

Circuit Service – 2nd Sunday of Eastertide

11th April 2021

‘My Lord and my God!’



Welcome to worship on this, the 2nd Sunday of Eastertide. Grace and peace to you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Today's service is based around lectionary readings, one of which is the very familiar story of Thomas' first encounter with his risen Lord.

Let us begin by acknowledging what God, our Father, has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. We use the (modified) words of Origen, a Christian scholar and teacher who lived in Alexandria approximately 184 – 253 AD:

If we believe that Christ has risen from the dead,
we must believe that we ourselves, have likewise risen with him.
And if we believe ourselves dead with Christ,
we must believe that we will also live with him;
And if we believe that Christ is dead to sin and lives to God,
we too must be dead to sin and alive to God.

Hymn STF 293 All heaven declares. (Alternative from H&P 213 This joyful Eastertide)

All heaven declares	I will proclaim
The glory of the risen Lord	The glory of the risen Lord
Who can compare with	Who once was slain
The beauty of the Lord	To reconcile man to God
Forever He will be	Forever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne	The Lamb upon the throne
I gladly bow the knee	I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone	And worship You alone

[Richards Noel William, Richards Patricia Lilian

All Age Talk

When I moved house two summers ago, I brought a lot of pots from the garden of the old house and dumped them in a shady corner of my new garden. Because I had been really busy for months before I moved, I hadn't looked after the plants in the tubs very well and a lot of them looked dead from lack of water and being overwhelmed by weeds. I didn't treat them any better when I arrived at the new house. There were so many boxes to unpack inside and so many other things to sort out over the next few months, that I completely forgot about them for the rest of the summer and all through the autumn and the winter. Last spring, when we were all told to stay at home, I thought I could spend some time working on the garden and sure enough all the plants I'd just dumped in the corner looked dead. I began clearing up and emptying all the dead plants out so that I could reuse the pots. I had nearly finished when I came upon a wonderful surprise. As I moved the last pile of big tubs, there behind them, was a smaller pot with just one beautiful bluish purple flower blooming away, completely out of sight. I got the pot out from its dark corner, gently pulled out the weeds from around it, and moved it to another sheltered spot near the back door where I could easily see it every time I came out.

It's called a Pasque Flower (see the picture on the order of service.) Pasque comes from a Hebrew word *pessach* (Passover): in French it is the word for Easter, and the flower is so named because it blooms around Easter time every year. I watered it during last summer and kept it in a sheltered spot during the winter, and this Easter it has produced two flowers and a bud which I hope will open into a third flower when they are finished. Finding that flower last year, just at the time when all our lives changed so drastically, lifted my spirits and gave me a great deal of hope. It seemed as though God was showing me that, like Jesus' disciples after his crucifixion, just when we think things are at their worst, God is still at work, creating and nurturing new life. And God continues to be at work even if we don't see it. This message of renewed life, resurrection, is of course, the message we celebrate at Eastertime. I wonder how many Pasque flowers I will find in my pot next Easter!

Prayer of Praise

Lord Jesus Christ, your risen power breaks through the darkness, chaos and confusion of our live.
You touch every open heart with signs of resurrection hope,
gifted to us in so many unexpected ways.

We praise you that because you lived our life and died our death,
your promise to be with us always holds true in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

LEAD US ON, RISEN LORD, INTO NEW LIFE.

Lord Christ, your risen power dwells in and energises your Church.

You come to us in compassionate leadership.
You minister to us in blessing, in judgement, and in challenge.
Your risen presence changes us and makes us agents of your good purposes to all the world.

LEAD US ON, RISEN LORD, INTO NEW LIFE.

Risen Lord, your power reaches even to the very furthest limits of the earth.
You are at work in the life of all nations, and all people:
in the lives of those who know you, and even in the lives of those who are yet to meet you.

Lord Jesus Christ, pour out your resurrection power this Eastertide.
Warm our hearts, give new life to your Church,
and transform the kingdoms of the world into the Kingdom of God.

O LORD OUR GOD, STAY WITH US. DWELL AMONG US.
LEAD US ON, RISEN LORD, INTO THE ABUNDANT LIFE OF YOUR KINGDOM.
AMEN

Reading: 1 John 1:1 – 2:2

The writer of this letter tells us that a distinguishing mark of those who are truly the children of God, is that they walk in the light, rather than hiding their deeds in darkness. Dim light, such as candlelight, can be flattering, but pure, bright light shows up blemishes and flaws. The pure clarity of God's light shows up how flawed (sinful) we truly are, even the best of us, and we cannot deny it. But, in Jesus Christ, God has provided us with the remedy for our sin. When we confess our sin we depend upon God's mercy, confident of God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake.

