



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

11TH APRIL 2021

EASTER 2

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>	PARISH OFFICE: Please phone or use e-mail to make contact TEL:01252 331161; e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
Acts 4 v 32 - 35	
1 John 1 v 1 to 2 v 2	
John 20 v 19 - end	

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN!



Jesus said to Thomas – ‘Do not doubt but believe’.

EASTER GREETINGS

Fr Keith and Carol wish you all a very Happy Easter and pray that you will be richly blessed by Jesus, our Risen Lord, in the days and months ahead! Alleluia!

As the Covid restrictions begin to be relaxed, we are all looking forward to getting back together socially, in ways that have been denied us for many months. It is still too early to be putting specific dates for social events in our diaries, but, as the ‘roadmap’ unfolds, we hope that that will be possible soon. In the meantime, we will go on offering worship online and on our website, as well as in our church building. We will also be offering some more study and discussion sessions, via Zoom, in the coming weeks.

If you would like to talk to us at any time please phone us: Carol – 01252 313239. Keith – 01252 321517

SHOEBOX UPDATE

265,975 That's how many shoe boxes were sent last year spreading joy and giving children an opportunity to learn about Jesus. Our boxes went to Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia. Thank you.

I would love it if we could be more 'green' this year. Wooden pencils, wooden handled skipping ropes, wooden yoyo or truck. Cotton facecloth, sisal soap bag, bamboo toothbrush and metal pencil sharpeners are all good. See if you can think of some more. Barbara Rose.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – EASTER 3

Acts 3 v 12 - 19; 1 John 3 v 1 - 7; Luke 24 v 36b - 48

Please pray for the souls of all the recently Departed, among them: STEVE EVANS; RITA WHERRELL; DOROTHY MILLARD; LIONEL COUSINS

PCC MEETING - Tuesday 20th April 7 – 30 pm on Zoom

CARE AND SHARE - tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the shelves or on the doorstep of the Rectory.

ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

BIRTHDAYS - Congratulations to all who are celebrating a birthday at this time especially: CLEO SHARP (16TH)

100 CLUB – MARCH WINNERS

First Prize - £82 – 50 – Tony Whelton

Second Prize - £34 – 38 – Tony Beckton

Third Prize - £20 – 62 – Chris Coupland

If you would like to join the 100 Club just £5 per month contact Fr Keith or the Parish Office.

Quiet Day, led by The Revd. Haydon Wilcox, at St. Columba's House, Woking.

The Quiet Day will support people to get back into the world from lockdown and will offer the opportunity to share, reflect, to be spiritually fed and to gain encouragement.

The event will be from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Numbers will be limited to 16. All Covid protocols will be practised to ensure a safe environment. The cost will be £30 and includes a packed lunch and refreshments.

We anticipate high demand, so two dates have been set aside: Monday 7th June and Monday 12th July 2021. To make a reservation please contact St. Columba's House on Tel. 01483 766 498 or email: admin@stcolumbushouse.org.uk

SOME THOUGHTS FROM FR. KEITH ON TODAY'S READINGS

I've always felt a bit sorry for Thomas, perpetually known as 'doubting Thomas' to most people, because that's not the full picture. St John tells us, in this morning's Gospel, that Thomas was not with the other apostles when Jesus came to them in the evening of the first Easter Day. When they told him that they had seen the Lord, he didn't believe them. Thomas was a 'hands-on' type of man, and he wanted actual physical evidence that Jesus really was alive again. But that wasn't out of character – Thomas always spoke out!

This is the same man who hadn't been afraid to seek clarification from Jesus, earlier on in the gospel story. When Jesus had been talking about His death, and the fact that He was going ahead to prepare a place for them, He had said that they knew the way to the place where he was going. Thomas didn't know, and he wasn't afraid to tell Jesus to His face – 'Lord we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?' That must have taken some courage, but Jesus responds gently and positively – 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'.

In the light of that episode, we shouldn't be too surprised, then, at Thomas' outspoken response to the news of the resurrection, and I don't think we should be too hard on him either for having doubts, after all, Jesus wasn't!

