

16th April 2023 – Morning Service

Peace be with you

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship - 1 Peter 1: 3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Let us rejoice in this good news with our first hymn.

StF 347 – Crown him with many crowns

- 1) Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne;
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of him who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.
- 2) Crown him the Son of God,
Before the worlds began;
And ye, who tread where he has trod,
Crown him the Son of Man,
Who every grief has known
That wrings the human breast,
And takes and bears them for his own,
That all in him may rest.
- 3) Crown him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
Who died, and rose on high;
Who died, eternal life to bring,
And lives, that death may die.
- 4) Crown him the Lord of peace,
Whose power a sceptre sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease,
Absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end,
And round his pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend
Their fragrance ever sweet.
- 5) Crown him the Lord of love;
Behold his hands and side -
Rich wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me;
Thy praise and glory shall not fail
Throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges & Godfrey Thring

Reading: 1 Peter 1: 3 - 9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Prayers of Adoration & Thanksgiving

God of Promise and God of Hope, we thank you that in your great mercy you have granted us new birth through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise your wonderful name!

God of Glory and God of Might, we thank you that through your great power you have granted us new strength to endure all things through faith in Christ our risen King. We praise your wonderful name!

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus, for you came to us a little child, one of us, flesh and blood to share in our humanity. L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus for you came to us as carpenter and yet in your creative hands a world was fashioned. L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus for you came to us as teacher and opened our eyes to the truths of your Holy word. L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus for you came to us as healer and opened hearts to the reality of wholeness L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus for you came to us as prophet, priest and king and yet humbled yourself to take our place upon the cross.

L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus for you came to us as servant and revealed to us the extent of the Father's love for human kind. L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus, for you rose from the ignominy of a sinner's death to the triumph of a Saviour's resurrection. L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, for the sake of me, and you, and other sinners too.

L: For God so loved the world **R: That all might have eternal life**

Thanks and praise be to you, Lord Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer. **Amen.**

StF 293 – All heaven declares

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| 1) All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord.
Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be the Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee and worship Him alone. | 2) I will proclaim the glory of the risen Lord.
Who once was slain to reconcile us to God.
Forever You will be the Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee and worship You alone. |
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Reading: John 20: 19 - 31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, 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's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

Now Thomas (also known as 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.'

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 performed many other 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 Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

A significant moment, and not only because the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples though the door was locked, but also because of what happened and what was said. This morning I would like to reflect on three key points that John shares with us in this reading. Firstly we are going to consider the gift of peace.

Following the death of Jesus, the disciples were living in fear of the Jewish leaders. So scared were they that they gathered together in one place and locked the doors. Can you feel the tension in the room? Ten grown men jumping at every unexpected noise; flinching at the sound of footsteps nearby; and cowering in the dark for fear of attracting unwanted attention. Can you imagine the conversation? I'm sure there were many questions asked; perhaps there were arguments as each one expressed their opinion on what to do next; maybe there were even accusations as they reflected on what had happened. Or was there no conversation? Was their grief and bewilderment so overwhelming that they couldn't speak; so they sat in silence, waiting for someone to take the lead and make a decision on what to do next. Did they remember to pray? Did they remember the hope of the teachings and miracles of Jesus, the promise of his word?

It is into this charged atmosphere that Jesus appeared. No knock at the door - he just stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then before the disciples had time to utter a response, Jesus showed them his hands and side. We are told that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Today Jesus says to us, "Peace be with you." Because Jesus suffered, died and rose again he can offer us a peace that is beyond our comprehension. A peace that means wholeness, completeness, forgiveness. A peace, which according to the apostle Paul will "guard our hearts and our minds."

Jesus offers us the peace of eternal life. In 1 Peter 5:10 we read, "*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*"

Jesus offers us the peace of being in a right relationship with our heavenly Father – the knowledge that we are pure and holy in His sight. 1 Colossians 1:22 says "*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*"

Jesus offers us the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven. 1 John 1:9 "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

I wonder, do we accept the gift of peace? Are we overjoyed when in the midst of a hectic day Jesus stands alongside us and gives us a breathing space? Are we overjoyed when a particular problem which has been challenging us suddenly seems to be resolved as Jesus takes the burden from our shoulders? Are we overjoyed when our fears are stilled as Jesus leads us from a place of darkness into the light of his love? Or do we take it all for granted? Perhaps we don't even recognise his presence in those moments, but congratulate ourselves for having made it through a testing time. Maybe we prefer to battle on rather than ask Jesus to stand alongside us and give us his peace.

