

Music to start: *The Lord of the earth* © 2020 Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community

Call to Worship

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We have not seen the risen Christ,

**But we see him in the lives
of those transformed by grace.**

We have not seen Jesus face-to-face,

**But we have seen him in the faces
of everyone whose love encourages us.**

We have not touched the wounds from the cross,

But we have been called to bring healing to the scarred of the world.

Thom Schuman

HYMN O for a thousand tongues <https://youtu.be/X-dEfz6Vms> Charles Wesley

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and king,
The triumphs of His grace!

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease—
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

He speaks, and, listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad,
The honours of Thy name.

Opening Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, on the second Sunday of Easter, the light of your love shines on!

Your light has come into the world,

And neither darkness, nor evil, nor even death itself could overcome it.

And we (like Mary, like the disciples, like "doubting" Thomas)

who have been there with you through Holy Week and the first Easter Morning

have been made witnesses to the resurrection story: wondering,

bewildered, hoping, rejoicing.... and sometimes doubting.

It is not always easy to believe with our minds and trust with our hearts.

Loving Christ, open the eyes of our faith that we may behold the work of your redemption.

Open our minds and hearts to receive you, Lord: your resurrection glory, your light everlasting.

May this time of worship, reflection and celebration be a worthy response to your love and your sacrifice for us. Amen

Offering

You are reminded to continue to send in your gifts for the work of the church.

God, whose giving knows no ending,

we offer up the treasure that you have entrusted to us;

we offer up the skills and time that you have graciously given to us;

we offer up ourselves in service and praise.

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Receive these gifts by your grace. Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

written by Joanna Harader, <http://spaciousfaith.com/>

Reading: John 20:19-31

In spite of our doubts, may we recognize you in our midst:
wounded, bloody, and resurrected.
in spite of our doubts, may we know when we come face to face
with the love that is greater than all deaths.
In spite of our doubts, may we reach out to touch the wounds of the world's pain
trusting that when grace and love surround them
they will become part of Christ's resurrected body.
And in spite of our doubts, may we live as though we are, too. Amen

written by Cheryl Lawrie

This is a continuation of where we left off reading on Easter Sunday. Poor, maligned doubting Thomas, so infamous he has become a saying, even more renown than Judas. Doubting Thomas has a dictionary definition, as a 'habitually doubtful person' and it even has its own Wikipedia page - a skeptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience. And, I didn't know this, there is a painting by Caravaggio of Doubting Thomas, which we will look at later. Even the non-religious have heard of doubting Thomas. But, we don't hear anything about the doubt of the others. Or, the amazement of any of them that Jesus can walk through walls. This is probably the verse in the Bible that might best appear in Star Trek or some other sci-fi programme. "Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them." Like the empty tomb, it is a matter over which you need suspension of disbelief, such as many good novels require. You either believe it or you don't. There can never be any proof. You have to make a leap of faith. The words of this prayer by John van de Laar express this well:

How do we find the faith to believe the story of Easter, Jesus? How do we grasp its truth?
We can only accept it; refusing to reduce it to scientific debate or historical literalism
kneeling with humility and awe beside the blood-stained cross and the empty grave;
for then, we are your witnesses.
How do we understand the mystery of your death and life, Jesus?
How do we explain it? We can only live it; allowing it to permeate every grain of this sand
that forms us, every thought, every priority, every act and every interaction,
for then we are your witnesses, and you deserve nothing less from us. Amen.

We all have heard of doubting Thomas, but what of our own doubts and fears? Do we doubt the resurrection; do we fear the consequences of that leap of faith? If we suspend our disbelief, if we go with the incredible story of the resurrection it will demand we change our whole lives, won't it? And it won't be comfortable. We will hear in our second Bible reading how uncomfortable true faith can be. We have to make a leap of faith, there can never be proof. Yes, we have some first-hand accounts from the Gospel writers of their encounters with the risen Lord, but all four gospels tell different stories, and even the oldest gospel, Mark, was written 70 years after the death of Christ. Can you remember accurately what you did and said 70 years ago? I can't even remember what I said in last week's sermon! And the end of today's reading says, "Jesus did many other signs in

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the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe...” In other words, John picks and chooses like any reporter, any writer, what he wants to tell us. There is always spin. There is always a particular slant, and opinion. Luke’s focus for his gospel, is the poor and the marginalised and how Jesus helped them. John’s focus is the mystery of Christ, his divinity – the Word made flesh, who was in the beginning with God and the Word was God. We hear the familiar words so often at Christmas, do we actually think about them, or just enjoy the sound of them? Do we say them as a habit without taking them in, like the Lord’s prayer?

Read and take in. Make up your own mind. Take the leap of faith; you won’t be disappointed. Don’t listen to fake news and spin or what the crowd are saying. Don’t be a doubting Thomas, be more like Mary. The Mary who went early to the tomb to tend to Christ’s broken body, who wept in sadness, but who recognised Jesus when he spoke her name and who went and did what Jesus asked her to do.

