

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
**Easter Sunday – Service of Light**

**Collect**

God of glory,  
by the raising of your Son  
you have broken the chains of death and hell:  
fill your Church with faith and hope;  
for a new day has dawned  
and the way to life stands open  
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

**Romans 6:3-11**

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**Mark 16:1-8**

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## Sermon

There is something wonderful about standing outside at 6 o'clock on Easter morning and watching the new fire. It's something I have done many times over the years, sometimes in a church car park; others beside a river. The experience has never been entirely the same. For a few years we were able to entice some teenagers to an Easter morning with the promise of bacon butties cooked on a barbecue. The food was appreciated, but there aren't many teenagers who look even close to awake first thing in the morning. Because of the changing date of Easter, sometimes it is almost entirely light at 6 am, and other times almost entirely dark. Each has a different feel, gathered round a fire. And of course in this country any kind of weather phenomenon is possible. My first Easter here was decidedly blustery, and often we are grateful for the warmth of the fire.

It is the fire that I want us to think about as we consider Easter hope this year. This time last year, we were not able to have services at all. You may recall how you spent your Easter Sunday – perhaps you joined with many of us in lighting a candle at home and saying the words of the liturgy that I had sent out. You may have found it a moving experience, or it may have been rather dislocating. As I looked at the church building, I couldn't help but be astonished that in 125 years, that was almost certainly the first time that there had not been a service in the building on Easter morning.

In the twelve months since then, many things have changed. It has been a year that none of us would have expected or could have predicted. While our hopes last year may have been that the worst of the pandemic was over, the reality has proved somewhat different. To that extent perhaps our hope is similar – that the worst really is over this time. Yet we probably feel considerably less confident in that hope. This has been a difficult year.

I wonder, therefore, what our hope for this year looks like. It seems to me that, just like dawn, it is not something that will appear suddenly, but rather something that will gradually emerge over the horizon. The joy of dawn is that sometimes it drenches us with light, and on other occasions, we hardly know when night ended and day began. And if our Easter hope is something that might appear gradually, perhaps we can begin to ask ourselves what we are looking for. It is here that the Easter fire can help us.

I don't know what it is about fire that is particularly compelling, but it really does seem to have life. And I think that its various properties can help us reflect on the past year, and look ahead with hope.

So let's start with the light of the fire. That glow which lights up the faces of everyone standing around. No matter how dark it is, once a fire is lit, we can see just a little more. So thinking of that light, I wonder where it is that you have seen light over the last year. It may just be flickers of light – like those stray embers, that appear just for a moment. It may be a bright light, like the lapping flames, or a more gentle yet constant glow, like the embers as a fire dies down. Every glimmer of light that you have seen over this past year is important, and helps us to see where we might find our hope for the coming year.

We also know, as we stand outside beside the fire, that it is astonishingly warm. I wonder where you have found warmth in the past year. Where you have felt nurtured when you needed it most. Where you have felt the warmth of love's embrace – whether or not it could be physical. See if you can hold onto each of those moments of warmth to help you to get closer to all that brings hope for the coming year.

In some ways fire brings comfort in the shape of warmth and light. Yet it is also a powerful and even dangerous force. Thinking about the violence of the flames, I wonder whether there are things that have made you angry over this past year. Injustices and tragedies that have got under your skin. This kind of anger is important, too, in helping us to understand where we will find hope for the coming year. We use that phrase “fired up” when talking about those things that inspire us. I wonder what you have been passionate about in this past year – another important component of hope.

Those of you who know Mark’s gospel well, will remember that there are two different endings. In the shorter version, Mark’s gospel ends with the account we have just heard – everyone fleeing from the scene, both terrified and amazed. While the longer version provides a little more about resurrection appearances, it is widely believed that the shorter ending is probably the original. There is something I find rather exciting about this ending – because really it is more of a beginning than an ending. What has just happened – the discovery of an empty tomb, and the explanation that Jesus has been raised – demands a response. And we know that there will be one. The rest of the disciples’ lives will be their response to the resurrection of Jesus.

And so it is for us, too. As we hear this morning’s reading, we are called to respond. To make this our beginning, and to ask ourselves where our Easter hope is and where it will lead us. We may find clues in the things that have encouraged and inspired, challenged and enraged us over the past year. We will probably work out the rest of the story with other people. Yet the call of Easter is to hold firm to the love we have seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and follow wherever we are called.

Amen