

Easter Sunday Service 20110424
Adrian Worsfold

Prelude Music: Handel Messiah *I Know that My Redeemer Liveth*

Chalice Lighting

From the stars we come
And little stars we make:
Here is our Easter flame
Burning and bright
Brightest in the darkness
Indeed, removing the darkness,
A glow to radiate light and love
Back across the universe.

Light the chalice

Some Words from Langston Hughes, followed by a brief piece of related music.

In time of silver rain
The earth
Puts forth new life again,
Green grasses grow
And flowers lift their heads,
And over all the plain
The wonder spreads
Of life,
Of life,
Of life!

In time of silver rain
The butterflies
Lift silken wings
To catch a rainbow cry,
And trees put forth
New leaves to sing
In joy beneath the sky
[As down the roadway/ Passing boys
and girls/ Go singing, too]
In time of silver rain
When spring
And life
Are new.

Music Short: LT 060 *In Time of Silver Rain*

Sentences

Except when a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone;
but, if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.

As the earth brings forth her bud, and the garden causes the things sown in it

to spring forth, so will come righteousness and praise to come among all peoples and nations.

The souls of the righteous are in good hands, and so shall no evil touch them any more. So when this mortal shall have put on the memory of immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.

Hymn SF 105 Easter Hymn [Nature Shouts from Earth and Sky]

Nature shouts from earth and sky, Alleluia!
In the spring our spirits fly, Alleluia!
Join the resurrection cry, Alleluia!
Love is God and fears must die, Alleluia!

Mary's son, Christ Jesus, died, Alleluia!
Killed by humans full of pride, Alleluia!
Such a loss of such a friend, Alleluia!
Yet the cross was not the end, Alleluia!

Out of death his Spirit sings, Alleluia!
Love to all the earth he brings, Alleluia!
Telling nations, war must cease, Alleluia!
Sisters, brothers, join in peace, Alleluia!

Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, Alleluia!
All are ways for love in you, Alleluia!
Many rainbows share one sun, Alleluia!
In the many, God is one, Alleluia!

Richard Boeke

Prayers

All and everyone, with hearts and minds open to the lessons of this season, when all of nature prophesies to humankind, let us rejoice in that Christian and Pagan gospel which interprets the prophecy of nature, and celebrate with gladness the triumph of life not death, of spiritual continuance through all outward change. Let us answer the manifold lessons around us with newness of life in ourselves, that so, casting off the works of darkness to put on the armour of light, and led by the hope that is full of ethical immortality, we may press forward in glad and faithful service unto that world in which there is fullness of joy and life.

Infinite and gracious God, who gathers life and immortality into Being itself, we draw near to you in grateful love - as giving the fountain of our individual beings. Apart from Being there is no life and only from Being comes death. You send forth your breath, the earth awakens, and all nature's voices lift up their responses. Send your Spirit into our hearts, that we also may praise with joyful lips, and all that is within us bless the holy name. On this day which testifies of the memory of the soul to outlast the changes of earth, and to rise victorious over the bondage of the end, may such immortal being hear the call and feel its meaning. Help us, we pray, to rise from the death of sin, in the likeness and might of him who assures us, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: I live and you shall also live.'

To the Name above all names, we are gathered in place here with sorrow for what we have done that we should not have done, and for having not done what we should have done. Each week we are clumsy and may even be deliberate, and here is an opportunity by which we can say sorry.

And we are thankful for what has been so beneficial, those small and larger events that visit us and bring forth a smile and warm glow within. How often do we see a pleasant serendipity in what takes place, either to others or ourselves? There is much to be grateful for.

And in this spirit of both sorrow and thankfulness, we can give praise for life, and for the very life of life, as it rests in Being itself, and so here, gathered in this place, we say Yes to life; we indeed say Yes in praise.

The Lord's Prayer:
BocelliAndrea Lords Prayer

Reading: Gospel of John 20 verse 11 to 18

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' 14 When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' 16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said

to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

[Litany to the Past, Present and Future](#)

The past is not another country, but is the ladder on which we stand. Those who have gone before us, who faced choices like forks in the road, have led us to where we are now. Their memory is our creation. Whether it was their intention or not, what they did has put us where we stand.

A first candle may be lit.

