

# Morning worship and Spiritual Communion

Easter 2 19 April 2020

## Introduction

The Gospel reading straddles two events: the first Easter evening when Jesus appears to his disciples, and then a second appearance a week later – which specifically involves Thomas.



Thanks to Clare for this photo

As we saw in our Easter Day service, our current situation gives us a different focus, which paradoxically is probably closer to the feelings of the disciples on that first Easter Day than usual. So we are starting this service in the same vein, with comments from Charles Edwards about that first evening, and followed by a new poem by Malcolm Guite written specifically for this 2020 Eastertide.

## **Jesus Appears to His Disciples John 20:19-21**

It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the father sent me, so I send you.’

## **Comments from Charles Edwards**

This chapter of John’s Gospel about Easter Day both starts and ends in darkness, with the discovery of Jesus’ empty tomb before sunrise, and its finish that evening. What a day!!

For now we are considering that first Easter night. This year we find a greater understanding with Jesus’ self-confined friends in their fear behind those closed doors. Then, into that atmosphere of bewilderment, depression and perhaps guilt, comes Jesus with “Peace be with you”, in a way that convinces them utterly that he’s truly risen in every significant sense.

This encounter fills these despondent, bereft and apprehensive people with a gladness and joy even John the Gospel-writer couldn’t adequately describe. This year, can our Covid 19 qualms be modified by our association with their experience enough to cry “Whopee” just a little!?

Together, he comes to send them out with power and a peace, not to leave them alone behind that locked door, but to free them for (I believe the current buzz word is *flourishing*), a fullness of life in a very open and therefore vulnerable, relation with God and others.

Jesus conveys this by showing who he really is by the scars which all human sin has inflicted on him, and with the breath of the Spirit, convincing us that we are accepted as a whole, nice and dark sides included, giving us nerve to accept ourselves, so we can soon go out for Christ, complete with scars, and be filled with joy.

### **Easter 2020 By Malcolm Guite**

And where is Jesus, this strange Easter day?  
Not lost in our locked churches, anymore  
Than he was sealed in that dark sepulchre.  
The locks are loosed; the stone is rolled away,  
And he is up and risen, long before,  
Alive, at large, and making his strong way  
Into the world he gave his life to save,  
No need to seek him in his empty grave.

He might have been a wafer in the hands  
Of priests this day, or music from the lips  
Of red-robed choristers, instead he slips  
Away from church, shakes off our linen bands  
To don his apron with a nurse: he grips  
And lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands  
The frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope,  
Breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope.

On Thursday we applauded, for he came  
And served us in a thousand names and faces  
Mopping our sickroom floors and catching traces  
Of that virus which was death to him:  
Good Friday happened in a thousand places  
Where Jesus held the helpless, died with them  
That they might share his Easter in their need,  
Now they are risen with him, risen indeed.

You can hear Malcolm reading this poem (left click then in box choose OK)  
<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2020/04/12/easter-2020-a-new-poem/amp/>

Now as we move to the next section of this service you might like to access the site below (left click then in box choose OK) to hear 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' (Words and music)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>

We are now going to focus on the second part of the gospel reading: the story of Thomas.

We call Thomas the doubter, yet this does him I believe a great disservice, and fails to recognise the importance of doubt within faith. There are generally too many people in this world eager to tell us that there is only one way of doing things, (theirs). This will be reflected in our worship, which is based round a Meeting Point I led on this day in 2015.

## **Thomas: a man of certainty – who also changed his mind!**

### **Opening prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Holy One,

On this Eastertide morning, we come to you,  
celebrating new life all around us,  
not quite believing it all, but going along with it, just the same.



Doubting Thomas

**We celebrate the doubters and questioners among us,  
who simply keep our faith real,  
who demand that we live our believing  
into faith that works towards justice and peace,  
and making sure that the hungry are nourished and loved.**

We celebrate the saints among us,  
whose courageous faith  
flies without a safety net,  
reminding us that true discipleship is risky and radical  
in the face of a world held hostage by greed, love of power, and denial.

**We are your Easter people, Holy One.  
Doubters, saints, sinners, questioners, spiritual and religious,  
who skip, run, and stumble on the journey.  
We pray that whoever we are on this journey,  
that you might open our ears and eyes  
to your call,  
to be Your love,  
wherever we are.  
In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.**

~ written by Rev Karla, and posted on **RevGalBlogPals**. <http://revgalblogpals.org>

### **Confession**

This Easter you bring us new life  
You tear apart the greed of the world  
Bringing down the powerful  
You reach out to the poor and the hungry

**But we turn from you  
Shielding our eyes from light  
Stepping back into darkness.  
We do not respond to your love  
Our hearts become hard  
We hurt you and one another  
We live for ourselves,  
Ignoring the needs of others.  
And in silence we pray for forgiveness...**

You come to us with words of peace  
And we know that we are forgiven  
For your love is stronger than hatred  
You bring life out of death  
You take away sorrow  
And surround us with joy.

## **Meeting Thomas:**

Reading     John 20: 24-29

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him: 'We have seen the Lord!'

Thomas said to them, 'Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars, and my hands in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be unto you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe.

Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Jesus said to him, 'Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me.'

## **Comments on the Reading**

Christianity did not invent the idea of resurrection. It was established as a belief in Judaism in the time of Christ though it was a relatively new belief of about a hundred years. Not everyone shared the belief. The Pharisees did, the Sadducees did not.