Let us pray:

The apostle Paul wrote: *“The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Lord Jesus, we confess that we do not always seek your peace but struggle on because of our stubbornness and pride. We are sorry for the times when we are so inward looking we miss your healing presence and comforting word. You are near to us Lord, waiting for us to turn back to you and receive the blessed gift of peace, which, by your grace, you want to bestow upon each and every one of us. May we open our hearts and minds to your loving care. **Amen**

StF 30 – Jesus stand among us

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| 1) Jesus stand among us
At the meeting of our lives,
Be our sweet agreement
At the meeting of our eyes; | 2) So to You we're gathering
Out of each and every land,
Christ the love between us
At the joining of our hands; |
| Ch) <i>O, Jesus, we love You,
So we gather here,
Join our hearts in unity
And take away our fear.</i> | 3) Jesus stand among us
At the breaking of the bread,
Join us as one body
As we worship You, our Head. |

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Reflection

Let's go back in our minds to the scene in that locked room. As the disciples register what they are seeing there must surely be an air of relief. Jesus is back. He will tell them what to do – he will lead them in the right direction. Into the silence Jesus repeats his blessing of peace, but this time follows it up with a commission. He tells the disciples that he is sending them out – just as the Father sent him, so he sends them. Out, into the big, scary world from which they are hiding. Out, like sheep among wolves, to face the onslaught of the Jewish leaders. Out, to work out God's purpose in the name of Jesus.

When Jesus first began his ministry he went to his home synagogue in Nazareth, where he was given the scroll to read with words from Isaiah: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.”* (Luke 4: v18). In the power of that same Spirit, the disciples are appointed to continue the work of Jesus which includes forgiving people of their sins. *“If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*

I wonder if Jesus was giving the disciples there a gentle hint. I suggested earlier that there may have been accusations made as the disciples thought about how they had each responded when Jesus was crucified. Is Jesus saying to them that they need to forgive each other their mistakes? For if they don't they will never be able to work together to serve God and fulfil their calling.

This band of scared, unreliable, lost and confused individuals are tasked with the job of taking the message Jesus preached out to the Gentiles.

“And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.””

This is the second key point of this passage. The disciples needed the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. To continue and implement the work of Christ in the world, they needed the breath of God to empower and sustain them. Through our Easter celebrations we have been reminded that Jesus defeated death on the cross for us, that we may be saved and have eternal life. But that is not all. As resurrection people we are tasked with sharing the good news of the gospel with others.

Are we hiding behind locked doors in the hope we won't be called to move out into a hostile world? Or do we accept Jesus's words of comfort and open our hearts to receive the Spirit, wherever that might lead us?

Having considered earlier how we receive the gift of peace, we need also think a little about how we share such a precious blessing with others. Jesus stood among the disciples. He showed himself to them. Jesus understood their needs. He loved them. We should do likewise. And perhaps the best summary of this is the hymn "Make me a channel of your peace." I read these words about this hymn: "*It is a fervent, personal prayer but one that is overtly social in its application. In it the believer asks to be a vehicle of divine peace and biblical shalom, one through whom God works "to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:12b-13). The fruit of the Spirit, including love, faith, hope, and joy, will be the channel of reconciliation and peace to a world troubled by hatred, doubt, despair, and sadness.*"

StF 707 – Make me a channel of your peace

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| 1) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you: | 2) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy: |
| Ch) <i>O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.</i> | 3) Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving unto all that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life. |

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Reflection

"I don't believe it!" I'm sure you must know who I'm thinking of when I say that – Victor Meldrew. That poor, apparently hard done by man, whose life seems to be one long round of misery as events conspire against him and cause him to repeat his catchphrase regularly. I wonder how many times Thomas said that to the other disciples in the week between their seeing Jesus and his own encounter with the risen Lord. It can't have been an easy time. Being the only one to have missed out on something wonderful; not being able to join in the conversations as the others talked of their encounter; not having the same new found confidence.