Thomas was no less devoted to Jesus than the rest of the apostles. Let's not forget that when Jesus had announced that he was going to Judea again, putting Himself at great risk, Thomas had urged the others on by saying 'let us also go, that we may die with him' (John 11 v 16.)

Now, when Jesus appears again, a week after Easter Day, He lets Thomas touch Him in order to confirm for himself what the others already knew. Jesus' only comments to Thomas, that could be conceived as a slight rebuke is - 'Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' Not harsh, but full of understanding of the person Thomas was. Jesus wanted to encourage him and keep him on board.

In the light of this episode, I think we should look again at how we respond to people who express doubts about our faith. Are we encouraging like Jesus, or just dismissive of how they feel? It is all too easy for us to judge people harshly, and get aggressively defensive. We may even look down on Thomas for his hesitation, and convince ourselves that we would never have been like him. We tell ourselves that we're better than that. But I wonder how many Christians can honestly say that they have never had doubts? If we have, then maybe we should draw on our own experience and think very carefully about how we respond to the doubters. Like Jesus we should aim to be understanding, rather than harsh, so that we help people to come on board rather than put them off completely for life.

We should always listen carefully to what people are telling us about the obstacles they are finding to having faith, and take them seriously. Sharing what brought us to faith, and what keeps us following Jesus can be a good start in responding. Talking about our own experiences, including our times of struggle and doubt, will demonstrate that having faith isn't an escape from harsh reality, but rather, a way of dealing with reality in a positive way. People need to know that Christianity is not a 'magic' solution to the difficulties that we encounter in life, but God's way of

helping us cope with them. Also, being honest about our frequent failures to live up to what Christianity tells us we should be doing, will also be encouraging. The fact that we know we're not perfect, but that God always wants to give us another chance when we're sorry, will also help us make the Christian faith more real to others.

In our first reading this morning, from Acts, Luke gives us a picture of life in the early church that clearly marks those early believers out from the rest of society. They were a group of people totally at one with each other, for whom private possessions were no longer important. They shared everything they had because they were focussed on the common good rather than just self. They spoke out with power about their belief in the resurrection and demonstrated their commitment to Jesus in very practical ways. They loved their neighbours by seeing that no one in the church was left in need.

So, people could look at them and see that their faith made a real difference to the way they lived their lives. Following Jesus wasn't about paying lip service to a religious concept, an abstract theory about life that stood apart from gritty reality. No, the early church was living differently, going against the natural tendency towards selfishness and looking after number one all the time! They were trying to live as Jesus Himself had done, making sacrifices for the good of others and supporting and encouraging one another in ways that showed strength and courage. It was a demonstration of the new life that the Easter experience had brought to the world – the new creation that came out of their baptism when they put aside the past.

Personally, I think that one of our greatest challenges today is to let people see that the Christian faith has a real value in enabling us all to live a life that is more fulfilling. Allowing Jesus fully into your life makes a real difference in the here and now, and we need to tell people that fact in our actions as well as in what we say. No less than 2000 years ago people around us should see a difference in how we live and treat others. We need to show that following Jesus isn't a kind of insurance policy for when we die, but an exciting way of living in this world in the here and now. Like Thomas many people ask for proof that Jesus is really alive before they come to believe. When we let Jesus guide us and direct our lives, they will begin to see the truth of that, in us.

So, doubting *can* be constructive. If we respond with gentleness, honesty and love, and show how Jesus is working within us, it can actually be a way of drawing people in. Being judgemental and dismissive will not. Jesus tells us that we are now his hands and feet, his voice in the world. We need to pray for guidance, and think very carefully when we have to respond to those who doubt and who may be speaking aggressively against all that we hold dear. For Thomas actions spoke louder than words, and I suspect that that is true for a great many people today.

