

Morning Service

19th April 2020

You may wish to light a candle.

Introduction – Rev Anne Taylor

Welcome to our online service – I know there are people joining us for worship from both near and far and wherever you are we hope that our time together will help you feel the joy and peace of the Easter message. If you have any prayer requests please do call or email our Parish Office. Let us worship together.

Opening Sentences

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Hymn Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV9wUIZJFAA>

The Collect

Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred; open the door of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace to the praise of God the Father. **Amen**

Bible Readings

Epistle – 1 Peter 1: 3-9

read by Andrew Greenyer

A Living Hope

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith —being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Gospel – John 20: 19-31

read by Sonia Greenyer

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.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon – Rev Nathan Thorpe – see below

Prayers

Our loving Father, as we recall the change that came over the disciples when they met the risen Christ on that first Easter Day we pray for the renewal of faith, hope and love among your people today. We pray for all who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, for those working on the frontline – in the government, NHS, emergency services, for those engaged in research to find a vaccine - and to all who must make decisions for the benefit of so many give guidance, endurance and wisdom. Amen.

We pray for those, like Thomas struggle with doubts and hard questions make yourself known to them through the good news that Christ is alive and through the witness of his followers. Amen.

We pray for those who like the disciples are burdened by anxiety and worry. For those who are vulnerable; we pray for safety and protection. For those who are fearful; we pray for peace of mind and spirit. Give us and then a fresh awareness of your love, strength and presence. Amen

Lord, we ask you to lay a healing hand upon all those who are sick. We pray especially for Amanda, Barbara, Eileen, Graeme, Mike, Steve & Jane, Tom, Tony and all those who need our prayers today. We remember all who live in Nursing Homes and those who care for them. May those who mourn be comforted, those who worry be calmed and those who seek new life find it in Jesus Christ; through whom we pray. Amen.

At that first Eastertime you brought hope and new life to Mary Magdalene and the disciples. We thank you Lord for the encouragement and strength that worshipping you brings each one of us and pray we may bring hope to others as we are made aware of your risen presence. Amen

The Peace

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.
The peace of the Lord be always with you
And also with you

Hymn – For all the saints

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGBrq-C5VYE&t=65s>

Taking of the Bread and Wine

It is right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

But chiefly are we bound to praise you because you raised him gloriously from the dead.

For he is the true paschal lamb who was offered for us, and has taken away the sin of the world.

By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again he has restored to us everlasting life.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Father, on the night before he died,
Jesus shared a meal with his friends.

He took the bread, and thanked you.
He broke it, and gave it to them, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this to remember me.

After the meal, Jesus took the cup of wine.
He thanked you, and gave it to them, saying:
Drink this, all of you.
This is my blood, the new promise of God's unfailing love.
Do this to remember me.

Father, as we bring this bread and wine,
and remember his death and resurrection,
send your Holy Spirit, that we who share these gifts
may be fed by Christ's body and his blood.

Pour your Spirit on us that we may love one another,
work for the healing of the earth, and share the good news of Jesus,
as we wait for his coming in glory.

For honour and praise belong to you, Father,
with Jesus your Son, and the Holy Spirit: one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.
Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in the one bread.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ you have assured your children of eternal life and in baptism have made us one in him; raise us to new life in your love in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you, and all who you care for this day and always. **Amen.**

Hymn To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

SERMON – Rev Nathan Thorpe **Easter 2 – St Thomas**

Someone once said that faith is like a jigsaw puzzle – as you go through life, you slowly assemble the puzzle until you get a picture with no gaps. At that point, something shakes the picture and scatters the pieces, then you have to start assembling it again. Every time it happens, there is a slightly different picture. Maybe, in that respect, it is a bit more like a kaleidoscope.

Thomas, in our gospel reading, has an interesting journey.

He is impulsive and offers to die with Jesus when Jesus was travelling to Bethany (John 11), but dubious about the place and the way he was leading them. Then there is this episode, which has been his enduring reputation to this day.

I came across a quote about how Thomas has been treated by subsequent spiritual teachers. ‘They both blamed him for his lack of faith and thanked him for his scepticism’.

Which is understandable – his world, his way of life had come crashing down. If you buy into something, dedicate yourself to it, relocate for it – when it fails, or doesn’t live up to your expectations – then you are going to feel hurt. Devastated, even. It is easy to get into the same place as Thomas.

So, Thomas does what comes naturally to all of us – limits his horizons and criteria to limit his capacity to pain.

Thomas sets himself criteria based on his experience. He didn’t simply go along with the crowd. He is already braver than most – he’s actually half-way there. Rather than simply denouncing it as preposterous – he actually gives the situation a chance to resolve itself. ‘Unless I put my hands on his side, I will not believe’.

Even though it looks like everything has crashed down, Thomas knows the man he’s followed – he was the one who convinced the disciples to go to Bethany – where Jesus raised Lazarus after all!

In our gospel reading, he is struggling with how to believe and what to believe in. Like his earlier questioning of the road to Bethany – he is struggling with the place and the way to get there.

It seems counter-intuitive for Jesus to go near Jerusalem, into danger. But Jesus does it for the love of a friend. I did a funeral this week and it was completely counter intuitive to not offer even a handshake or go and see a family to plan the service. It seems very counter-intuitive to keep our distance in order to help people at the moment.

But our faith grows as a result of working with doubt and questions – it deepens and should enlarge our hearts. It develops by talking and acting together. I hope many of these social initiatives we see around us continue even after lock-down has lifted.

So, after the death of Jesus, Thomas wants to see and touch so he can be sure he's going the right way and he can believe again. He doesn't want to get fooled again. He is responding authentically with a wariness that is natural and understandable. For that, I think he deserves understanding rather than dismissing.

Today, it is easier to raise barriers we might not see lifted. Unless wars cease, that person changes, that person apologises, I will not believe. Unless I experience some measurable difference in my life, I will not believe. Therefore, the whole thing is not worth bothering with.

Thomas didn't have the luxury of figuring out all the pieces – the Resurrection, in the form of Jesus, happened to him right there and then. Whether we think his reaction was good or bad, it was certainly natural.

I once heard someone say 'church is just a club – it only helps its members'. My response to that is – what are you wanting to get out of it?

I am sure, based on their experience, that it seems true. But it is not my experience – my experience is quite the opposite. I have seen more people use their tragedy for good, their time, talents and finances for the good of others around them. They just don't shout about it.

Rather than make conditions that will become bricks in the fortress we build around our minds, hearts and souls; these people can use their experiences to give others life too. I wonder if Thomas, after touching the hands and feet of Jesus, would have recognised the phrase 'speak from your scars, not from your wounds'. I am certain that there are far more unknown saints – for which the person, example or teaching of Jesus – have moved them to proclaim 'my lord and my God' like Thomas, than I will know in my limited experience.

The encounter with Jesus certainly changed Thomas. Because after his resurrection experience, and Pentecost, Thomas fades away into rumour and legend. He is believed to have travelled to India, founded at least 7 churches there & influenced a branch of the church called 'St Thomas Christians' – one of the oldest Christian communities of Jewish origin in record.

He still ventured into the places where it was not common to go. He continued to walk his own way – even changed and deeper than he had been – and way beyond his perspective in that upper room.

I find that quite admirable in a lot of ways – and contrary to those spiritual writers I quoted at the start of my sermon – I thank Thomas for his scepticism and his lack of faith. It teaches me a great deal about what the resurrection might look like to me and you as we continue to celebrate this Easter wherever we are. Amen.