

Worship for the 1st Sunday after Easter

Welcome: to worship for Low Sunday, as the Sunday after Easter is sometimes known. We are grateful to Jeongsook, Jill, Richard, Barbara, Candy and Tony who are all taking part this week. If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with me on revpeter.mwc@gmail.com

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

Call to worship

Come, embrace the risen Christ.
Come, embrace the Prince of peace.
Come, embrace his pierced hands.
Come, meet your Lord and your God.

Hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord
STF 295

Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to His name.

Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
He is the King of creation. Refrain.

Spread the good news o'er all the earth.
Jesus has died and has risen. Refrain.

We have been crucified with Christ.
Now we shall live forever. Refrain.

A prayer of approach

As the disciples in the locked room reached out and touched you,
let us reach out and touch you today, living Lord Jesus.
Let us feel your scarred hands and feet.
Let us put our hands in your side.
Let us be still and know that you are our Lord and our God.
Amen.

Lord, your body was broken, and your blood was shed.

Thank you for the cross.

You did it so that we might live.

Thank you for the cross.

Thank you for all that you have done for us.

Thank you for the cross.

Your love has set us free.

Thank you for the resurrection.

You were raised to life and ran out of that grave.

Thank you for the resurrection.

Thank you that we have eternal life in you.

Thank you for your cross and resurrection. Amen.

A prayer of confession

We come with busy hearts and minds:
let us confess to God all those things we should not carry.

O God, forgive us when we cannot see you for all our questions,
when we refuse to believe, out of uncertainty or fear,
when we don't recognise you at work within us.

God of mercy, Forgive us.

O God, forgive us when we keep you to ourselves,
unwilling to share your joy with others,
preferring to stay in our comfort zones, behind closed doors.

God of mercy, Forgive us.

O God, forgive us when we muddle up our priorities,
misunderstand our purpose and potential,
and do not listen to your calling.

God of mercy, Forgive us.

Silence

Hear now the words of Jesus for all who are truly sorry and seek to renew their lives.

Your sins are forgiven.

Pause

Lead us now, O God,

To acknowledge your costly generosity by living as forgiven people, until heaven and earth rejoice and the whole earth cries Glory! Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9 (NRSV)

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.

Hymn: When Easter to the dark world came STF
316

**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 ten disciples met in fear,
Then ‘Peace’ said Jesus, ‘I am here.’
At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.**

**When Thomas’ heart was hurt and grieved,
Then Jesus’ wounds his doubt relieved:
At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.**

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

Reading: John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

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.’

Jesus and Thomas

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.’

The Purpose of This Book

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.

Reflection (Rev. Barbara Greenwood)

I've been thinking about faith.

Today, the Sunday after Easter, is traditionally known as Low Sunday. It stands in contrast to the emotional and spiritual peak of Easter Day. We are still in the season of Easter, if we were meeting in a church building today I would still start the service with the great proclamation of faith: Alleluia! Christ is Risen! And you would respond: He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Nevertheless, Low Sunday feels like an anti-climax... although perhaps this year it was Easter Day itself that left some of us feeling low.

I've been thinking about faith – that thing which St Peter writes in our epistle is more precious than gold. And, because it is precious, it needs to be tested, it needs to be tried and probed and stressed, so that the strength of it, the genuineness of it, can be seen. It's in the hard times that we really need our faith, so it's vital that it has been well tested in advance. “I believe”, we say. “I believe in God, I believe in Jesus, I believe in his resurrection.” We sing about it, week by week. It's easy to believe when there's not much at stake, harder when everything is at stake.

In my younger days I went on several of those outward-bound adventure type things, so I've had

several goes at abseiling. It's nerve-wracking, lowering yourself backwards over the edge of a cliff, with a hundred foot drop below you. But you can feel the harness, the rope pulling taut, it gives you a feeling of security. It's with you all the way, until you reach the bottom. I've never tried parachuting, or bungee jumping. The thought makes my blood run cold – you have to jump from a great height, go into free fall, and trust that, before you hit the ground, the equipment will do its job and you will land safely. That takes more faith than abseiling. I would certainly want to know that the equipment had been rigorously tested before it got anywhere near me.

I've been thinking about Thomas – good old Doubting Thomas, who didn't believe in the resurrection until he had seen and touched Jesus for himself. I think he gets a bad press. You see, the other disciples had all seen the evidence. In John's Gospel, Peter and the other disciple see the cloths in the empty tomb, the women see Jesus, and the rest of the disciples had seen Jesus on his previous appearance when Thomas wasn't there. They told Thomas they had seen Jesus, and he didn't believe them. Would you? Dead people don't come back – we know this. He was grieving, in shock, the world had that unreal quality which it often does following a bereavement, like it does at the moment.... And they were asking him to believe that a dead man was walking around again? Of course, he didn't believe them.

And then, Jesus came. He came back for Thomas – he showed himself, gave Thomas the evidence he needed. And Thomas fell down on his knees, said "My Lord and my God!" and never doubted again. Or did he? The tradition is that Thomas travelled widely preaching the Gospel, all over the Middle East, to India, possibly to China, Indonesia and Paraguay, and that he was martyred in India. Over the years that he was travelling and evangelising, there must have been many hardships. There must have been times when he asked himself whether he had really seen what he'd thought he'd seen whether God really was with him.