In this Easter season then, as I said last week, let's show ourselves to be truly an Easter people. Let's live the joy and demonstrate the reality of what we believe, by mirroring the love, of our risen Lord. As we begin to take a new direction post-Covid, let's allow Jesus to send us out, so that those who, like us, have not seen Him in the flesh, may still, come to believe and share in the new creation that he has brought.

'Doubt is but another element of faith' - St Augustine

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

(A recording of this service is available to view now on the St Peter's website.)

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand.

(L) Alleluia, Christ is risen!
All: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

(L) O Lord, open our lips
All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

(L) In your resurrection, O Christ,
All: let heaven and earth rejoice. Alleluia.

A candle may be lit

All I will make a way in the wilderness,
and rivers in the desert.

- 1 'I am the Lord, your Holy One, ♦
the Creator of Israel, your King.'
- 2 Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, ♦
a path in the mighty waters,
- 3 'Remember not the former things, ♦
nor consider the things of old.
- 4 'Behold, I am doing a new thing; ♦
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
- 5 'I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert, ♦
to give drink to my chosen people,
- 6 'The people whom I formed for myself, ♦
that they might declare my praise.'

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All I will make a way in the wilderness,
and rivers in the desert.

This hymn is said or sung:

A brighter dawn is breaking,
And earth with praise is waking;
For Thou, O King, most highest,
The power of death defiest.

And Thou hast come victorious,
With risen body glorious,
Who now forever livest,
And life abundant givest.

O free the world from blindness,
And fill the world with kindness,
Give sinners resurrection,
Bring striving to perfection.

In sickness give us healing,
In doubt Thy clear revealing,
That praise to Thee be given
In earth as in Thy Heaven.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.
Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and
evil and confessing our sins with a sincere and true
heart.

Pause to call to mind our sins and then we confess them:

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins,
and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.
We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.
We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.
We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

(L) God of love and power we ask you to
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by your Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. Amen.

The collect for Easter 2:

Almighty Father,
you have given your only Son to die for our sins
and to rise again for our justification:
grant us so to put away the leaven
of malice and wickedness
that we may always serve you
in pureness of living and truth;
through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read Acts 4 v 32 - 35 then Psalm 133 concluding with:

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read 1 John 1 v 1 to 2 v 2

(L) Alleluia, alleluia. I am the first and the last, says the
Lord, and the living one;
I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.

All: Alleluia.

Now read John 20 v 19 - end

*Fr. Keith has written some thoughts for today – see above,
before the start of this service.*

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L) Let us affirm our faith:

All: We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and
unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of
God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God,
Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not
made, of one Being with the Father; through him all
things were made. For us and for our salvation he came

down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

All Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Alleluia.
He has defeated the powers of death. Alleluia.
Jesus turns our sorrow into dancing. Alleluia.
He has the words of eternal life. Alleluia.

We now say 'The Benedictus' together:

All: The Lord is risen from the tomb
who for our sakes hung upon the tree. Alleluia.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: The Lord is risen from the tomb
who for our sakes hung upon the tree. Alleluia.

Prayers of intercession now follow

In joy and hope let us pray to the Father:

That our risen Saviour may fill us with the joy of his glorious and life-giving resurrection, and that we may spread that joy to those around us, bringing hope where there is despair and reconciliation where there is brokenness, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That isolated and persecuted churches may find fresh strength in the good news of Easter, remembering especially our sisters and brothers who are suffering in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, China and Indonesia, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That he may grant us humility to be subject to one another in Christian love, learning from one another and allowing others to minister to us, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That he may provide for those who lack food, work or shelter, blessing foodbanks, night shelters, citizens advice bureaux and all who volunteer in our community, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That by his power war and famine may cease through all the world, that peace and justice may be the goals of world leaders everywhere, and that there may be a fairer sharing of the earth's resources, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That he may reveal the light of his presence to the sick, the weak and the dying, to comfort and strengthen them and to support all carers and health workers, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That, according to his promises, all who have died in the faith of the resurrection may be raised on the last day, remembering especially at this time - STEVE EVANS; RITA WHERRELL; DOROTHY MILLARD; LIONEL COUSINS, we pray to the Father.