The present is but a fleeting moment. If the people of the past have had their victory, we have the eternity of the moment. That eternity is what stands behind the choice we make: this or that. Time is the key, and time is dynamic: If you are older, time travels faster. If you are moving, time travels more slowly in relation to others. If you are scared, time actually slows down. If your life flashes before your eyes, time is slower. So grab the moment, and make a decision. The future hangs on it.

A second candle may be lit.

The future is always rushing forward, but it is always time from now. There is no mechanism to knowing the future. It takes 12 cues of a white ball in a game to make the layout of the balls on the snooker table unpredictable. Climate may be steady at any one time, but you can only forecast the weather a few days ahead. You cannot insure against financial meltdown: it follows no bell curve pattern. The future is chaos: Yet it always seeks entropy. All we can do is build the future now, but let the future decide where it will be. We might try to build the Kingdom of God, but it doesn't mean we will get it. But, on the other hand, with a little push in the right direction, we might just

find something remarkable coming about.
The choices are ours, where we have them.

A third candle may be lit.

Hymn SF 002 Was Gott Thrut choir [*A Promise Through the Ages Rings*]

A promise through the ages rings,
That always, always, something sings.
Not just in May, in finch-filled bower,
But in December's coldest hour,
A note of hope sustains us all.

A life is made of many things:
Bright stars, bleak years, and broken rings.
Can it be true that through all things,
There always, always something sings?
The universal song of life.

Entombed within our deep despair,
Our pain seems more than we can bear;
But days shall pass and nature knows
that deep beneath the winter snow
A rose lies curled and hums its song.

For something always, always sings.
This is the message Easter brings:
From deep despair and perished things
A green shoot always, always springs,
And something always, always sings.

Alicia S. Carpenter

Poem: I presume Celia Midgley wrote this poem after visiting the ex-Todmorden Unitarian Church. She calls it: *On Going Back to my Home Church, Now a Heritage Centre*.

Time spent on the dead is not time wasted.
Time spent is not time thrown away.
The past is key to our own birth and living,
the key to our own living and rebirth.

An empty church is not a church unpeopled.
An empty church is not a church unloved.
Its door unlocked resounds down ailes of memory,
echoing steps to an altar stone of hope.

The stout unjudging pillars part a welcome.
Marble-cool they stroke this fevered head.
Tears in the angeled font wash children's faces
and Jesus bids me shine like yesterday.

A pilgrimage is not to make an ending.
A pilgrimage is not to bury the past,
but seek it, meet it, know it and accept it
and grateful cherish every love and loss.

Give us the grace to receive our nurturers,
builders and teachers who helped find our song.
Give us to love the place and our beginnings,
always and ever the same for going back.

Musical Interlude: Handel's *Messiah* 'Comfort Ye'; Thomas Randle singing
and Huddersfield Choral Society BBC Philharmonic conducted by Harry
Christophers.

[Easter Litany of Reflection](#)

We praise our universe and magnify our small place in with it. Galaxies and solar systems are full of majesty and glory. Blessed be this expanse for ever, for it has placed and made its conscious people. This earth is in our hands for our years, and our record bears witness. Within it we know our low estate, and we are tellers of our stories from old.

We have been in darkness and the shadow of death, and the light of greater knowledge has been hidden. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. We shall not die, but live now, and declare the evolved as our home. Sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth; for the former things have passed away, and all things have become new.

The ideal person has climbed no heights, nor is made perfect through character building. In suffering humanity can the fullness of the Spirit dwell; and of this fruit we may all partake.

Christ lightness is Christ likeness, not exclusively but received universally.

Here we locate the world, bearing witness to the truth. And every one that is of the truth hears a similar voice.

Perhaps it needs faithfulness unto death, even that handed out by those who know not what they do. This way too one can receive the crown of the eternal moment.

We are no more strangers and exiles, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of Being itself.

In humanity there is but one family, there and here; one living communion of the seen and unseen.

Not long will we be untested: then shall we seek the being of Being in these courts below; and such will respond to these our faltering lips.

Our forebears have been called to higher praise, and gathered to their parents must all children be. We therefore pray that our humanity continues in this pattern.

May it be numbered with the saints in glory ever forward. Let the dead and living praise their situation, above and below; indeed let all the generations give thanks. Let the humanity be glorified to rise up to dwell with highest Being in the heavens.

