

Worship for Sunday 19th April
prepared by Kate Horrix, Local Preacher.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked, for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
'Peace be with you.'

The peace of the Lord be with you in this moment.

In our homes, with our family, in our isolation, we pray:

Jesus stand among us in your risen power.

Let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.

HYMN STF 297 Christ is alive, let Christians sing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRQoeitN5nA>

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,

Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

Loving, Living God, we come before you in awe and wonder, in thanks and praise,

For now we know you are God indeed:

Maker of all, through and through creation.

We praise and adore you.

Loving, Living God, entering our humanity in Jesus,

Living as us, dying for us,

Rising to life to confirm Easter's hope for the world.

We praise and adore you.

Loving, Living God, powerfully present in your Spirit,

Drawing us to truth, guiding us to light,

Showing us the Way, the Truth and the Life for all time.

We praise and adore you.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

One God for ever and ever.

We praise and adore you. Amen

Reading from 1st letter of Peter ch 1 verses 3-9

Praise to God for a Living Hope

³ 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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ 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, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This letter was written about 30 years after the resurrection to new Christians in Turkey. They were living in difficult times, holding on to their faith.

The Message version translates verse 4 :

'Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand new life and have everything to live for....'

Prayer of Confession

In you we trust, O Lord:
Forgive our lack of faith.

Your love surrounds us every moment:
Forgive our lack of love.

You call us to your service:
Forgive our disobedience.

You go before us in all we do:
Forgive us when we do not follow.

**In His love and mercy, God promises us forgiveness,
sets us on our feet again
and walks beside us on the way, as forgiven people.
To Him be praise and glory Amen.**

Reading from John's gospel chapter 20 19 -30

**It is thought that this was the original ending of John's gospel.
Chapter 21 was added later.**

HYMN STF 316 When Easter to the dark world came

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLuvrDNsM9U> (music only)

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| 1 When Easter to the dark world came,
fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame :
<i>at Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.</i> | 5 When Thomas' heart was hurt and
grieved,
then Jesus' wounds his doubt relieved : |
| 2 When Mary in the garden walked,
and with her risen Master talked : | 6 And friend to friend in wonder said :
'The Lord is risen from the dead !' |
| 3 When John and Peter in their gloom
met angels at the empty tomb : | 7 This Eastertide with joyful voice
we'll sing : 'The Lord is King! Rejoice !'
<i>At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O sing, all the world, for Eastertide.</i> |
| 4 When ten disciples met in fear,
then 'Peace' said Jesus, 'I am here.' | W. H. Hamilton (1886–1958) |

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Thomas: a reflection on his part in the Easter story

What a debt we owe to the disciple Thomas! Movements throughout history have chosen to airbrush out characters they brand as dissidents. People who don't toe the official party line.

Not Thomas. His doubts about the resurrection of Jesus are recorded in detail by John. Being true to himself, Thomas needed physical evidence, not hearsay, about the resurrection and persisted until he came face to face with the living Christ. At which point, reaching out to touch Jesus' wounds, he makes the great declaration, 'My Lord and my God.' Here the Lord of all creation, the one who breathed life into the universe has entered the human form in Jesus. His scars are the proof of his suffering at our hands, on our behalf. Thomas is the first disciple to proclaim that Jesus is the living God.

Yet, down the ages, he has been known as 'Doubting Thomas.' That label was not given to him by the disciples. They would have known him by the nick-name, 'Didymus'. Nothing to do with his size or Ken Dodd. It's a Greek word meaning twin. Was he Greek? Did he have a twin sister or brother? Was he or she dead? How did Thomas come to be a disciple? What was his job?

We don't know the answers to any of those questions. What we do know is that each time he is mentioned in the gospels, he appears along with his nickname, 'twin'.

Thomas also stands out as a man out on a limb. He has a mind of his own.