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

That he may send the fire of the Holy Spirit upon his people, so that we may bear faithful witness to his resurrection, we pray to the Father:

Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant that, as his death has recalled us to life, so his continual presence in us may raise us to eternal joy:

All: Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

The following hymn may be said or sung:

I danced in the morning
When the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon
And the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven
And I danced on the earth,
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe
And the pharisee,
But they would not dance
And they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen,
For James and John
They came with me and the Dance went on.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced on the Sabbath
And I cured the lame;
The holy people
Said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
And they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a Cross to die.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced on a Friday
When the sky turned black
It's hard to dance
With the devil on your back.
They buried my body
And they thought I'd gone,
But I am the Dance, and I still go on.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

They cut me down
And I leapt up high;
I am the life
That'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
If you'll live in me -
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

Let us pray:

(L) Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors 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.

(L) Lord God our Father,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ
you have assured your children of eternal life
and in baptism have made us one with him:
deliver us from the death of sin
and raise us to new life in your love,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(L) May the God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make us perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight;
and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all today
and always. Amen.

(L) May the risen Christ grant us the joys of eternal life.
All Amen.

(L) Let us bless the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia.
All Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

All May the souls of the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.
Amen.

EVENING PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

O God, make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

In your resurrection, O Christ,
let heaven and earth rejoice. Alleluia.

Blessed are you, Sovereign Lord,
the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
From the deep waters of death
you brought your people to new birth
by raising your Son to life in triumph.
Through him dark death has been destroyed
and radiant life is everywhere restored.
As you call us out of darkness into his marvellous light
may our lives reflect his glory
and our lips repeat the endless song.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

This hymn may be said or sung

Jesus lives! thy terrors now
can no longer, death, appal us;
Jesus lives! by this we know
thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us. Alleluia!

Jesus lives! henceforth is death
but the gate of life immortal;
this shall calm our trembling breath
when we pass its gloomy portal. Alleluia!

Jesus lives! for us he died;
then, alone to Jesus living,
pure in heart may we abide,
glory to our Saviour giving. Alleluia!

Jesus lives! our hearts know well
nought from us his love shall sever;
life, nor death, nor powers of hell
tear us from his keeping ever. Alleluia!

Jesus lives! to him the throne
over all the world is given:
may we go where he has gone,
rest and reign with him in heaven. Alleluia!

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
let us pray with one heart and mind:

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 139; Tue 104; Wed 33; Thurs 34;
Fri 118; Sat 66 ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All The glorious grace of God
is freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- 1 Blessed are you, the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, ♦
for you have blest us in Christ Jesus with every
spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
- 2 You chose us to be yours in Christ
before the foundation of the world, ♦
that we should be holy and blameless before you.
- 3 In love you destined us for adoption as your children,
through Jesus Christ, ♦
according to the purpose of your will,
- 4 To the praise of your glorious grace, ♦
which you freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- 5 In you, we have redemption
through the blood of Christ, ♦
the forgiveness of our sins,
- 6 According to the riches of your grace, ♦
which you have lavished upon us.
- 7 You have made known to us, in all wisdom and
insight, ♦ the mystery of your will,
- 8 According to your purpose which you set forth in
Christ, ♦ as a plan for the fullness of time,
- 9 To unite all things in Christ, ♦
things in heaven and things on earth.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All The glorious grace of God
is freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Readings:

Monday Exodus 15 v 1 - 21; Colossians 1 v 1 - 14
Tuesday Exodus 15 v 22 to 16 v 10; Coloss. 1 v 15 - end
Weds. Exodus 16 v 11 - end; Colossians 2 v 1 - 15
Thursday: Exodus 17; Colossians 2 v 16 to 3 v 11
Friday Exodus 18 v 1 - 12; Colossians 3 v 12 to 4 v 1
Saturday: Exodus 18 v 13 - end; Colossians 4 v 2 - end

After the second reading we say:

The Lord is my strength and my song:
he has become my salvation.