Most of the believers in resurrection believed in bodily resurrection – your resurrected body was as when you died, but not all – some believed in a spiritual resurrection. Thomas might have been one of those. It wasn't that he didn't believe that resurrection was possible, rather that Jesus's resurrection seemed to be different from what he supposed it should be.

Thomas wasn't there that first Easter evening, so the disciples tell him the good news, which is of physical resurrection, and he wants to check it out. How did he get in? What did he look like, what did he do? Thomas realises that if this is

physical resurrection and not some illusion, or group-projection, then Christ's wounds would still be there. Did they see them? Sorry, didn't think about that. Well, shouldn't we check it out?

Peter could have stood on his high horse: 'this is now what true believers believe: If you are one of us, you must believe.' Thank heaven he didn't. Thomas is still very much included in the group, and there the next week.

So this may explain Thomas's insistence on verifying the physical trauma of crucifixion. He does not make the actual test – it would seem that on seeing Jesus he had to revise his concept of the resurrection body – how like Jesus to do the unexpected!

This encounter leads to Thomas saying My Lord and My God: the first time in the Gospels that Jesus is actually called God: Lord (leader) yes, Son of God, yes, but Thomas for the first time says risen Jesus you are my God. This is transformational.



*This is the depiction of the scene by Caravaggio. Of the many depictions there are – and it is a subject that has fascinated artists for many centuries – this is perhaps the most visceral. Despite the other disciples' protestations of belief, two of them at any rate are just as interested as Thomas!*

## Intercessions

Life-giving God,  
We give you thanks  
For Jesus has risen.  
He comes to us with words of peace

Come to us today.  
In government rooms where politicians meet  
In city board rooms where executives plan,  
In court rooms where lawyers debate,  
**Come with words of peace.**

In hospital rooms where people are waiting,  
In prison cells where people are afraid  
In homes where people struggle to make ends meet,  
**Come with words of peace.**

Come to us whenever we are afraid  
Whenever we are grieving  
Come to us now we pray in silence  
For those we care for and are worried about...  
Despite the strong and solid doors we lock  
To protect ourselves  
To shut out the world  
**Come to us with words of peace.**

Intercessions by Susan Miller (alt), and posted on the Church of Scotland's *Starters for Sunday* website. <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

Please use the link below (left click then in box choose OK) to access 'Bless the Lord my soul' sung at St David's church In Exeter – thanks to Nigel for this.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85UXQFbhWCQ>

## A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

*You may wish to say or pray*

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Please left click on this link and click OK ' to visit this website

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dtbzFdFTnc&feature=youtu.be>

where you will hear the choir of St David's church sing an anthem by Nigel Walsh – (Christ has no body but you - a setting of words attributed to St Teresa of Avila.)

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.  
*(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)*

## **The Conclusion**

Renew us in the power of your Spirit  
That we may open the doors  
And go out into the world  
To touch others  
And bring words of peace to the people we meet.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;  
The Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us;  
The Lord look kindly upon us and give us peace. Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.



La Resurrezione by Pericle Fazzini (1913-1987)

This sculpture representing the Resurrection was offered by Exeter Cathedral's website. Italian-born painter and sculptor, Pericle Fazzini, was commissioned to create this sculpture for the Paul VI Audience Hall in the Vatican. Completed in 1977, it was originally sculptured in polystyrene and then cast in bronze/copper weighing 80 metric tons. It is on a monumental scale — 66ft wide, 23ft high and 10ft in depth. The artist said it depicts Jesus rising from from a nuclear crater in the garden of Gethsemane. Fazzini intended it to represent the anguish of 20th century humankind living under the threat of nuclear war.

— Canon Ian Morter

**Please scroll down to next page for evening prayer**

## **This Sunday Evening**

Churches Together in Devon in common with Churches Together throughout England are asking that at 7pm each Sunday evening, you light a candle in the windows of your home as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, our source and hope in prayer.

## **Night Prayer**



If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

### **Opening prayer:**

Spirit of the Risen Christ,  
As the lamps light up the evening,  
Shine in our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love.

### **A reading from Isaiah 55: 10-11**

My word is like the snow and the rain  
that come down from the sky to water the earth.  
They make the crops grow  
and provide seed for sowing and food to eat.  
So also will be the word that I speak -  
it will not fail to do what I plan for it;  
it will do everything I send it to do.

### **Thanksgiving prayer**

We give you thanks, our provider,  
That you are always present, in all things,  
Each day and each night.  
We give you thanks for your gifts of creation,  
Life and friendship.  
We give you thanks for the particular blessings of this day....

## **Psalm 121**

I look to the mountains;  
where will my help come from?  
My help will come from the LORD  
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let you fall;  
your protector is always awake.

The protector of Israel  
never dozes or sleeps.  
The LORD will guard you;  
he is by your side to protect you.  
The sun will not hurt you during the day,  
nor the moon during the night.

The LORD will protect you from all danger;  
he will keep you safe.  
He will protect you as you come and go  
now and forever.

## **Prayers for the nation, for those in need, and for those close to you.**

Let us pray to the Lord, who is our refuge and stronghold.  
For the health and well-being of our nation, that all who are fearful and anxious  
may be at peace and free from worry:  
*Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.*

For the isolated and housebound, that we may be alert to their needs, and care  
for them in their vulnerability:  
*Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.*

For our homes and families, our schools and young people, and all in any kind of  
need or distress:  
*Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.*

For a blessing on our local community, that our neighbourhoods may be places  
of trust and friendship, where all are known and cared for:  
*Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.*

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection  
of God.  
*Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus  
Christ. Amen.*

## **Closing**

Risen Christ, watch over us this night  
And keep us in the light of your presence. Amen