Blessed be the One cause and end who underlines the victory. And within whose Spirit we can become the people of God. Blessed be the dawn of this ongoing light.

The soul does not stay within the grave: the soul is the path of life. That life, this presence, is fullness and joy; at its heart are joys and pleasures for the moment we call eternity.

[A Thought about Jesus's Divinity \(Or Otherwise\)](#)

Whilst the Trinity is an argument that has never convinced, I have never been wholly convinced by those who follow Jesus and yet say also he had either no divinity or none inherently different from the rest of us.

Let's base this on the historical Jesus, the one who preached, taught and healed towards a last day fulfilment of Israel where he was an agent of change to prompt God to bring this about, for him either to be transformed into the Messiah coming from clouds of glory, or someone or something else.

My method of examining divinity would be by thinking of the Avon Lady at the front door. She says, "Avon calling!"

Now, the question is, is Avon calling? Now it might be that she is self-employed on contract, or even fully employed (still a contract of course, and of course self-employment is a form of contractual employment).

The point is, she is not really Avon is she, but just, at best, an employee. An employee, or rather the job they fill, can be made redundant. So perhaps the job is 'Avon', even if the person isn't.

Yet the person employed often says "we" when referring to the firm. And you find that in modern capitalism, there is the divide between owner and employee. Even the managing director is an employee. Anyone, employee or otherwise, can be a shareholder, or owner. And who is a business or a firm, if it is not the employees involved? And the shareholder of Avon doesn't greet you saying, "Avon calling," but the employee does.

So when employed, we become representative, and in that contract of employment we take on the role of the job. Indeed we embody that role. So in this sense, when Avon comes calling, and the person at the door opens the catalogue, they are that catalogue too. Or to put it another way, the man or woman who comes to the front door, to sell brushes, is in one very important sense also a brush him or herself.

So when Jesus identified himself with the equivalent of a make-up firm, he became a "we" with the make-up firm, becoming its role and identity, because he was its agent.

This is consistent with a Reformation-style Arianism, not necessarily that Jesus Christ was God's first creation in order to create all else - in the beginning was the Word - but an Arianism that gives a special divinity of connection and association to this Jesus close to God. St Paul's view of Jesus as God's sole worker, as the agent of salvation - not trinitarian at all - is nevertheless not wholly unitarian. It did allow, however, a rapid escalation of titles given to Jesus by followers towards the trinitarian.

So I am suggesting that, just as the Avon lady is indeed to some extent Avon calling, so the follower of Jesus is saying Jesus is, to some strong extent, God calling.

Only when you say, as I do, that you are not a follower of Jesus, do you reject

the identification, but even then to claim to be an agent of God, and him submitting to God in his desire to restore Israel, he stands as that agent of "we" about God and himself. Of course he was mistaken: it didn't happen, this fulfilment of Israel, and he might have assumed too much regarding a contract of employment.

Unless, of course, there was a change of mind by God, in whatever was his contract of employment, or original self-employment, or even voluntary work, and some sort of resurrection of terms and conditions took place. This would be that, although the authorities decided he should be denied even a pension, God decided to honour and extend the existing contract of employment.

Hymn: SF 044 Sine Nomine choir [Give Thanks for Life]

Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
Mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,
Yet sing to god our hope, our love, our praise:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for those whose lives shone with a light
Caught from the Christ-flame, gleaming through the night,
Who touched the truth, who burned for what is right:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for all, our living and our dead,
Thanks for the love by which our life is fed,
A love not changed by time or death or dread:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Give thanks for hope that like a seed of grain
Lying in darkness, does its life retain
To rise in glory, growing green again:
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Shirley Erena Murray; (C) 1987 Hope Publishing Company Carol Stream

Intercessions

The heartbeat of the churches and synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras are all around us.
And we are but a few of the beating hearts.
We pray for people of faith
That they may come to see the way ahead,

Enduring with trust the attachments of suffering,
Taking a bypass or going through it,
Seeking the better way and freeing themselves -
To build a future of victory of life over death.

We pray for the world, and especially for peace,
For today many are caught up in conflict [Name some]
All they want is representation and self-determination
But the powers would crucify them.
Many seek and have found the better way:
The peaceful way that is a firmer foundation for the future.
Let those in rough circumstances, and trapped,
Find resolution soon at least.

