

Welcome to our worship on this **Second Sunday of Easter, 19th April 2020** coming from the parish of St Mark's Church in Reigate. We are gathered together in a spiritual community, each of us in our own homes. We're a bit like the first Apostles, who after Jesus was raised from the dead locked themselves in an Upper Room and self-isolated. I'm sat here in the Vicarage rather than in Church and for this worship we are being joined by various people who have recorded parts of the service from their own homes. We can all pray at home and lift up our prayers to our heavenly Father who always hears our prayers.

As you watch this broadcast perhaps you can join in with the usual responses, the hymns and with the Lord's Prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We sing the Easter hymn, *The day of resurrection.*

The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
the Passover of gladness,
the Passover of God;
from death to life eternal,
from earth unto the sky,
our God hath brought us over
with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil,
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal
of resurrection-light;
and, listening to his accents,
may hear so calm and plain
his own "All hail", and, hearing,
may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heavens be joyful,
and earth her song begin,
the round world keep high triumph,
and all that is therein;
let all things seen and unseen
their notes in gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord is risen,
our joy that hath no end.

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.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon *you*,
pardon and deliver *you* from all *your* sins,
confirm and strengthen *you* in all goodness,
and keep *you* in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

We join together in singing this hymn version of the Gloria.

Glory be to God in heaven.
and to all on earth, His peace;
Lord and Father, King in glory,
gifts of praise in us release,
so our worship and thanksgiving
from our hearts will never cease.

Christ incarnate, sent by Father
to redeem, renew, restore;
risen Lamb, in glory seated,
hear our prayers, Lord, we implore.
Now to Father, Son, and Spirit,
be all glory evermore.

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The Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter.
Let us pray that we may reign with the risen Christ in glory.

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.

Our first reading is read by Ben Read.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, verse 14 and verses 22 to 32.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover, my flesh will live in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

“He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.”

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.’

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the first and last, says the Lord, and the living one;
I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.

Alleluia.

A reading from John chapter 20 verses 19-31

Hear the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors 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 side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “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.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

The readings for the second Sunday of Easter feel like a bit of a time warp between two distinct periods in history. The Gospel of John is told in real-time, as we witness the disciples on the evening of Easter Sunday locked up in an upper room in great fear. In the Acts of the Apostles, they have a historical account of Jesus' resurrection to inspire future generations of his great witness and presence among us. In order to grasp the Lord's presence following the crucifixion, human senses must be employed, followed by a great dose of faith.

We are living in a world-wide challenge at the moment, as people everywhere worry about the effects of the coronavirus on their communities. There are strong recommendations from medical experts that require a dynamic shift, affecting the way we use our senses. "Don't touch your face" is an often-repeated admonition. Sneeze or cough into your elbow or a paper tissue which you immediately bin. Keep 2 metres apart from everyone and no shaking hands. So many familiar customs are being replaced, at least temporarily. All these measures are designed to keep as many people as possible healthy and free of the virus.

The Easter story is one that challenges the senses as well. The disciples still cannot believe their eyes when they go to the tomb and find it empty. After Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been rolled away, she was struggling to understand what had happened. She saw a man standing in front of her, offering solace, but blinded by her tears, she couldn't see who it was. Once she heard the Lord's voice, she was able to tell the others of his resurrection.

The sighting and reporting were not enough for the men; Simon Peter and another disciple decided to go and see the tomb for themselves. Just as Mary had said, the tomb was empty, apart from the linens in which Jesus had been wrapped. They could see and feel the material that had clothed Jesus three days earlier, but that was it. No doubt they could still smell the fragrances from the spices used when placing Jesus in the tomb. All their senses, however, could not deter their sensibilities that something worse had happened to Jesus – and they were afraid that something awful was imminent for them, as well. Yet what can be worse than death?

Thankfully for all of us, Jesus does not allow the story to end there. With four simple words, Jesus sets to comfort and reassure the group that they are going to be alright and that they are not alone. "Peace be with you," were the words they heard as Jesus appeared before them. Understanding that their faith was shaky, Jesus shows them the wounds in his hands and side. He breathed on them and gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus went to his people to let them know that they had not been abandoned.