I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the Lord.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
The Lord is my strength and my song:
he has become my salvation.

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All The stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone. Alleluia.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

All The stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone. Alleluia.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is
ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world
and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

This hymn may be said or sung:

This joyful Eastertide,
away with care and sorrow!
My Love, the Crucified,
hath sprung to life this morrow.

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen.*

Death's flood hath lost its chill,
since Jesus crossed the river:
Lover of souls, from ill
my passing soul deliver,

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen.*

My flesh in hope shall rest,
and for a season slumber,
till trump from east to west
shall wake the dead in number.

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen.*

Let us pray:

Risen Christ,
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors 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.

Lord God our Father,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ
you have assured your children of eternal life
and in baptism have made us one with him:
deliver us from the death of sin
and raise us to new life in your love,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

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

Let us bless the Lord. Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace. Amen

SERMON FROM BISHOP JO

A Low Sunday?

It's 'low Sunday', the Sunday after Easter. Traditionally that refers to church attendance: presumably people exhausted their religious energy last week such that they can't make it to worship today. It's probably an apt description for clergy just now, having excelled themselves over the past week (not to mention the past year). I'd like to hope that this sermon here on Youtube allows many of them to take a well-earned break this weekend.

But what if 'low Sunday' is more than either of those – what if there is disappointment with Easter? Last week we proclaimed Christ is risen, triumphant over sin and death. Yet today the graves of those we love so dearly are still occupied, and the news of the past week hardly suggests sin has been eradicated from our world. But our own hearts and homes and workplaces tell us that - abundant evidence

that sin has hardly been loosened in its grip since last Sunday. For any one of us, perhaps especially in covid times, there's a huge gap between the Easter proclamation of joy and the felt reality of grief, guilt, and hopelessness – a gap that threatens our fragile faith.

Thomas is stuck in that gap. He *wasn't there* when the risen Jesus appeared to the other disciples, he missed out. He was off somewhere else, on his own, when Jesus showed up in that locked room. Even though he's heard Jesus is alive, he's not buying it. Disappointed, heartbroken by the death of his Lord, Thomas now just wants to get on with his life. We may dub him 'Doubting Thomas' but notice what John calls him – three times - 'Thomas the Twin' – even though, if he has a sibling, we never hear anything about them. But in John's gospel no words are accidental: I wonder if his point is that Thomas is our twin, embedded within the story of Jesus' resurrection? As our identical sibling, he's articulating our disappointment and doubt that anything has changed, absolutely and forever, with Jesus' death on the cross.

The point at which Thomas finally comes to believe is when Jesus urges him, 'Come on, put your hand into my side'. And the instant Thomas touches the raw wound, he blurts out, 'My Lord and my God'. That moment is so vivid, but listen to what Jesus says next: 'Because you have seen me you believe? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (20:29). I pick up some impatience in Jesus' voice, as though he were saying to Thomas and all subsequent doubters, ourselves included, 'Look, I won't continue to do this. There's a better way to learn to believe than sticking your hand in my side. There's a better way to know the truth of the resurrection'

Jesus had already shown his disciples that better way, when he breathed into them the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed the Spirit into them – just as God once breathed life into Adam's nostrils. So this is a second creation story, along with the words 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them' (20:23). Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is granting humans a power that previously belonged to God alone: the power to unlock the death-grip that our sins have on our souls, to erase them from the cosmos. The power to forgive sins is the mark of a new creation, of a profoundly changed life, not just for this small group of disciples but potentially for humankind altogether.

Now how does that work? Think for a moment about the old creation story in Genesis. Already in Eden, human lives came to be governed by shame and blame, anger and fear; the man turned against the woman, the woman turned against the snake, and all of them turned away from God. But now the risen Jesus comes to the disciples when they are locked away in fear of their enemies, and offers them a completely new version of the human story, where forgiveness and freedom in the Spirit replace bitterness and blame. Jesus comes to that fearful community, tottering on the verge of collapse, and he breathes into it the Spirit that does not condemn, the Spirit of God that works in and through us for peace and wholeness. The disciples are to carry that Spirit out into the world: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you... Whenever you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them' (20:21, 23). The forgiveness of sins is the foundational mission of the church, as John conceives it. This is how we, Jesus's disciples, are to practice resurrection, the new life that began with the victory on the cross. Practicing the forgiveness of sins is practicing

resurrection; that is how we may come to believe that, in the crucified and risen Lord, everything has changed.

