven's King to rule and reign, to the Father's side ascended till as judge he comes again.**

**We believe in God the Spirit; in one church, below and above: saints of God in one communion, one in holiness and love.**

**So, by faith, our sins forgiven, Christ our Saviour, Lord and Friend, we shall rise with him in glory to a life that knows no end.**

## **Peace**

### **Intercessions**

#### **Intercessions for Easter 4 (2021)**

Father God, we pray for your Church, in all its variations; that in constant prayerfulness Christians everywhere will be attentive and receptive to your Holy Spirit. We pray that our joy and conviction in you as our one true Saviour will be so radiant that all who are lost, weary and searching may be directed to the lasting inner peace of God.

We pray for unity within individual churches as well as across churches within the same denomination and those of different denominations. Regardless of our traditions, may we show the world a united front, revealing our committed faith in Jesus Christ and sharing the love he has for all people with everyone we meet. May we be submissive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, correction, and transformation of our lives.

Father God, we pray for the world, with all its mistakes and tragedies, that your active Holy Spirit will bring order, serenity, and hope.

We pray for all those in powerful leadership positions; for those whom they govern, and for those with whom they negotiate; that all their resources of power and wealth will be so used so that peace and justice may prevail over all the earth.

We pray too for all who are involved in the worldly struggles for power; for all areas of political unrest; for all decision and policy makers; that wisdom, common sense and respect will encourage just and peaceful governments to arise.

Father God, we know that the lives of many who live around this church are in turmoil; distrust, anger, and violence is the 'norm' for some families and their neighbours. Addictions which cause suffering and sorrow and stunt healthy living abound in more places than we would like. Financial difficulties plague many and debt is overwhelming for others.

We thank you for all those who set the example of living peacefully in the midst of a sea of hardship. We pray that others would learn from them. We thank you for every single person who serves others in this place and ask that you will uphold and sustain them. We pray that your blessing and goodness will infuse our precious community full of precious lives.

As always, Father God, we name silently those we know for whom life is dark because of illness, in whatever form that takes.....We ask for your unique healing touch upon each one of them, giving them release from pain, wholeness and health, and hope for the future.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

### **SONG**

### **Blessing and Dismissal**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**