Our next hymn, which we will use as our prayer of confession, uses the Greek words of a simple, very early Christian prayer for mercy.

Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy)
Christe eleison (Christ have mercy)
Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy)

[Hymn STF 421 Empty, broken, here I stand](#) (This can be read as a prayer rather than sung, if necessary)

Empty broken here I stand,
Kyrie eleison,
Touch me with Your healing hand,
Kyrie eleison,
Take my arrogance and pride,
Kyrie eleison,
wash me in Your mercy's tide,
Kyrie eleison.

Give me strength to carry on,
Kyrie eleison,
when my dreams have turned to dust,
Kyrie eleison,
In You O Lord I put my trust,
Kyrie eleison.

Chorus

Chorus

Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison,

When my heart is cold as ice,
Kyrie eleison,
Your love speaks of sacrifice,
Kyrie eleison,
Love that sets the captives free,
Kyrie eleison,
O pour compassion down on me,

When my faith is all but gone,
Kyrie eleison,

Kyrie eleison.

Chorus

Chorus

You're the voice that calms my fears,
Kyrie eleison,
You're the laughter dries my tears,
Kyrie eleison,
You're the music, my refrain,
Kyrie eleison,
Help me sing my song again,
Kyrie eleison.

Humble heart of holiness,
Kyrie eleison,
Kiss me with Your tenderness,
Kyrie eleison,
Jesus, faithful Friend and true,
Kyrie eleison,
All I am I give to You,
Kyrie eleison.

Repeat *Chorus* (x2)

[Nick and Anita Haigh]

Reading: John 20:19-31

Sermon

Most of us will have heard this story from John's Gospel many times, and we probably have our own understanding of it already. So familiar is the story of 'Doubting Thomas', that we hardly notice the details of the first episode in which, on the evening of the day Jesus' tomb was found to be empty, he came to his disciples. On this occasion, I'd like to put Thomas' doubt into context, so that we might take heart from his experience and learn further from it.

Firstly, what actually happened while Thomas was absent that evening? Jesus' disciples, his closest followers, were spending the evening together locked in a house in Jerusalem because they were terrified that the Jewish authorities would come after them now that their leader had been killed. They were still afraid, despite the discovery that Jesus' body had gone from the tomb; despite Peter and the unnamed beloved disciple having examined the tomb and found the grave clothes discarded there; despite Mary Magdalene's meeting with the risen Jesus in the garden and her joyful report of it to them. In short, perhaps with the exception of the 'beloved disciple', they still doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead, even though someone they knew well claimed to have met and talked with him.

What changed them from fearful doubt to belief and joy? Nothing less than a personal meeting with the risen Christ, being shown the marks of crucifixion on his resurrected body, and the gift of the Holy Spirit received directly from him. (How much does this differ from what Thomas later asked for?)

So, what about Thomas? From what we know about him earlier in the Gospel, he is neither sceptical by nature nor weak and vacillating in his devotion to Jesus and his mission. When they hear that Lazarus is sick and dying at his home in Bethany, the disciples attempt to dissuade Jesus from going so near to Jerusalem because they are fearful of the authorities' hostility. But Thomas courageously declares that, despite the danger, they should all go 'that we might die with him.' [11:15] Thomas is a realist who doesn't shy away from the dangerous implications of following Jesus, but his love and loyalty are without question.

If you enjoy filling in the blanks in Gospel stories, there's the question of where Thomas was on that Sunday evening. Had he gone out for provisions, although it was rather late in the day for that? Was he the one who was brave enough, or practical enough, to go and check on Jesus' other followers in and around Jerusalem? Might he even have gone to the tomb himself in search of an answer? Or possibly to talk further with Mary Magdalene about her meeting with Jesus in the garden?

Imagine then his frustration and disappointment when he returned to find the others buzzing with the news that the risen Lord had come to them, and he had missed it, including the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon them. What a cruel irony! I can hear the tone of frustration, and even resentment, in his voice,

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put **my** finger where the nails were, and put **my** hand into his side, I will not believe it.” [20:25b NIV] It’s almost a verbal stamping of the foot. If their houses had had sturdy internal doors in those days, he might have stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him! Is that why he had to wait a whole week for his own encounter with his risen Christ – time to calm down and be ready to receive what his Lord wanted to give him.

