



EMMANUEL CHURCH – EASTER 4 WORSHIP – 25TH APRIL 2021



Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 25th April 2021.
If you are able, join in this service on Zoom – contact Rev. Paul for details of the service, login and password.

Opening Prayer: Creator God, out of nothing you created everything.

You called into being our living planet: our home and place of journeying,
awesome in its beauty and grandeur, generous in providing for your creatures.

We thank you, Creator God, for the world.

You called into being humankind, in your image, man and woman, to be loved and to show love.
You breathed into us the breath of life, and you gave us a reason for living.

We thank you, Creator God, for humankind.

You called into being prophets of your word, to call us back to your loving way of living;
For although we reject and betray you, you remain faithful.

We thank you, Creator God, for your steadfast love.

You came as the eternal Word, in Christ. When we remained sinfully deaf to your call,
he died and rose again to make us see the triumphant and transforming power of love.

We thank you, Creator God, for making us a new creation.

Reading: Acts 4:1-12, 21-22 ‘Peter and John on Trial for... Healing’

¹ While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, ² much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.” ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed. ²¹ After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

Address: ‘In the Dock’

Prayers of Intercession and Lord’s Prayer: *please be still and remember in your prayers all those experiencing great trials at the moment: whether victims, criminals, those experiencing uncertain health or diagnosis, those worried about their livelihood, family, or friends.* **Our Father, who art...**

Blessing: May the blessing of God: Father, Son and Spirit be with us today and always. **Amen.**

Address: 'In the Dock'



Acts 1, 2, and 3 contain some great events: the Ascension, the Twelve restored numerically, Pentecost, a healing... but we seem to crash right back down to earth in Acts 4. Peter and John are on trial for the healing of a man in the Temple, claiming it was by the power of the risen Jesus Christ. It seems rather suitable today to have a reading covering this court case – this week we've had a number of individuals or people or organisations well and truly in the dock:

- † **Derek Chauvin** – on trial this week for the murder and manslaughter of George Floyd. The long-awaited trial, brief deliberation, and – found guilty on all counts.
- † **Arsenal, Chelsea, Man City, Man Utd, Spurs**, and one other club – I can't remember the other one – have well and truly been in the dock this week for taking fans for granted and abusing their trust. The speed of the ESL's collapse and apologies are basically an admission of guilt.
- † **World Leaders** have been on trial this week too in a different sense – “How long do you honestly believe that people in power like you will get away with it?” Greta Thunberg asked at the Climate Conference. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwmrxq94v1jt/greta-thunberg>
- † **The Church** – it would be a delusion to think that only the Church of England has an issue with racism and no other church does. What about Emmanuel? How inclusive are we as a church now, and what more could we do to celebrate difference and diversity in our midst?

The dock is exactly where Peter and John find themselves. Given that Jesus was crucified presumably only weeks earlier, they must have feared for their lives. It's interesting too that only Peter seems to speak: John is not recorded as giving a defence, and I wonder what he thought when Peter launched into his sermon? I know what I'd be thinking: 'Get me my own lawyer!!' Peter's defence is to say: 'Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Saviour of all, the one who you crucified, but God raised. You accuse us of healing, of saving this man? We did it'. Talk about self-incrimination! And not only that but the evidence – the healed man – comes and stands there too so no-one can deny it. If they're being accused of sharing their faith, preaching Jesus crucified and risen, and healing in his name – they're guilty as charged!

It's possible if we want to, to have a relatively easy life as a Christian, or for that matter as a whole church. You can turn up, keep your head down and leave it at that. But actually, if we have a more authentic discipleship, a faith which is expressed in our words and actions – then we might well have to experience the consequences that come with that. If we do find we're in the dock, let it be for the right reasons: whether its climate change, poverty, equality... let it be on the right side of God's justice. Recently Christians of all denominations have been pushing the government to reconsider their cuts to the international aid budget from 0.7-05% of GDP because of the consequences. (It was the World Council of Churches in 1958 who pushed governments to set a minimum aid budget). Thinking of diversity and difference – there are many churches where people who are of different background, sexuality, divorced, transgender would not be welcome. What can we do as Emmanuel to express our belief and hope that 'God with Us' means not just us, but for us all – and push back against the discrimination?

The comedian Frank Skinner recently published a book of prayer and when interviewed said: “It's easier to come out as an alcoholic than as a Christian”. It's not easy in our world today for you and I to risk being in the dock for our faith – but it might be exactly where we are called to be from time to time. Fortunately, like Peter and John we can be simple, ordinary children, women and men, of no great learning, expertise, no great brilliance: just faithful disciples who won't stay silent in the face of injustice or pain, or need. And the living Christ will always be our guide, our protection, and our cornerstone.