There's an unconscious assumption we often make that if God is with us, then our life is going to be protected, we will be rescued from hardship and danger. The Psalms in particular are full of pleas to God for protection, and thanks and praises for deliverance already received. But in these days, when we are praying for this virus to be over, when we may be praying for particular individuals we know who have caught it, what is it we are really asking or expecting God to do? And if it isn't quickly over, if the person we know dies, what does that say about God? What will happen to our faith?

Perhaps the problem is that we try to tie God down. We make assumptions about what God will do in particular circumstances, and what our faith entitles us to, if I can put it like that. What did Jesus actually promise? He promised the presence of the Holy Spirit. He promised his peace would be with us – but not peace that the world gives. He said that he was the way and called us to follow him.

In these difficult and confusing times, we need a simple faith – a faith which says "My Lord and my God", and then waits to see what God will do, where he will lead, rather than assuming we know what happens next. It's OK to wonder. It's OK to doubt – sometimes the doubters are the ones with the strongest faith, because in the face of everything going on around them, they are still seeking God, still expecting there to be an answer, even if they don't quite know what it is.

Hymn: When our futures are uncertain (STF online only)

**When our futures are uncertain,
when our Christian life is tough,
when our worries fill our thinking,
when our hope is not enough –
then the rallying cry of Thomas
rises high above the crowd:
'Give your lives, your all, for Jesus.
Join him on this narrow road.'**

**When the many signs confuse me -
aimless wanderings fill my day -
then I pray the prayer with Thomas:
'Gracious Lord, show us the way.'**

**Suddenly the spell is broken!
Truth and Life in Christ, I see:
'I'm the way that you are seeking,
Come, disciple, follow me.'**

**When I miss the great adventure,
When belief is too absurd -
deep inside, I need, with Thomas
simple faith to be assured.
Then, the resurrected Jesus
brings to me his hands and side.
Overwhelming love engulfs me!
Death is dead and Christ's alive!**

**Come, inspire this feeble vision,
put your daring in our minds:
words to motivate disciples,
lives that challenge humankind.
Like Saint Thomas, full of passion,
clear our gloom that we may see -
Christ, our Lord, alive forever!
Christ, my God, alive in me!**

Words: © Adrian Low

Metre: 87.87.D

Suggested tunes: Scarlet Ribbons (StF 131); Jesus calls us (StF 28); Calon Lân (StF 323i)

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Let us give thanks to God

For the love of our father, the maker of all, the giver of all good things:
Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For the world's beauty and the changing seasons, for blossom, birds and bees and for the love of life that we have been given:
Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For Jesus Christ our saviour, who lived and worked among us, for those wonderful moments of recognition of the Lord alive with us:
Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For His suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection to new life, the signs of new life we see and those that we hope for:
Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For His rule over all things and His presence in the world, *the signs of compassion care and community around us:*

Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who teaches and guides us:

Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD**

For the grace of the Spirit in the work of the church scattered or gathered and the life of the world:
Let us bless the Lord, **THANKS BE TO GOD. AMEN.**

Offering

Many of us make bring our gifts and offerings through standing orders, through charitable gifts that we make, our time and our availability, our care and our compassion. We acknowledge all that giving as part of this worship this morning.

We say together:

GRACIOUS GOD, ACCEPT THESE GIFTS, AND WITH THEM OUR LIVES TO BE USED IN YOUR SERVICE; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN

Prayers of intercession

Loving Lord,

You promised us that whenever two or more are gathered in your name our prayers will be answered. Our definition of 'gathered' is strangely changing! We pray that these prayers, spoken from hearts spread out across our community will be acceptable to you.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

We humbly pray
for all our brothers and sisters
in Christ around the world.
Separated from each other
as we are by the darkness of this disease.
We pray that you will hold us close,
Bound together in your love,
In faith.

Gracious God

Hear our prayer

We pray for all the nations.
None are exempt from this pandemic.
We pray for all the other problems facing the world,
Poverty, famine, drought, war.
These problems continue on
Unaffected,
worsened by its shadow.

Gracious God
Hear our prayer

We pray for our leaders
Guiding us as best they can.
We pray that you will guide them,
And so, lead us,
through to a brighter world-
Brighter for everyone.

Gracious God
Hear our prayer

We pray for our community
for those serving us
Both ministering to our health
and our everyday needs.
We pray that you will protect them,
Keeping them and their families safe.
We pray for those around us living alone,
Isolated, lonely,
Unseen.
Keep them from despair Lord.
Guide us to them,
Show us their need.

Gracious God
Hear our prayer

We pray for the sick, Lord.
We pray that you will be with them
where family and friends cannot.
We pray for those who have lost their battle,
who have died.
We pray that they are safe with you.
Please comfort and support their loved ones,
Left behind to mourn in isolation.
Hold them especially close.

Gracious God
Hear our prayer

Almighty God,
Please join us, your children,
together in your love,
Along with all those who have gone before us,
And use us to your loving purpose.
Amen

Let us join together in 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

Hymn: See, what a morning STF 309
See what a morning, gloriously bright
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes
Tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,
Borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives,
Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping: 'Where is He laid?
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name:
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope,
Bringing peace to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit
Who clothes faith with certainty,
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned with power and authority!

**And we are raised with Him,
Death is dead, love has won Christ has
conquered;
And we shall reign with Him,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!**

Final Blessing

Jesus stood among them and said,
'Peace be with you.'

As the Father has sent me,
so I send you.
Receive the Holy Spirit.'
Go and do the Father's work,
in the name of the Son
and in the strength of the Spirit. **Amen.**

**And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the
Holy Spirit remain with you always. Amen.**