And when the waiting was over, what a wonderful opportunity Thomas received. His Lord offered to meet his every declared need. We aren’t told that Thomas did actually touch Christ’s wounds. I suspect that he didn’t. Just the offer, and to be in the presence of his risen Lord, seems to have been enough to prompt, without further hesitation, one of the most powerful declarations of faith in all the gospels, “My Lord and my God!” [20:28]

So, Thomas got his happy ending, but what of us?

Jesus points out to Thomas and the assembled disciples that the faith of those who do not have their opportunity for such ‘physical’ encounter with him, is not only just as valid as theirs, but in some ways more commendable (if faith can ever be deemed commendable). In any case, it is not for any of us to judge the relative quality or extent of someone’s belief. In John’s Gospel, to believe in Christ means far more than to subscribe to a set of ideas about him: it is to be receptive to relationship with him through faith. The appropriate response to any encounter with Christ, is, like Thomas, to accept Christ’s Lordship over our lives and to worship him.

Lastly, I believe there is an implied message here for the Church’s mission of evangelism. During that intervening week it was the role of the other disciples, not to try to argue Thomas into belief or chastise him for his lack of it, but to lovingly hold him within their company until such time as he had his own encounter with the risen Christ. We need to recognise in all the Kingdom work that we do that God’s timing is often different to ours.

[Hymn: STF 134/H&P 457 Christ whose glory fills the skies](#)

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true and only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o’er the shade of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Daystar, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day’s return
till thy mercy’s beams I see,

till they inward light impart,
glad my eyes and warm my heart.

Visit, then, this soul of mine,
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, Radiancy divine,
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day!

[Charles Wesley]

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray to Almighty God for our own needs and the needs of the world.

God of resurrection power, as we remember today the doubts of Jesus’s closest friends, we hold before you all those struggling with doubt and fear at this time:

- ◇ Those who do not know whose ‘truth’ to believe, adrift on a sea of misinformation, exaggeration and suspicion
- ◇ Those who find themselves alone and isolated from loved ones and trusted friends
- ◇ Those who do not know how to face what tomorrow may bring.

◇ All who suffer in body, mind or spirit.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God of resurrection power, we pray for the leaders of the world's nations, as they grapple with current realities of Coronavirus, and seek to find ways to rebuild their people's future prosperity and well-being.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

God of resurrection power, we hold before you those who are living with a great sense of loss at this time:

- ◇ Loss of loved ones
- ◇ Loss of job, home, financial 'security'
- ◇ Loss of opportunities to gather for education, stimulation, worship, fellowship and fun

May each one find a sense of renewed purpose, and that peace which comes from deep within and cannot be shaken by circumstance.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

*Risen, reigning Christ,
in you past, present and future are brought together in one great hope.
Renew our faith in you, so that the past may not hinder us,
nor the present overwhelm us, or the future frighten us.
You have brought us this far,
continue to lead us until our hope is fulfilled
and we join with all God's people in never-ending praise;
for your name's sake.

AMEN [*Prayer from CTBI worship material for the Queen's Golden Jubilee 2002]

Lord's Prayer

[Hymn StF 296 Christ has risen while earth slumbers](#) (Alternative H&P 198 Jesus lives! Thy terrors now)

Christ has risen while earth slumbers,
Christ has risen where hope died,
as he said and as he promised,
as we doubted and denied.
Let the moon embrace the blessing;
let the sun sustain the cheer;
let the world confirm the rumour.
Christ is risen, God is here!

Christ has risen for the people
whom he loved and died to save;
Christ has risen for the women
bringing flowers to grace his grave.
Christ has risen for disciples
huddled in an upstairs room.
He whose word inspired creation
is not silenced by the tomb.

Christ has risen to companion
former friends who fear the night,
sensing loss and limitation
where their faith had once burned bright.
They bemoan what is no longer,
they expect no hopeful sign
till Christ ends their conversation,
breaking bread and sharing wine.

Christ has risen and forever
lives to challenge and to change
all whose lives are messed or mangled,
all who find religion strange.
Christ is risen. Christ is present
making us what he has been –
evidence of transformation
in which God is known and seen.

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Blessing

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
scatter the darkness of our hearts and minds,
and may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit,
rest upon us and be with us always.

[Ancient Western Rite for Easter]