The Apostle Thomas missed that interaction with Jesus, and so as they recounted it to him, it sounded especially fantastical. He just couldn't believe that the Lord had somehow been returned to them physically, even if only for a brief moment.

Many people struggle with the continuing presence of Jesus following his resurrection and, like Thomas, are always looking for proof. Martin Luther King is reported to have said, "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." Jesus appeared again in that small room where the disciples were gathered to make a point of visiting Thomas. When our hearts are open, we are able to receive the presence of the risen Christ. The Lord God is with us in the happiest times and the darkest moments.

We can bear witness to the living God because of those who saw him. Faith is more than a five-letter word. It requires the use of our senses. It requires us to hear God and to feel the Holy Spirit within us. The faith that Jesus tried to inspire in his disciples is the same faith God wishes for his modern-day followers. While we may never personally see the marks imposed by those awful nails, we know through faith that Jesus rose from the dead to save us. Jesus lived among us, fully knowing us and loving us in the most human terms. Crucifixion led to the salvation of all believers.

As resurrection people, faith is what guides us to live the kind of lives that Jesus envisioned when he preached. He spoke about love and forgiveness and motivated his disciples to preach that message of deliverance to everyone. Through those messengers we have an ability to trust in a triune God that wants the very best for us. There's a recognition that we all will fall short of the goal sometimes; everyone has a Thomas moment. Doubt sets in occasionally for the most devout people. Moments of anxiety can lead to questioning the very existence of God. In times of death, it can be difficult to hold on to the promise of eternal life with Christ. God hears the cries of his people and will always endeavour to make his presence known. The forgiving God remains present for as long as it takes the sceptic to believe and to receive the gift of grace. God offers the opportunity every day to begin anew.

Doubting, or rather, Believing Thomas is a reminder that God understands those who question what happened to Jesus after he was placed in the tomb. Faith is a potent source of power, especially in times of fear and uncertainty like the time we are living through today.

In his sermon to the community, Peter recounted the extraordinary resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He died and was placed in a tomb like an ordinary human. Yet Jesus was no ordinary man and the tomb was not his final destination. On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus appeared to the disciples for them to carry the news of the death and triumphant victory over the grave to the rest of humanity.

As we continue to celebrate these great fifty days of Easter, we are encouraged to leave our rooms of fear, wrap ourselves in the love of the risen Christ, and boldly proclaim that Jesus is alive and will be with us until the end of the ages. Alleluia!

Our next hymn, *Dear Lord, we seek to see your face*, picks up on the theme of our Gospel reading and is set to the tune "Surrey", an appropriate tune for our parish.

Dear Lord, we long to see your face,
to know you risen from the grave,
but we have missed the joy and grace
of seeing you, as others have;
yet in your company we'll wait,
and we shall see you, soon or late.

Dear Friend, we do not know the way,
nor clearly see the path ahead,
so often, therefore, we delay
and doubt your power to raise the dead;
yet with you we will firmly stay –
you are the Truth, the Life, the Way.

We find it hard, Lord, to believe.
Long habit makes us want to prove:
to see, to touch, and thus perceive
the truth and person whom we love;
yet, as in fellowship we meet,
you come yourself, each one to greet.

You come to us, our God, our Lord.
You do not show your hands and side,
but give, instead, your best reward
as in your promise we abide.
By faith we know, and grow, and wait
to see and praise you, soon or late.

John Raphael Peacey (1896-1971)
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Our faith is in the living God, and so we declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

On this day that the Lord has made,
let us pray for the people he has redeemed.

Lis Davis leads us in prayer.

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

We join together in the Hymn: Love's redeeming work is done

Love's redeeming work is done;
fought the fight, the battle won:
lo, our Sun's eclipse is o'er,
lo, he sets in blood no more.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
death in vain forbids his rise;
Christ has opened paradise.

Lives again our glorious King;
where, O death, is now thy sting?
dying once, he all doth save;
where thy victory, O grave?

Soar we now where Christ has led,
following our exalted Head;
made like him, like him we rise;
ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!
Praise to thee by both be given:
thee we greet triumphant now;
hail, the Resurrection Thou!

Let us pray.
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.

Rejoicing in God's new Creation,
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:
**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and all those
whom you love, this day and always. **Amen.**

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!