

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Revd Dr Valentin Dedji to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### **Welcome & Invocation**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: I warmly welcome you and greet you in the name of the Risen Christ.

### **Hymn: In Christ Alone (Singing the Faith 351)**

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsOQ269I4>

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,  
fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
scorned by the ones he came to save:  
till 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;  
till he returns or calls me home,  
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963)

### Opening prayers

Almighty God, we thank you for the precious gift of a new day and of a new opportunity to start afresh with you. We are grateful that, of your own free goodness and mercy you have created us, and through the resurrection of your only-begotten Son, you have given us a new hope. Guard us by your love and, in your wisdom, keep us in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen!**

### Confession of sins

Lord Jesus: In the face of all sorts of evil forces, if we have fallen into despair,

**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have failed to hope in you,

**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have forgotten your victory on the cross for us,

**Lord, forgive us.**

Words of Grace:

May the Living God raise us from despair, give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ. **Amen!**

### Bible Reading John 20: 19-23

#### Jesus Appears to the Disciples

<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

## Reflection

We thank God that today in the UK, in this Easter season, contrary to last year, the atmosphere is more optimistic, particularly regarding the Covid19 Pandemic. Of course, we still continue to pray for those who may be suffering from complicated symptoms of what is now known as 'Long Covid'. But for now, it was a great joy for me to celebrate the Easter evening service, in the presence of a number of our church 'members within Edmonton Methodist Church' building. We felt as if we were experiencing a 'new birth'. We were truly beaming with joy when we proclaimed: **'HAPPY EASTER!'** **'CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED, ALLELUIA!'** For those church members who were able to come out from their loneliness, there was a feeling of 'light overcoming darkness' and 'hope conquering fear'.

That's why, on this Sunday after Easter, I would like to share briefly with you on the theme: **'Living as Easter People'**.

In our reading in John 20: 19-23, we see that the situation in Jerusalem in the aftermaths of the crucifixion of Jesus was profoundly unbearable for a number of His remaining disciples. So, they decided to lock themselves behind doors **'for fear of the Jews'**.

The key word that would help us to understand their state of mind here is: **FEAR**.

FEAR can be a destructive force in our life. One of the old English words for fear means 'sudden attack', 'ambush' or 'snare'. That's what fear does; fear attacks us and takes us captive. That's why, the best antidote to fear is FAITH in God! For, fear weakens but faith strengthens. Fear imprisons, but faith liberates. Fear paralyses, but faith empowers. Fear disheartens, but faith encourages. Fear sickens, but faith heals.

In the short narrative according to John's Gospel, there are some dramatic and significant details which I would like to comment on briefly:

- 1) The locked doors: in the specific context of Israel where the weather is mostly hot throughout the day, doors of houses are usually wide open for fresh air. Therefore, in that particular context, 'the locked doors' were a symbol of a situation of crisis, blockage, loss of hope, retreating from the enemy...
- 2) I am more than ever convinced that, the practical implications of the disciples' state of **fear** could be: post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or paralysis. This can lead to a loss of identity, loss of a sense of direction, hatred of others... doubt (This is when some people may start wondering: Is God still with us?)

It was in the middle of such a depressing situation that Jesus appeared to his disciples.

3) After showing them his sides and his pierced hands as proof that it was Him - the Risen Christ and not a ghost, He reassured them: **'Do not be afraid'**. Then, He offered them His PEACE – SHALOM. The gift of Peace was what they needed in that moment of post-traumatic disorder. I personally take note of how Jesus did not show any judgmental attitude towards His disciples, despite their collective failure towards Him. We may remember how they all deserted Jesus. How they could not watch and pray with Him and Peter notoriously denied Him... Yet, the Risen Christ did not start by pointing fingers at any of them! This is a lesson for us, in our daily relationship with one another...

Imagine how big our joy would be to hear the Risen Christ speaking directly in our situation saying: 'You may be wondering what the future holds for you. But I am telling you: I am the only one who holds the future. DO NOT BE AFRAID: In your loneliness, I am with you. In your state of Fear, I will give you my Peace –the Real SHALOM. In your anxiety, I will give you my reassuring presence. What a joy that would be!