We pray for those we know who are sick and who may drink from the well of life...

We think, as Celia did, of those who have been here before, that an empty church is not empty.

Sermon

A common feature of the appearances, and indeed in the developed tomb tradition in John, is that Jesus is not recognised, that some theological point is made, often around the liturgical symbolism of food, and then Jesus is seen, after which he is gone. Here it was the fulfilment of the restoration of eternity in the Godhead. Once your eyes are opened, once you get it, he's gone, and you carry on looking ahead. Resurrection is not a story of ordinary continuance of one individual.

However, in order to have victory over death' many believers say this is the Jesus of the flesh who is resurrected, indeed he is the first of the resurrected. The world is material and bodily, and he stands at its apex. Instead of a dramatic device, they make it a history.

The stories, however, point more to the community: to its legitimacy, its means of authority, its central rituals: resurrection as a form of reaffirming by visitation; they indicate radical reordering of humanity in the Kingdom, of a once temporary early Church, where communities understood that there had been resurrection appearances and an ascension that said there would be no more of these, but there would be a rapid second coming. As time went on, and nothing dramatic happened, a more backward looking, and in the person

of Jesus faith took hold, consistent with the escalation of titles given to the rabbi by early believers.

It is all liturgical first and last. The reason John's Gospel has the crucifixion a day earlier than the synoptic gospels is because it has Jesus going outside the city walls to be killed at the same time, 3 pm in the afternoon, when the Jewish priests in the Temple were killing the lambs for the Passover feast. He becomes the Lamb in a cosmic drama. And the gospels are their own liturgical theologies: John's gospel, the most advanced, has it all as a process of the completion and restoration of creation into the person of Jesus Christ himself. I think those of us of a critical eye have a right to recognise this, that is the clouding of the waters of what we call history.

To be honest, the resurrection is neither here nor there: as Mr. Sedman (who put up our sound system) said to me recently, "It is 2000 years old thinking."

Not much is achieved by getting behind the liturgy into history, if you can do it at all. We should start with our own liturgical communities anyway. Christian liturgical communities do claim continuance with those early communities that turned Jesus into a salvation figure, who focused increasingly on Jesus when Jesus had focused upon the actions of God. Now I don't think we do follow on in that resurrection liturgy. Like most Western people today, we habitually think differently, and after centuries of the Enlightenment and a subsequent technologising of ordinary thought, we have a different sociology of knowledge. Liturgies of atonement and resurrection and ascension are all miracle liturgies, connecting with food and bodies, but we think practically and about this worldly reasons and solutions: we make our culture and we evolve our biologies.

So my starting point is that we - we - are our memories and our biographies, in that, negatively, any damaged brain means the distortion or loss of personality and, with Alzheimers, means the removal of identity after the last memory flash, the final recognition, of who and what we are. Furthermore, death involves the immediate and rapid destruction of the brain: those who today, thinking technologically, arrange to be put in ice at their death in the hope that some future surgery can restore their brains and life simply do not realise the utter rapid destruction of the brain, dependent as it is on our biology.

Of course I don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus in the sense that the person who died had a continuous consciousness and memory restored afterwards in a restored body. The human being who died rotted rapidly, probably in some lime pit and gone forever, never to be identified by anyone

and no body or tomb to visit. Though, I would suggest, this sort of speculation is fruitless.

Resurrection implies that the person is restored and restored into a condition of perfection. Now, actually, we don't really know what perfection is, though we might speculate that it involves an inner ethical condition. It must presumably mean personal fulfilment.

Resurrection also implies the restoration of the world - indeed the cosmos - into a condition of perfection, and therefore its fulfilment.

If who we are is so much the sum of our memories and consciousness of memories, how does this relate to the fulfilment of personality, and of the cosmos?

This all needs working out within time. Something like achieving perfection is not some given eternal, but something arrived at, if at all. It has to be in our lives, in our culture.

But time is something that varies out there objectively and is intimately connected with subjective experience. Subjective experiences of time do have objective reality. A person who travels faster will become younger than a person who travels slower; time does slow down for the traveller. Experiments have also shown that time actually does slow down for a person who is scared. It emphasises what is known in quantum physics, that the observer changes the result of external reality.

