

## Service of Worship for 19th April 2020

Welcome to worship this morning on this Sunday after Easter as we join together in worship from our homes. This Sunday used to be known as “Low Sunday” to distinguish it from the “high day” or supreme celebration on Easter Day, a week earlier. But some have suggested that it was “Low Sunday” because congregations were lower than on Easter Day when many made an extra effort to attend Church. This year we can say for certain that the numbers in Church will be no higher or lower on this Sunday than they were last, but, although we are separated from our fellow Christians, we can still praise God for the glorious truth that the resurrection of Jesus is true every day of every year, whether or not we are able to meet in churches to acknowledge it. So let us worship:

### Call to Worship

At the first Easter Jesus’ disciples met together behind locked doors out of fear of the Jewish authorities, but the risen Jesus still came to meet them where they were and said, “Peace be with you”. This Easter, as we meet separately on the orders of our authorities behind our individual front doors out of fear of the Coronavirus, the risen Jesus is still able to come to meet us where we are and join us together with all our sisters and brothers as He says to us “Peace be with you”. May we all know that peace as we worship today.

Hymn STF 148 / Hymns and Psalms 575 [Come, let us with our Lord arise](#)

### Prayer of Adoration & Confession:

Father God, so often in our lives we experience a sense of anti-climax: after a wonderful holiday or a great celebration we are reluctant to have to get back to normal, to return to work or to resume our usual routine, because we know that we have to leave behind that special time. Last Sunday the joy of Easter may well have helped us to overcome the fears brought by the Coronavirus and the limitations caused by the current lockdown, but now a week later we may feel that we have come down to earth with a bump as our fears continue and the lockdown goes on.

But Father, on this Sunday after Easter, we rejoice that the truth of Jesus rising to new life is just as real today as it was last Sunday or on the first Easter Day. We praise You that, where the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, there can never be any anti-climax: for Jesus is as alive today as He was at the first Easter. He rose then to die no more and, if we reach out to Him, we can know His risen presence every day of our lives. We pray that as we meet in our different homes today, we may know that Jesus is with us all and we may experience the same joy and excitement that Jesus' first friends knew when they discovered that He was alive and with them. May the risen Jesus be so real to us today and every day that we are overwhelmed by His love and His message. That is our prayer, that is our desire today, Lord.

And yet, Lord, we know how often even before the onset of the present lockdown, we have failed to show that Jesus lives. That may well be because we have not recognised the risen Jesus when He has tried to reveal Himself to us. We have been so wrapped up in ourselves and in our own selfish worries and concerns, that we have taken no notice when others have witnessed to His presence even though, as they have done that, Jesus Himself has been standing by us, waiting to renew us and empower us.

Father, forgive us for our blindness to Jesus in the past; forgive us when we have been deaf to His voice and unable to see His love at work around us. Open our eyes, Lord, and open our ears to the presence of Jesus so that we may be so excited, so filled with Jesus, that the truth of His resurrection may be seen in us and in all Christian people everywhere every day of every year. We bring all our prayers in the Name of the risen Jesus. Amen.

The risen Jesus says to each one of us: "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more". Amen. Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

### The Lord's Prayer

#### Reflection: Life Without Anti-Climax

Have you ever read a story or watched one being acted out on television and decided that you didn't think much of the ending because nothing exciting happened or because it didn't seem to fit? Sometimes they have had plays on the radio where they have given the audience a choice of endings and asked them to vote on which one they preferred. Here are some simple story outlines, each with three different endings, and you can choose the one you like best.

Outline A: Noddy was having his breakfast when the Wobbly Man came rushing in and said, "Noddy, come quickly! Big Ears has been captured by the wicked goblins."

Ending 1: Noddy turned round and said, "What do I care about Big Ears?" So Noddy went back to bed and never saw Big Ears again.

Ending 2: Noddy rushed out to get in his car and went at top speed to find Big Ears, but he went through a traffic light when it was red, so Mr. Plod put him in prison and he never saw Big Ears again.

Ending 3: Noddy rushed to get into his car and drove straight to the goblins' house. The Wobbly Man knocked at the door and distracted the goblins' attention, whilst Noddy got in through a back window, untied Big Ears and brought him safely home.

Outline B: Winnie the Pooh's donkey friend Eeyore was not feeling quite so miserable as usual because it was Easter Day and he had an Easter egg to eat. He was just admiring it and looking forward to it when Pooh came along.

Ending 1: Pooh wasn't looking where he was going, so by accident he sat on the Easter egg and made a squelchy mess. Eeyore said: "Thank you, Pooh. And a very happy Easter to you too."