Earlier in John's gospel, when a message comes to Jesus that Lazarus, their friend is dying, Jesus proposes that they should go to Bethany. All of the disciples are doubtful about the wisdom of this - with the exception of Thomas. Bethany was too close to Jerusalem, too close to those who had tried to stone, to silence Jesus. John records (11:16), 'Thomas, who was called The Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' A lone, courageous voice. A man prepared to put his life on the line because following Jesus meant so much to him. Why? It has been suggested that Thomas loved Jesus because Jesus loved and valued him for who he was. Jesus didn't see him as the other half of a pair of twins, but purely and simply for himself.

Later in Jerusalem, in the upper room, Jesus struggles to make it clear to his disciples what will happen to him and tries to reassure them. In the famous passage John 14: 1-7 beginning 'In my Father's house there are many mansions... I'm going to prepare a place for you', it is Thomas who bravely asks, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' You sense that Thomas is asking the question that the others would like to ask. To which Jesus replies;

'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Some days later, back in the same room, the significance of these words forcefully stops Thomas in his tracks as he reaches out to the Risen Jesus and declares, 'My Lord and my God!'

In the gospel glimpses, Thomas comes across as a man with a keen mind; a man not afraid to ask awkward questions; a man who wants to get to the truth of a situation; a realist whose commitment to Jesus is absolute, honest, passionate. We do him a disservice to remember him as the doubting disciple.

Why wasn't Thomas with the others on the first day of the week? Another question we can't answer with certainty. We do know that when the others tell him that Jesus has appeared to them, Thomas holds his ground. He wants real explanations; he trusts his own senses. Quite in character, he says; 'Unless I put my hand in the nail marks and my hand in his side I will not believe.' In crucifixions, side piercing was rare. The soldier did that to ensure that Jesus was dead. This graphic detail would indicate that somewhere in the crowd was Thomas. An eyewitness to the horrors experienced by his beloved Lord. He may have heard his dying Lord cry out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Through the agony, in his own despair, he may have heard a voice saying Thomas, Thomas, why have you forsaken me? Of all the disciples he had been insistent they go to Jerusalem to die with Jesus.

While the others were locked inside the upper room for fear of the authorities, Thomas was locked inside his overwhelming sense of failure, shame and grief. He had let Jesus down in the face of injustice and death. Moreover, he was overwhelmed by the hollowness of deep disappointment that the vision of a better world had vanished. The kingdom of God Jesus had promised had been trampled to dust by the Jewish leaders and the might of the Roman military machine. Why did he who raised Lazarus not display his power by coming down victoriously from the cross? How could Jesus allow himself to be so humiliated? Why did he have to endure so much pain?

Grief is devastating. Perhaps more so for those who pride themselves on being clear-thinking rationalists, being able to hold in their emotions, not wanting to show how grief shatters you body and soul. I think Thomas needed to be alone. He didn't want to be seen sobbing uncontrollably. He didn't want to be swayed by emotion into hallucinating the presence of Jesus in their midst, as he believed the others had been. I wonder whether it had taken a lot of persuading to get Thomas back into the same room where had listened spell-bound to Jesus, allowed his feet to be washed by him. Then to receive from him bread and wine, his body and his blood.

That second Sunday, I think what persuaded Thomas to go back to face his fears was the continuing transformation of the others. Their grief had turned to joy. Their fear to hope. They radiated excitement about Jesus being alive. So because of their friendship, their changed outlook, not their protestations, Thomas returned.

Jesus walked through doors which were closed. He greets them, 'Peace be with you.' He turns his eyes towards Thomas. He reaches out to him with nail-torn hands. He shows his wounded side.

'Do not doubt but believe'. Not so much a rebuke as a command. C.S. Lewis writes, it's as if Jesus were saying to Thomas, 'you should have known me better'. After all you have heard me say, all the miracles you have seen me do, you should have known that my followers spoke the truth, that resurrection is a reality.

