

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home Sunday 16th April 2023

Service prepared by Rev Eric Renouf

Hello!

The second Sunday of Easter is also called Low Sunday and many of us use the same word to describe how we feel at times. This Sunday is also called 'the first after Easter' when in fact the Easter season will last another five weeks! It may be more accurate to refer to it as the second Sunday OF Easter.

Prayers:

Dear God, we are as we are at this moment. Help us, whatever we feel like now, to discover for ourselves more of who you are. Forgive us when we close our minds to the possibility of an encounter with you and help us, in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, to live more hopefully. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter:

Faithful God, the strength of all who believe and the hope of those who doubt; may we, who have not seen, have faith and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

I've chosen our first hymn because it reminds us of the various ways in which some of the first disciples of Jesus met their risen Lord.

Hymn StF 316

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV58YPdfKV8>

When Easter to the dark world came,
Fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When Mary in the garden walked,
And with her risen Master talked:

When John and Peter in their gloom
Met angels at the empty tomb:

When ten disciples met in fear,
Then 'Peace' said Jesus, 'I am here'.

When Thomas' heart was hurt and grieved,
Then Jesus' wounds his doubt relieved:

And friend to friend in wonder said:
'The Lord is risen from the dead!'

This Eastertide with joyful voice
We'll sing: 'The Lord is King! Rejoice!'
*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O sing, all the world, at Eastertide.*

W.H. Hamilton (1886-1958)

Our first reading reminds us that it is through the resurrection of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ that we can discover hope beyond our dreams!

Epistle: 1 Peter 1: 3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation which is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved to be genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Hymn StF 134

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu1ZKM-IXZg>

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-Spring from on high, be near;
Day-star in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till thy mercies beams I see,
Till they inward light impart,
Glad my eyes and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, radiancy divine;
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display,
Shining till the perfect day.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Our gospel reading at first takes us back to when the friends of Jesus first became aware that he was risen and alive. It moves us on a week to further encounters with him.

Gospel: John 20: 19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you!" And with that, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Now Thomas, (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus

came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God."

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Sermon

The disciples of Jesus had been through huge changes in the past week or so. Their friend had been arrested and then put to death by being nailed to a cross as if he were a criminal. They were still reeling with the pain of bereavement when they then had to take in the unbelievable news that he was well and truly alive, risen from the dead!

It's not surprising that Thomas – and, I wonder, who else? – then or now - simply could not accept what his fellow disciples told him about the risen Jesus. After facing the earlier shock of the crucifixion of Jesus, Thomas needed to be as certain as he could be that what his friends told him was indeed true – good news, indeed!

Ten years ago, Pope Francis produced a major message, a papal encyclical for the Catholic Church worldwide. I've been thrilled to read parts of it during this past Lent while following a series of Bible studies called 'The Joy of the Gospel.' Here are some quotes to whet your appetite, starting with the first sentence of Pope Francis' message.

'The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.' ... 'There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress.'

The sheer joy of the first disciples of Jesus in their encounter with the risen Lord Jesus comes through strongly in the gospels. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus transformed his friends. Within a few weeks, they became newly aware of the living presence of God through the gift of his Spirit and they began to share the good news of Jesus with others. Our reading from Peter's letter gives us a sense their confidence in what God has done for us.

Our reading from the gospel shows that Thomas shared that confidence and commitment. But he seems to have been someone who needed, more than others, to check things out. He did that during the conversation Jesus had with his disciples during their meal – 'The Last Supper' – together. Jesus tried to help them know that he was about to die but that they should trust in God. Here's how John puts it in his gospel.

'You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

Thank God for Thomas who raised a question as well as for Jesus and the assurance he gave to his friends. Our questions can help both ourselves and others to grow in faith. Tradition tells us that Thomas went on from his positive encounter with the risen Jesus. The Mar Thoma Church of Kerala, in the south-west of India claims that it was founded by Thomas the apostle 20 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I was a young minister in Jamaica when I first learned the traditional Easter greeting, when I went to our early Easter Day morning service. It was our church organist greeted me with, "Alleluia! Christ is risen," I replied "That's right, Aunt Theda." She said, you mustn't say that, you must say "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Someone once said, 'The resurrection of Jesus is not a happy ending to a sad story, but the start of something new.' Easter can be a new start for us and for our homes and our communities as we learn to trust God for the new resurrection life that he gives through Jesus.

Prayers for others and ourselves

(leaving space for our own thoughts and prayers before continuing with the Easter greeting.)

Dear God,

Thank you that Thomas had the courage to speak his doubts, a lone voice among his friends. Give us also, as friends of Jesus, the courage to face up to our doubts and questions and to be open to your life-giving presence in all the complexities of our lives

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear God,

We thank you that the first disciples of Jesus were enabled by you to speak and to live the good news of your amazing love made real through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. We thank you also for all in every age and place who have spoken and lived out the good news of sins forgiven and death overcome through faith in you through the living Saviour.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear God,

We remember before you any who are in danger of being trapped in the prison of not being able to see beyond the present and the material, whether because their life is too easy or too difficult. We ask that your truth, goodness, love and beauty will continue to bring new life to individuals, families, communities, nations and in all our global common life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear God,

We thank you for those who are special to us . . . and we remember before you any who are in particular need

Help us, each one in our thankfulness for each other to be alert to each other's need and to help each other along the way

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear God,

We thank you for all who have gone before us in life and faith, and in particular those who are so real and present for us now in our life and memories

Help us to follow their good examples and be enabled by you to live and work, to be and to die to your praise and glory.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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 forever. Amen

Prayer of Dedication

We offer to you, dear God, all that we have and are to work with you in your life-giving and renewing work in us and through us in your world. Amen

Hymn: StF 314

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sT1dFvQqAM>

This joyful Eastertide,
what need is there for grieving?
Cast all your cares aside
and be not unbelieving.

Come, share our Easter joy
that death could not imprison,
nor any power destroy,
our Christ, who is arisen!

No work for him is vain,
no faith in him mistaken,
for Easter makes it plain,
his kingdom is not shaken:

Then put your trust in Christ,
in waking and in sleeping.
his grace on earth sufficed;
he'll never quit his keeping.

Fred Pratt Green 1903-2000

Blessing

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the peace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen! Thanks be to God!

(Try googling 'The Joy of the Gospel' online, and you can read and ponder more of the Pope's message.)