This isn't about clergy delivering the Absolution: practicing forgiveness is for all of us. But not easy. When we've suffered in some way at the hands of others – and who has not – we tend to become deeply sensitised to our own struggle and powerlessness and conversely also to our opponent's power and seeming prosperity. They're ok and I'm not ok. The injustice tilts our whole world, such that we fear a tipping point if that debt is not repaid – unless and until we realise what the cross is all about: Jesus paying off all our debts, both those we owe and those we are owed.

Even then let's not pretend it's easy, because sin leaves behind a depth of pain and wrongdoing. We need the Holy Spirit within us, giving us strength to go all the way down, exposing our wound to Christ, to the place where healing is found. Bringing us to point where we invite Jesus to lay a healing finger on our areas of greatest vulnerability. That takes work; it may take help; it's rarely instantaneous. One step at a time we tread – but discovering a capacity to forgive far beyond what we alone could ever manage or imagine.

But Thomas refuses to believe there can be life beyond his loss. He seems to want to believe, and yet he's tied to his pain and disappointment, and deeply defended. And so he seeks to thrust his hand into Jesus's gaping wound, he longs for Jesus' vulnerability, not realising that he's got the learning process the wrong way round. Asking for another's vulnerability is the easy bit; it is much harder and yet more hopeful to do the opposite: to expose our wounds to Christ. To open ourselves up to the probing touch of God's Holy Spirit and ask for healing.

'Shalom' says Jesus to his disciples. 'Receive the Holy Spirit', the Spirit of shalom, of wholeness and peace. God's Spirit within us frees us from the fear that there is no bottom to our loss, that the hole in our lives can never ever be filled. That frees us from all our vain attempts to fill the emptiness with other stuff – with sex or status or something – anything that might plug the hole that finally only God's love can heal.

As Nelson Mandela reminded us, it is a long walk to freedom. Forgiveness is not so much a feeling as it is work – sometimes the work of years. In every case it challenges our natural feelings, and especially our instinct for justice. When I'm suffering, I want the one who has hurt me to suffer. Measure for measure, a life for a life.

That's called retributive justice. That's the system our courts employ, and on the whole we're grateful that they do. But that kind of justice needs to be recognised for what it is: a zero sum game. It assumes every loss is final and permanent. While the gospel offers a vision and mandate for an altogether different kind of justice: restorative justice. This assumes that the God who triumphs over death is powerful to heal every wound, to grant new life even where we can see only death and destruction. That's the justice of the resurrection, of the new creation in the risen Christ.

So Jesus comes to his disciples when they're locked away, doubtless embittered as well as fearful, and shows them they have a *choice* about what kind of justice they will seek. 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'. Forgiving the sins of others – that is restorative justice. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we, the disciples of Jesus, are invited to put our best energies and creativity into the slow work of opening a space in our personal lives, our families, and our

communities for God's work of bringing life out of death, reconciliation out of alienation. Or we can choose to retain sins, seeking not erasure but punishment, not embrace but exclusion. Which kind of justice do you wish for? In any given instance, the choice is ours.

The very first work that the risen Christ assigns his disciples is the forgiveness of sins. They're hiding in fear, fear from their religious identity, and Jesus calls them to set that fear aside and go out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's a challenging mission for sure, but it is given as a gift. It's through the work of forgiveness – the experience of being forgiven AND the experience of offering forgiveness – that we will come to grasp the resurrection, that we will realise its power, that we will find evidence of the new creation. And that through believing we will have life in Jesus' name. And others may find that life too.

I urge you – I exhort you – to risk it! In the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