Time then is highly personal, with losses to the past and the building up of memory, and an orientation to the future to come. And resurrection points to the future. In the Christian myth, the resurrection is a time of beginning, among only a few: it is not, for example, the birth of the Church. It is more the foundations. It looks forward and little happens.

And isn't then resurrection not about measuring time, but a moment of time inverted, where something of a profound moment is every moment, where inverted time is like eternal time? Yes there is then the future to build, and hopefully built on the basis of that eternity in a moment of realised fulfilment, one that is, and yet is yet to be.

So we as individuals, and as a reinterpreting group, are involved in worship that means, in a sense, some reorientation of the self towards asking about any fulfilment of ourselves and the world. We have our own, derived, liturgical outlook.

Here is a problem of our time and thought. Resurrection as a notion defeats the law of entropy - that compulsory physics of all moving towards decay; properly, the dispersal of energy so that it can do no work, and we know that energy and material are bound together. There is to be no restoration, only a long long ending.

How about, then, fulfilment, as being something like that moment of having a good meal, or having a refreshing drink of water? How about joy being a deep, quality of experience, rather than just a surface laugh? It is the difference, is it not, between gift and exchange. Gift is profound and exchange is ordinary if necessary. How about bringing in the notion of God here, something of the depth of things in culture, in communication, in moments, to be realised liturgically?

I maintain that there was no extension of Jesus's holy contract, and no defeat of his biology, and that this is all a red herring anyway: but that here we have acquired, in a tradition, and beyond, thanks to "2000 years old thinking", the means for some profound reflection, about how our individual biographies, and our collective language capabilities, weave stories of meaning and profound moments: interweaving these with what we know about physics and biology when asking questions about fulfilment and perfection and consciousness.

Think of it like this. Perfection isn't about being perfect: it is something to be found within the most damaged of human beings, indeed the humblest of any creature. Consciousness comes in degrees, but we look for something more within that miracle of being, the profundity of being itself, being that becomes Being with a capital B.

Despite everything, despite all suffering, it is the ability to see what is special, what is worthwhile, was and is and will be all wrapped up together. In a world that distorts and trivialises, and practises evils of all kinds, finding that point of fulfilment is its own restoration, for looking back, in the present and for building a future. The present moment, or who and what we are, of our already perfection, becomes an eternal moment, in the affirmative, something that the liturgy at this time of year confirms.

Music for [Collection](#) *Handel Messiah If God Be for Us*

[Notices](#)

Hymn: The following hymn is very simple, but in terms of my sermon it is not

simple at all. It is in fact close to my sermon: the fairest gift, it is what you see, and the fruit is of pure delight. It is **SF 076 I Saw Thee Ships [In Spring I saw the Easter Tree]**

In spring I saw the Easter tree,
The Easter tree, the Easter tree;
In spring I saw the Easter tree,
The fairest gift in the garden.

'Twas tall and broad and fine to see,
And fine to see, and fine to see;
'Twas tall and broad and fine to see,
The fairest tree in the garden.

The tree it was an evergreen,
An evergreen, an evergreen;
The tree it was an evergreen,
The fairest tree in the garden.

Its fruit did taste of pure delight,
Of pure delight, of pure delight,
Its fruit did taste of pure delight,
The fairest tree in the garden.

And of that fruit all may partake,
All may partake, all may partake;
And of that fruit all may partake,
The fairest tree in the garden.

Francis Simons

[Benediction Part 1](#)

You who have an eye for miracles, regard the bud now appearing on the bare branch of the fragile young tree. It's a mere dot, a nothing. But already it's a flower, already a fruit, already its own death and resurrection. **Diego Valeri. 625 in UUA, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Boston USA: Beacon Press.**

Hymn: We sing **SF 172 Donne Secours write alt [This is the Truth that Passes Understanding]**

This is the truth that passes understanding,
This is the joy to all forever free,
Life springs from death and shatters ev'ry fetter,
And winter turns to spring eternally.

Robert Terry Weston

Benediction Part 2

Out of the dusk a shadow,
Then a spark.

Out of the cloud a silence, then a lark.

Out of the heart a rapture,
Then a pain.

Out of the dead, cold ashes,
Life again.

626 in UUA, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Boston USA: Beacon Press.

Postlude Music: Handel Hallelujah Chorus piano [computer generated]