

**‘Christ has risen while earth slumbers’ by John L Bell & Graham Maule  
(Singing the Faith 296)**

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Christ has risen while earth slumbers,  
Christ has risen where hope died,  
as he said and as he promised,  
as we doubted and denied.  
Let the moon embrace the blessing;  
let the sun sustain the cheer;  
let the world confirm the rumour.  
Christ is risen, God is here!

Christ has risen for the people  
whom he loved and died to save;  
Christ has risen for the women  
bringing flowers to grace his grave  
Christ has risen for disciples  
huddled in an upstairs room.  
He whose word inspired creation  
is not silenced by the tomb.

Christ has risen to companion  
former friends who fear the night,  
sensing loss and limitation  
where their faith had once burned bright.  
They bemoan what is no longer,  
they expect no hopeful sign  
till Christ ends their conversation,  
breaking bread and sharing wine.

Christ has risen and forever  
lives to challenge and to change  
all whose lives are messed or mangled,  
all who find religion strange.  
Christ is risen. Christ is present  
making us what he has been –  
evidence of transformation  
in which God is known and seen.

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This hymn is for me a holder of hope. “Christ has risen where hope died.”

I have many friends who live with challenging mental health conditions. Having hope is a big issue when your greatest challenge and barrier to happiness is your own mind. My friends are amazing, creative, kind, clever, capable people whose energies at times are consumed in finding the ability to function in the most basic ways. They have at many times felt well

beyond hope (where hope has died), but it has been a lesson in wisdom for me to be asked by them in these dark times to hold hope *for* them; to hold hope that their life and health will not always be as it is now; to hold hope that their lives and beings belong, are loved and are called; to hold hope that God is loving even when that would not appear to be their current experience.

I can hold hope for them now, and in other times and ways they hold hope for me.

I believe we can scale this experience up to think of our world at large. As I reflect on the plight of refugees or on ongoing situations of oppression and violence in our world nearby and far away, I know it must feel for many traumatised people, as it did for Christ's friends, that hope has died. For those who "fear the night, sensing loss and limitation", I can express hope in never giving up my efforts to discover and establish justice and peace; holding the hope that, even from the worst mess, Christ can birth new and healthy life. In the same way people who are despairing can hold hope for me as I witness in them the tenacity of humanity to survive, adapt and still honour love and grace. We hold hope for each other.

John and Graham's hymn affirms this belief of heart and mind that, however dark or complicated, things can be transformed towards the wholeness of life which Jesus came to bring. It affirms that pain, in its many different forms, can be the birth pangs of something new, even at times when that new life can feel far away. It holds the hope of transformation, which Jesus' resurrection affirms.

For, as John and Graham put it, while the earth was asleep and not trying to do anything, God was carrying out a revolution in our midst. Their opening line affirms that the power behind this resurrection business is not humanity's but God's. It reminds me that God is alive and active, revolutionising the world through love, in times, places and ways I am completely ignorant of. This does not disenfranchise our existence, but is a reminder that God's dreams and workings are bigger than any one of us can conceive.

But how much more poetic and effective simply to say: "Christ is risen while earth slumbered."

That image holds hope for me and for all people, that even when we are suffocating in despair, God is still present, has not given up on us and is leading us to new life. Christ has risen and is birthing new life in the midst of our confusion, when "lives are messed or mangled". Even when we cannot see it and when we have little to do with it, God is still present bringing her intended abundant life to all.

This Eastertide, here is a hymn that carries hope in the highs and lows of life. It marks the times when we experience Christ's transforming power, when our darkness fades and new life is revealed and we want to revel with the moon, sun and world in the light and joy. It also marks the times when we feel beyond hope, trapped in confusion or despair, and the times when we are ignorant of our desolation.

In all these times this hymn holds hope for us, that the resurrection witnesses to the transforming power of God of Love – yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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