At that moment Thomas knew for himself the divinity of Jesus. 'My lord and my God.' This time he requests no explanations, no feedback of how it all happened. His earlier questions had now been answered. In the resurrected Jesus lies the way to God the Father; in him lies the truth that whatever separates us from God is now forgiven and healed. With that acceptance comes new life, new creation - the gift of peace.

We may not fathom the mystery of the resurrection but like Thomas we can know its reality. Like him in this difficult time we can know the peace which comes from knowing Jesus as Lord and God. A peace which passes all our understanding and helps us rise above our fears.

We are living through times of physical, emotional and mental turmoil. We are unwillingly behind closed doors. See how, as he did for Thomas the twin, Jesus loves us for ourselves, how he sees our individual needs and finds ways to meet them which are beyond our earthly understanding. He breaks through the locked doors of our souls to offer us new life; to breathe his Spirit into us. Life shattering events, this current crisis may lead us, like Thomas, to question aspects of our faith. Don't shy away from them. Share your doubts, your questions honestly with trusted friends (with the help of technology) give voice to them in prayer to the God who knows intimately our suffering and our grief and wants above all else to bring us healing and fullness of life in him. When the grieving Mary met Jesus outside her brother Lazarus' tomb, Jesus said to her (John 11:25,26) 'I am the resurrection and the life.....do you believe this?'

Through Mary, through Thomas, today we are being asked the same question.

May our response be, 'Lord I believe help my unbelief.' (Mark 9: 24)

We thank God that Thomas with his doubts was not airbrushed out of the story.

Through him, Jesus sends this message to us all:

'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

May we, however weak our faith, go on to be a blessing to others so that they too might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and through believing have life in His name. Amen.

Use Hymn STF 629 as a personal prayer



God of my faith, I offer you my doubt,
For life at times seems far too dark for me,
And my belief becomes more insecure,
When worldly cares produce uncertainty.

God of my hope, I offer you my fear,
When I am scared by my anxiety,
When all I hear is suffering and woe,
In all my shadows you will walk with me.

God of my joy, I offer you my grief,
When I sink down in sadness or despair,
When in depression I cannot be touched,
I pray in all my depths to find you there.

God of my love, I offer you my pain,
When I'm alone and feel nobody cares,
In aching age or in rejected youth,
You bear my cross and dry my human tears.

God of my life, I offer you my dreams,
Light in the darkness where I hide from view,
Light in my faith, my hope, my joy and love,
Light in my life and all my life in you.

(Colin Ferguson b.1937)

Our time of prayer for others

Loving God we hold before you those who doubt and question your goodness.....

Risen Lord, give them your peace.

Loving God we hold before you all who are suffering the effects of war and conflict.....

Risen Lord, give them your peace.

Loving God we hold before you all who are suffering and in pain, those with this deadly virus, the medical teams working hard to bring healing.....

Risen Lord, give them your peace.

Loving God, we hold before you those who are afraid, those who are sad, those who grieve.....

Risen Lord, give them your peace.

Loving God we hold before you those struggling to cope with life. We pray for all carers, researchers and those decision-makers trying to lead us through these difficult times.....

Risen Lord, give them your peace.

Lord, you come to us with your healing, liberating touch.

So touch our lives with your risen power

that we may be each day your outstretched hand of love to others. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

HYMN STF 313 Thine be the glory, Risen Conquering Son

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoV5w2Qfag>

1 Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won ;
angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay :

*Thine be the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

2 Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb ;
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom ;

let the Church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for her Lord now liveth,
death hath lost its sting :

3 No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of Life ;
life is naught without thee :
aid us in our strife ;
make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless love ;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above :

Edmond Budry (1854–1932)

translated by Richard Birch Hoyle (1875–1939)

Risen Jesus, Take our hands in your hands.

Fill us with your peace.

Breathe on us your Spirit,

**that we may boldly declare your risen life in our words and actions,
to your praise and glory. Amen**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with us all, now and always Amen.**