Ending 2: Eeyore said, "Hello, Pooh. I suppose you heard about my Easter egg. People only bother about me when I've got something they like. Don't tell me, I can guess: you want some of my egg. Well, it's only Eeyore you'll upset, so why don't you eat it all." And so Pooh did eat it up, all at one gulp.

Ending 3: Pooh said, "I'm sorry, Eeyore, but you have been given my Easter egg by mistake." "Oh," said Eeyore. "I should have known. I thought it couldn't have been meant for me. No one ever gives me anything nice." But Pooh said, "Wait a minute, Eeyore and let me finish. That is my Easter egg, but here is yours." And Pooh produced a huge thistle-enriched chocolate egg, twice as big as the other one. So Eeyore had a wonderful Easter.

Outline C: Harry Potter was trying out some spells with his friend Ron Weasley when Hermione Granger brought the news that the evil Lord Voldemort was attacking the Hogwarts School Headmaster, Dumbledore.

Ending 1: Ron said, "Oh good. Let's go and help." So they went to help Voldemort attack Dumbledore.

Ending 2: Harry said, "Oh dear, what a pity. There's nothing we can do. Let's go and play quidditch."

Ending 3: Hermione said, "Let's go and rescue Dumbledore." So straightaway they went to help Dumbledore and overpowered the evil Voldemort.

Outline D: Jesus died on Good Friday. On Easter Day, the women came to his tomb expecting to find his body.

Ending 1: And that was just what they did find, so they left the spices and oils and went home. They lived unhappily ever after because Jesus was dead, never to return.

Ending 2: But the women found that Jesus' body was gone and that Jesus was alive again. The women said, "That's interesting, but we better get back to normal. What's for breakfast?"

Ending 3: But the women met the risen Jesus and their hearts were filled with joy. They knew that their lives would be changed forever because Jesus was not dead, but alive.

I wonder which endings you chose. Our Christian faith is that the story of Jesus rising again is not just a story, but an earth-shattering event that changed the world for all time and that cannot have a let-down at the end. Jesus rose again not just for one day, but for all time. He still lives today, so there cannot be any anti-climax. The big question is: are we ready for Jesus to live in us, to guide us and help us? He always wants to come into our lives, but He will only do that if we let Him and if we allow Him to stay with us. If we do, our lives will

have meaning and purpose, so that they will not be empty and go nowhere like some of those story endings, but instead will achieve something worthwhile because we will be doing God's work and living in Jesus' way.

Hymn StF 311 / 208 Hymns and Psalms [The day of resurrection](#)

1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: This passage tells us how on the first Christian day of Pentecost Peter preached the message of Jesus' resurrection:

READ Acts 2, verses 14a & 22 to 32

Psalm for Today: Now let's read the very Psalm from which Peter quoted in that passages from Acts:

READ Psalm 16 (StF 802/838 Hymns & Psalms)

Gospel: This passage reminds us that, no matter how brave we are in the face of the Coronavirus or any other troubles, our greatest hope and comfort can come from having faith in Jesus as our Lord and our God.

READ St. John 20, verses 19 to 31

Hymn: 763 Hymns and Psalms See, Jesus, thy disciples see

OR StF 296 [Christ has risen while earth slumbers](#)

Reflection: The Faith that Overcomes

I wonder why Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them on the first Easter Day? Of course, we can never know for certain, but I like to think that it was a sign of Thomas's bravery that he ventured out whilst the others stayed behind locked doors, terrified that if they set foot outside they might be arrested or even worse. There is an indication earlier in John's Gospel (in chapter 11) that Thomas was a person of courage because when Jesus set out to bring Lazarus back to life, despite the threat to his own life if He risked going near Jerusalem, it was Thomas who had said "Let us all go with him, so that we may die with him". So maybe the fact that Thomas was out and about when Jesus first appeared to His other male disciples is another sign of his bravery and readiness to take risks. Maybe Thomas was not with the others that day because he was not as distraught and overwhelmed as they were and was instead seeking to carry on despite the tragedy. We always need people like that in times of grief and despair and, at the moment, we should be thankful for all those who are bravely carrying on doing their jobs despite the Coronavirus and despite the risk to their own lives and wellbeing.

Many of those good people may not have a religious faith at all, but they still may put us to shame because of the care they show and the sacrifices they make. Yet, if our Christian faith is of any real value, then surely we must believe that it is a good thing to have that faith and that, if we can have faith and also act bravely and sacrificially, then that is something

worth aiming at. If we look closer at what happened to Thomas, perhaps that can help us to grow in faith.