"I can't make head nor tail of it. Jesus is dead – I saw him crucified, his body taken from the cross and placed in the tomb. Yes, there are reports of the body having gone and Mary seeing him in the garden, but Mary is grieving, and grief can do strange things. The disciples said Jesus just appeared, but the door was locked. I know that, I had to knock for ages before they heard me and let me in. They must have seen a vision, a ghost. Maybe it's a practical joke, let's wind up Thomas when he gets back. Let's tell him we've seen Jesus and, shucks, you missed him! But it's been a week now, and they're still convinced they saw Jesus, and that he showed them his hands and side, and breathed on them and commissioned them to share the good news of forgiveness. You'd have thought they'd have got bored by now. Even their story is the same – no details have changed. But I can't believe it. Not that it was the real, physical Jesus. I want, I need to see him for myself, and feel the wounds in his hands and side".

According to Harold Wilson, a week is a long time in politics. A week must have been a long time for Thomas too, struggling to make sense of everything. But when the time was right, Jesus came back to meet with Thomas. And boy, when the moment came for Thomas to encounter Jesus, it proved to be well worth the wait. In seeing and touching, Thomas was led to declare "My Lord and my God!"

"I didn't need to touch his hands and side at all. As soon as I saw him I knew! Jesus, the man who had so intimately shared my life for three years was God. Human and yet divine. In this world, and yet, not of it. I'm sorry I didn't believe the others, but there was just something inside me that wanted more proof.

Jesus was so good – understanding my need and coming back to reassure me. Just like he always had – and always will. “Stop doubting and believe!” he said. And then, gently, he rebuked me and told me that there would be future generations who will be blessed if they believe without seeing. That’s you. Please believe what you have been told. Jesus is alive!!”

In this account, reported so carefully by John, we are given another insight into the love and care that Jesus has for each one of us. The grace of Jesus is evident as he recognises Thomas’s grounds for faith and presents his post-resurrection body for Thomas to touch. He does not write Thomas off as an unbeliever but supports him as he pieces together the events of the last week.

Think back to this last week. How has Jesus supported you?

Jesus offers us his peace, the gift of the Holy Spirit and his grace so that each and everyone of us may one day echo the words of Thomas: “My Lord and My God.” Amen.

Prayer of Intercession

Lord God, we come together in this moment, in your presence, to bring our prayers of intercession, knowing that you hear us.

We bring to you, Lord, the Church in all its richness and all its need; all its diversity and all its division. Give us a fresh understanding of what it means to live in you. May all of us celebrate the reality of your presence among us, filling us with new life and new hope.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord, our nation, our world, our universe; all the areas that are fastened shut to hold you out; all the bewildered confusion about who you are and why we worship you; all the doubts and insecurity, and all the searching for inner peace.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord, our homes and families and all the joys and sorrows of our relationships. We bring the rooms in which we eat and work and relax, and invite you into them all.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you Lord, those whom life has damaged, and all who find it difficult to trust in you. We bring those who need refreshment and hope, comfort, healing and inner serenity.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you Lord, those living in fear; those who grieve; those who are ill, lonely, abused, forgotten or cast out. Still them with your presence that they may recognise the gifts you offer and turn to you for salvation.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you.**

We bring to you, Lord, ourselves and the particular concerns on our hearts this morning.

[Silence...]

L: Lord in your presence: **R: We lift our hearts to you. Amen.**

We bring all our prayers together in the words of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to say:

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 313 – Thine be the glory

- 1) Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave-clothes where
thy body lay:
- 2) Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
Let the church with gladness hymns
of triumph sing,
For her Lord now liveth, death hath
lost its sting:
- Ch) *Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*
- 3) No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life;
Life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conquerors through
thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to
thy home above:

Edmund Budry

Blessing

May the love of the Father, the tenderness of the Son, and the presence of the Spirit, gladden your heart and bring peace to your soul, this day and all days. **Amen.**

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