4) Jesus performed an **ACT OF NEW CREATION on His disciples**: He breathed onto them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is a strong evidence that the breath of life is what makes a big difference between a living body and a dead body. In medical terms, we may talk about the vital role that oxygen plays in the human body. We could say that the events that happened in Jerusalem were so life-draining that the disciples were like walking dead. They were paralyzed. And as Jesus appeared to those confused disciples, He breathed onto them as a sign of a new creation, a new lifeline, a new purpose in life, a new hope to move forward.

5) The disciples were **empowered** to forgive as they were forgiven. Jesus said: 'Forgive one another as I have forgiven you. He also gave them the most life transforming gift: the gift of love. 'Love one another as I have loved you'. By doing so, the Risen Christ empowered His disciples to show love to one another as He loved them despite everything that happened. The lesson here is that, whatever we may be going through with ourselves, with some friends of ours or family members, let me tell you: Forgiveness and love are special gifts from the Risen Christ. And is a special instruction to us to pass those gifts of love and forgiveness on to one another.

Through those details, Jesus challenged us individually and collectively to stand up and live, not as if we were still on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, but to live as Easter People.

This is particularly vital in our today's world where fear, anxiety, confusion are taking over our lives.

This is a challenge for us Christians to find the way to be more compassionate, more caring for one another, fighting for justice and righteousness. As we may have discovered, the coronavirus does not respect the powerful. It does not distinguish between the rich and poor, it does not know races, colour, gender or cultural background.

We cannot pretend to be Church of the Risen Christ if we only preach, but fail to live as Easter people...

This is where I like the words by prophet Jeremiah saying: ***'Seek the Peace and Welfare of the city where you live. For if that city is at peace, you too will be at peace and you will prosper.'***

I take this opportunity to say a BIG THANK YOU to so many volunteers who have been truly amazing in the way that, since the first lockdown last year, they have sacrificed their time and talents by serving at our Community Foodbank at Edmonton Methodist Church. Many thanks to all those who have

continually and very generously given us monetary and food donations towards the Foodbank. Let me remind you of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: ***'I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me some drink. I was naked and you clothed me. I was in prison and you visited me. For whenever you did it to the least ones of my servants, you did it for me. Come then you faithful servant and receive the Crown of Glory that was reserved for you!'***

Therefore, let's continue to reach out to one another. Let us continue to show one Love!

When we allow the Risen Christ to come into our loneliness, into our private and closed lives, He will breathe a new spirit of understanding, revealing to us the way to refine, rebuild, renew and receive the relationship of gentle love and fidelity that is at the origins of all existence. Very often this starts as a tiny seed which can grow into a whole new pattern of personal relationship with the Risen Christ.

Let us walk together along this path with our sisters and brothers in this broken world of ours.

Let us walk together along this path with Jesus, the Risen Christ and discover that it is a path of love, hope and forgiveness.

That's what it means to live as Easter people!

May the Risen Christ who conquered death, give us new hope, new joy and victory over all sorts of personal issues and may He take control of every aspects of our daily life. We pray that the Risen Christ may give a new breath of divine inspiration to medical doctors, consultants, engineers and all those who work in scientific research, so that God may continue to use their hands and their expertise in order to heal us from all sorts of dreadful diseases and any other medical conditions for His Glory. Amen.

Let's pray

**Prayers of intercession** (using the words of hymn StF 718)

Lord Jesus, we lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet, haunted by hunger, war and fear, oppressed by power and hate.

Here human life seems less than profit, might, and pride, though to unite us all in you, you lived and loved and died.

We bring our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised; you show us how old pain and wounds for new life can be used.

We bring our broken loves, friends parted, families torn; then in your life and death we see that love must be reborn.

O Heavenly Father, we bring our broken selves, confused and closed and tired; then through your gift of healing grace new purpose is inspired.

Come Spirit, on us breathe, with life and strength anew; find in us love, and hope and trust, and lift us up to you for your Glory. Amen.

(Silent prayers)

### **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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

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

Before we receive the blessing, I would like to leave you with the well-known words of the chorus of hymn **Songs of Fellowship 736:**

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;  
Because He lives all fear is gone;  
Because I know He holds the future,  
And life is worth the living  
Just because He lives. Amen.

### **Blessing**

May the Peace, the blessing and the power and blessing of the Risen Christ dwell on us and our families now and forever!

**ALLELUIAH! THANKS BE TO GOD!**