So how did Thomas feel when he was told by his fellow-disciples that they had seen the risen Lord? We can't be sure, but was his refusal to believe that Jesus was alive in part caused by his annoyance that he had missed out and that he had been in the wrong place at the wrong time? Yes, maybe he doubted too, but the fact that the others were so excited must have persuaded him that something had happened and that he should have been there. We would probably have felt like that and may have blamed our misfortune on fate or bad luck, forgetting that for the Christian there can be no such thing as fate or luck, but only the things that God wills or at least allows. There is no evil power or force in charge of the universe trying to stop us from enjoying ourselves and getting the most out of life. But what there is instead is the risen Jesus and His power and life and love. He wants the best for each one of us and now He is risen He has the power that none of us can have, for He can be in more than one place at one time: not just in two places at once, but in many many places, wherever His help and love are needed.

When Jesus discovered Thomas's failure to believe, He soon appeared to the disciples again with Thomas present, so that Thomas could make that step of faith and have the chance to believe that not only was Jesus alive, but that He was also Lord and God. He gave Thomas the opportunity to reach out and touch His hands and side, so that Thomas could not only see but handle the risen Lord. At the moment because of the Coronavirus we are not able to reach out and touch one another beyond our own front doors. We cannot greet each other in Church nor can we embrace our friends and families. And that is a real hardship for us all, a hardship that we may be finding very hard to endure.

However, Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet believe". Although we cannot see Jesus or literally reach out and touch Him, we are still called to have faith that He is with us and that He is alive. Some opponents of our Christian faith suggest that the first Christians made out that Jesus had risen because that was what they wanted to believe, but that it was just wishful thinking. Yet, if that is so, how was it that they kept on saying that He was alive not just for a short time but over many years, even when they were threatened with pain and, in some cases, death? What is more so many Christians since, who have not physically seen the risen Jesus, have still had the faith that He is alive, even when life has been hard or they have had to suffer for what they believed. If we focus on faith of that quality, that can help us to grow in faith ourselves and find the courage we need to go on believing and, like Thomas, to be those who are willing to take risks in order to comfort and encourage others. Faith like that can help us in the present time when we are unable to embrace family and friends as we would like and can enable us to be more sure that the risen Jesus stands beside us in bad times as well as good.

May what happened to Thomas enable each one of us to come to a firmer faith, so that with him we may bow in the presence of the risen Jesus and affirm Christ as our Lord and our God, the living object of our faith who continues to join us with all those we love and with all those who share our faith. At the moment we can't touch the risen Jesus and we can't touch many of those we long to see, but we are still joined to Christ and to all people of good

will by the love of God which surpasses every lesser love. May that be a comfort and encouragement to us all.

Hymn StF 297/ Hymns and Psalms 190 [Christ is alive](#)

Prayers of Intercession: You are invited to share in the following response after each prayer

**Leader:** In a time of crisis and doubt

**Response: May Christ be known as Lord and God**

Heavenly Father, we pray for all the peoples of the world. We give thanks for those countries where the Coronavirus has affected few if any people and for those lands where already its impact seems to be diminishing. We pray that this may continue. But we pray also for our own country and for all those places where so many have been infected. We pray for those in hospital at the moment and for those who are seeking to nurse them and care for them, that they may be protected from contracting the disease themselves. May You continue to inspire all those who are serving so sacrificially, despite the danger to themselves.

And then we remember those in the poorest countries of our world who often seem to be forgotten at the moment. We know that in lands such as India and parts of Africa the virus is likely to do enormous damage as people live close together and have no way to avoid passing on infection. We pray that we in the richer countries may not just think of ourselves, but do the Christlike thing and seek to offer some help to those who are so much worse off than we are.

We also remember the Church throughout the world and Christians in both rich and poor lands. We give thanks for those Christians who are amongst the ones who put others' well-being before their own and who are doing what they can to serve their fellows. We pray for the Church in our own country and for our own local Church, asking that our Church members may do what they can to help others and to witness to the love of the risen Christ.

We remember any we know personally who are suffering at the moment, either because of the virus or for any other reason. Some of us may have been bereaved and may feel particularly numb and devastated. May the rest of us reach out to the sick and sad by phone calls and by any other support we are able to provide at present, for we know that that is the way of Christ.

Finally, we pray for ourselves. For many of us, our faith may be severely tested at present and so we ask for encouragement and hope. But some of us may have strength and courage to reach out to others, and we give thanks for that and pray it may continue. May more of us be enabled to take risks for Christ, so that our faith may grow despite the present circumstances.

And so we bring all our prayers in the Name of the risen Christ, our Lord and our God.  
Amen.

Hymn StF 314/ Hymns and Psalms 213 [This joyful Eastertide](#)

Prayer: (say these words to those who are sharing this worship with you and know that they are also saying the words to you)

May we each know that the risen Christ is with us in all that we face and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen