

twelvebaskets



EASTER 2A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Second Sunday of Easter - Year A
16th April 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

314 STF – This Joyful Eastertide OR

297 STF – Christ Is Alive!

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

30 STF – Jesus, stand among us OR

309 STF – See, what a morning

Readings: Acts 2:14a. 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Hymn:

316 STF – When Easter to the dark world came OR

293 STF – All heaven declares

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

313 STF – Thine be the glory OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ in every age

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

484 STF – We will walk with God, my brothers OR

348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord

Blessing

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Call to worship

Christ Is Risen!

He is risen indeed

Fling wide the doors of your hearts and let the Saviour in!

Amen.¹

Hymn:

314 STF – This Joyful Eastertide OR

297 STF – Christ Is Alive!

Opening Prayers

Here we come Lord God, gathering in your name.

As we gather, as we pray and worship and learn together, Jesus is in our midst.

The Christ who is God-made-human and the human is holding all of creation together in his divinity, we welcome you, by your Spirit, into our presence.

Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord of Light,
Come Prince of Peace,
Come Creator God and Creative Spirit.
Come.

Amongst all our doubting and uncertainty,
We bring our whole selves to worship this day, and in the stillness, we just take a moment to still our minds, quieten the distractions, to focus on you, Lord God.

[Pause].

Amongst all the distractions of this day, Holy God, show us how to focus on you.

[Pause].

We bring our whole selves to worship and today we bring thankfulness – we bring all that we are grateful for, the blessings and gifts we have received, even if we failed to acknowledge them at the time.

Let us share with one another for a moment now: what are we most thankful for?

[Invite congregation to share a few things people are thankful for].

Lord – hear our shouts of gratitude to you, for we are truly thankful.

We bring our whole selves to worship, O God, and we recognise that we bring our failings too. In a moment of stillness, we come before you to say sorry, for all the things we have done wrong, all the moments we have failed you.

[Pause].

¹ Call to worship written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

Holy and gracious God, we know even as we come in prayer, that you have already forgiven us. You love us just as we are, and you set us free from all sin and shame. Today we hear again the words of comfort: 'you are forgiven'.

Thank you Lord, for your grace and mercy.

Thank you for the hope we carry in our hearts,

In Jesus' name we bring these – and all our prayers,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Have you ever been told something that seems so far-fetched and almost impossible?

For example,

- Did you know there is enough gold inside the earth to cover the entire surface of the planet?
- Or did you know lemons can float but limes can't?
- Do you remember or did you know that McDonald's once made broccoli flavoured bubble gum?

All of these facts do make you think: 'really'?! Don't they?

In our gospel lesson today, someone had a hard time believing what others tried to tell him. The story of Jesus appearing to his disciples after Easter is so exciting. Imagine watching Him die, and feeling so upset, and then seeing Him alive again! But one disciple missed out.

This disciple was Thomas. He didn't quite believe what he had heard and wanted to know and see for himself whether this was true. Jesus showed Thomas the wounds and demonstrated the truth that he had truly risen to life!

We have the stories of the Bible, and many people raise questions around which bits we should believe or not. But this story of Thomas helps us to think about how we respond to the amazing miracle of Easter – the new life of Jesus raised from the dead.

In order to trust someone or something, we have to see that it is trustworthy. God has most definitely proved Himself trustworthy. He does what He says He'll do. His promises are accurate and true.

Today's story teaches us that it is ok to have some doubts. However, The Bible gives us great hope. We can't see God necessarily, but we see His evidence and know He gives us life. The Bible is God's word, given to us so we can know and believe!

Amen.³

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Hymn:

30 STF – Jesus, stand among us OR

309 STF – See, what a morning

Readings: Acts 2:14a. 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Hymn:

316 STF – When Easter to the dark world came OR

293 STF – All heaven declares

Reflections on the readings

God of the prophets,
you fulfilled your promise
that Christ would suffer and rise to glory.

Open our minds to understand the scriptures
that we may be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without
end. Amen.

“Oh, he was well-named when they called him 'Thomas.'”

Have you ever heard that said of someone? I know that I have. Usually it takes the form of a dismissive or derogatory statement; the speaker is exasperated because someone named 'Thomas' is, in their view, causing them grief by asking (uncomfortable) questions. Doubting Thomases can be such a pain! Does the Church or the world need them?

However, let's back track a little, as we think about the Gospel reading we heard. It was made up of two stories and Thomas didn't feature in the first of them. You could say that they are episodes three and four in John's series of resurrection accounts.

In episode one Mary Magdalene found that Jesus' tomb was empty and went and reported her finding to Peter and “the one whom Jesus loved” (who is usually identified as John, the gospel writer himself). The two men accompanied her back to the tomb and found that it was indeed empty, as Mary had said.

In John's second story we learn how Mary, who remains beside the tomb, weeping, then meets the Lord and finally recognises him, she 'sees' Jesus in the garden.

And so we reach Episode three—our reading from the Gospels today. At the beginning of the passage we found ourselves, on the evening of the first Easter Day, locked away with the disciples. If you thought that the first Easter Day was a day of celebration, think again, the disciples were afraid for their lives. They'd seen their leader, Jesus, taken away, some of them had been there when he was executed. So, their fears were far from groundless: the Jewish leaders who'd come for him might well come for them too. The recent past is cause for their despair.

We're not told why they were meeting together. We don't know how many were present. Was it a gathering of men only or were some of the women present? Leaderless now, maybe they've met to make plans, but their future looks hopeless

(might they stand a better chance of eluding the authorities if they split up and each seek his or her own hiding place)?

Perhaps they discussed the strange tale they've heard from the women who went to Jesus' tomb that morning. What about Mary Magdalene's claim to have seen the Lord? They probably didn't know what (or who) to believe any more. To their fear we can add confusion.

Then Jesus came and stood among them. (Note that the risen Jesus was recognisable.) He greeted them, "Peace be with you." It was more than just a polite greeting (not just, "Hello, how are you doing?"). In place of the fear and confusion of his disciples Jesus brings Shalom (God's offer of peace, well-being and wholeness). He shows them his wounded hands and side. The disciples rejoice at the sight (they're so happy to see that it's really him), and then he reiterates, "Peace be with you."

Having brought peace to that place of fear and confusion, Jesus then gives another gift, that of the Holy Spirit. You could say that in John's version of the Jesus story Pentecost (as in the day of the coming of the Spirit) occurs on Easter Day! Jesus breathes the Spirit into them, much as God breathed life into Adam (Genesis 2.7). The Spirit is God's breath, the breath of life, a new beginning for the disciples. Looking to the future, Jesus then commissions his spirit-filled disciples to be forgivers of sins. They are to continue the work that he has begun.

The gospel writer doesn't say how Jesus left the room. Perhaps they were so dumbstruck, so astonished by all that had happened, that they didn't see him leave. But Thomas had had no chance to 'see.' He wasn't with the others on that Easter evening. He didn't receive Jesus' breath. When his excited friends proclaimed (like Mary), "We have seen the Lord." Thomas' response is that he wants to 'see' too.

Now, in defence of Thomas, please note that he doesn't turn on the disciples and say, "that's impossible, how can you and Mary have seen Jesus?" nor does he attempt to undermine them. Perhaps he was very aware that something had wrought a change in the attitudes of his friends who'd previously been so afraid and confused? Thomas wants to experience that 'something' too. Unless he 'sees,' he will not believe.

Thomas had to wait a week. On the Sunday after Easter the disciples were back in their meeting place. Was this their weekly habit? Did you notice that the text said that the doors were shut but didn't mention whether they were locked, so maybe the disciples were beginning to feel a little less afraid. Again, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Without further ado, he invited Thomas to touch his wounds and to 'see.' He didn't chastise Thomas for wanting to see for himself.

Thomas has often had a bad press but he could be characterised as thoughtful and discerning. In our post-Enlightenment context, we could regard him as someone who needs to (scientifically) test the claims of others. He knows that authentic faith cannot be inherited or borrowed from others, it has to be rooted in sincere inner conviction. Jesus understood his need and gave him the proof he needed.

Thomas' response to their meeting is to proclaim Jesus, "My Lord and my God." His reaction is more than just pleasure at seeing Jesus; like Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8.29) he truly recognises Christ's lordship, he 'sees' that Jesus is Lord and God. So, maybe the Church needs more Thomases?

How do we seek to understand what Jesus then says to Thomas? (perhaps originally Jesus' last words in the Gospel of John). Are we too quick to jump ahead and assume

that we are “those who have not seen and yet have come to believe?” That we are the (future) blessed?

Perhaps we find it easier to identify with John whose physical eyes saw only an empty tomb (something that we can imagine, that we can picture with our mind's eye), yet he believed.

It is easier to attest that we have seen and believed because, through the ages, Christ's disciples have breathed in the breath of the Spirit and have breathed out the message of what it is to be an Easter people. We join the ranks of those who have received the Gospel message from our forebears in the faith.

But are we playing our part in the story or are we now huddled in a locked room, like the disciples on Easter evening? Are our doors open or closed (literally and metaphorically)? Do we need to get out more? The book *The Challenge of Missions* argues that a church that isn't a missionary church is doomed to die. Think about it: if the disciples hadn't taken courage, gone out from that locked room and spread the gospel, it would have been unspoken, unheard and lost to future generations. Had the disciples not responded to Christ's call, our churches would never even have existed.

So, what has happened to our desire to be a movement, a people on a mission. Being a missional Church is about more than holding occasional 'open' events to which we invite a few 'extra' people who are like us.

When did we get 'edifice complex,' the disease that makes us seemingly more concerned about the upkeep of our buildings than the state of the soul of the nation and the peoples?

If we're to be a missiological movement, we must live in obedience to our calling. We exist to spread the good news, far and wide, by whatever means we can: for that purpose the risen Christ, on that Easter evening, gave his Spirit to disheartened, dispirited apostles (ordinary people like us) so that they could share his love. And on the following week he came again so that one who had yet to see could both 'see' and believe.

May God grant us eyes to see, feet to follow and tongues to tell of his love. Amen

[Questions – either for discussion in small groups, or as a whole congregation. You might like to invite people to talk to their neighbour about each question for a minute, and then hear some responses.]

1. What did you learn in the Reflection that made you think differently about this part of the gospel story?
2. With which character or characters in the story do you identify? Why?
3. How can your church be a missional church?⁴

Hymn:

313 STF – Thine be the glory OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ in every age

⁴ Reflection written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

Prayers of intercession

Father God, who breathed life into humankind, hear our prayers today for those who have neither seen nor believed the story of Jesus. Send down your Spirit once more, so that ordinary fearful and confused Christians may have the courage to share their faith with those whom they encounter. Revive your Church, we pray

We pray for churches around the world, for Christian brothers and sisters who worship you in places to which we have never been and in languages that we do not understand. Make us one in the Spirit. Help us to reach out across the distances and the differences of culture, language and privilege.

Unite your Church we pray.

Creator God, we pray for all whose lives have been affected by natural disasters, by flood and wild fires or by volcanic eruptions and earthquake. We pray for rescuers and relief agencies as they endeavour to bring aid and for survivors as they struggle to rebuild their lives.

Be present and bring order out of chaos, we pray.

Jesus, Prince of Peace, bring an end to armed conflicts in this war torn world. We pray for all whose lives, safety, homes and livelihoods are threatened in the various theatres of war around the world, some are endangered by conflicts that dominate the media headlines, others fall victim to forgotten wars. So we pray for real peace not just in Ukraine, Syria and the DRC but wherever people take up arms against others.

Bring your peace we pray

King of Kings, we pray for the rulers of the nations that they may rule with justice and equity, that all governments will show compassion to those who are the weakest and the most vulnerable of their peoples.

Sovereign Lord, bring fresh hope for the future, we pray

Holy Spirit, Comforter, tend the sick, the dying and the dispirited. Strengthen the arms that hold, the hands that seek to heal, the tired feet of medical personnel who try to cure our ills. Console those who await the outcome of medical tests and procedures. Weep with all who hurt, soothe the fears of the dying and comfort the bereaved. Today we remember before you the needs of those known to us.....

Grant them the assurance of your presence with them, we pray.

Lord of the Dance, we hold before you those who have cause to celebrate. We give thanks for landmark achievements in life, for longevity, for enduring relationships, for commemorations of the past and for commitments to the future. God of all the ages and stages of life, make us ever aware that all life comes from you.

Generous Lord, help us to appreciate all your gifts to us, we pray.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

Thank you Lord, for these gifts. The gifts here in this room, and the gift of your son
Jesus, who lives and reigns within us.
May we use these gifts for your glory,
In Jesus' name,
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

484 STF – We will walk with God, my brothers OR
348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord

Blessing

Everyday God we thank you for the presence of your Son
wherever we gather to worship you.

Help us now to fling wide the doors
Breathe your Spirit into us
That daily we may live as faithful disciples
Sharing the good news of the Kingdom
Now and forever we pray. Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Wendy Kilworth-Mason