HYMN How often we, like Thomas (tune R&S 566, The Church’s One Foundation)

How often we, like Thomas,
need proof before we trust.
Lord Jesus, friend of doubters,
come, speak your truth to us.
We long to feel your presence,
and gain new faith from you,
to find, without our seeing,
the blessing Thomas knew.

You always stand among us,
no doors can lock you out.
Your presence reassures us
though we still live with doubt.
As present-day disciples,
whose lives by sin are flawed,
we want to come believing,
and cry: “My Lord, my God!

Edith Sinclair Downing, © Selah Publishing

Reading: Acts 4:32-35

People like to ignore this short reading of only three verses, because it overturns our whole modern economic and political system. “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common... There was not a needy person among them” for they shared everything. This talk of sharing and there being no needs that went unmet, also includes this: “with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” and chapter 4 of Acts starts with Peter and John being arrested for proclaiming Jesus, though they were “uneducated and ordinary men.” This is a hard message to hear. Many, if not most of us, do not even want to put our names to a petition about child hunger or climate change, never mind go to a demonstration for something we feel strongly about, or talk openly about the risen Christ and all that he stands for – to help the poor, free the prisoners, liberate the oppressed, change the system from manmade to God’s creation.

Now, I’m not suggesting that we should all go and live in a commune like the early Christians and share all our possessions, I know that is impossible in our modern world. But the world would be a much better place if we shared things, if aggressive capitalism was not the system across virtually

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the whole planet, and the model espoused to poorer countries to get ahead. If rich countries shared covid vaccines, if we all stopped buying so much stuff – cars, mobile phones, TVs, and yes I know I own all those things, but at least I keep them until they are old and broken, rather than upgrade or renew them every time I am invited to. If our world was based on sharing rather than GDP. If like Bhutan, success were measured in happiness, rather than buying and selling things, we perhaps would not have the climate crisis that we have. If we were not obsessed with gadgets and social media, as useful as technology has been during the pandemic, we perhaps wouldn't have so many children and young people with mental health issues caused by online bullying and self-esteem issues because they don't get enough 'likes' on Instagram, or followers on Tik Tok.

In the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador who was killed for speaking out for the poor, "It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us." If we think we have to change a whole economic and political system, we will never even get started, because it is beyond us. But there are small things we can do. The Elders and I are looking into becoming an Acts435 partner church. Acts435 is a charity based on those words from Acts – "There was not a needy person among them...it was distributed to each as any had need." As a partner church we would contact Acts435 about people we know who have small, specific needs. Via their website, they raise the money, and the church then facilitates the purchase of the required item or the paying off of a bill or debt. 100% of what is donated goes directly to those in need. As one of the founders, former Archbishop of York, John Sentamu says, Acts435 is an incredibly simple way to make a difference in the lives of people in poverty in the UK.

My mother was fond of saying, there's more than one way to skin a cat! A not very delicate way of saying that there are many small ways to make a difference and bring about God's kingdom. Do not be overwhelmed by the vastness of the task, take it one step at a time. Take the leap of faith!

Prayers of Intercession

Holy God, as Jesus entered the locked room to show his disciples the beginning of a new world, so enter our hearts and move us to faith in Jesus as the Risen One. Convince us of the reality and significance of the resurrection, and free us from all manner of fears and phobias. Give us courage in the face of death, knowing that this is the gateway to new resurrected life for those who trust in Christ.

*Lord, in your mercy... **hear our prayer.***

Be with your church throughout the world so that its preaching and works of love may continue to testify to our Lord's resurrection. Wherever your church is faithless and lacking in courage to do the work that Jesus has given, visit it and build it up with your Spirit. Be with all ministers and leaders so that they may listen well and then speak with Christ's authority.

*Lord, in your mercy... **hear our prayer.***

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Bring peace to all parts of the earth. Wherever nations are at war and people are divided, visit and bring true reconciliation. Especially protect all people of faith and help them to influence their country for the good of all.

Lord, in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Wherever homes are disrupted by anger and bitterness, and wherever relationships are distorted and dulled, visit and bring peace and harmony. Wherever young people are gathered in your name, visit and guide them with your holy word and wisdom.

Lord, in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Visit and comfort the sick and suffering, Lord. Heal and strengthen broken bodies and calm confused minds. We pray for those we know with particular needs. Support them all with your great love and mercy.

Lord, in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Holy One, we present these prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is risen from the dead, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

from the Lutheran Church of Australia (amended)

Lord's Prayer

HYMN The Church is wherever God's people are praising (recorded by Thora)

The Church is wherever God's people are praising,
knowing they're wanted and loved by their Lord.
The Church is wherever Christ's followers are trying
to live and to share out the good news of God.

The Church is wherever God's people are loving,
where all are forgiven and start once again,
where all are accepted, whatever their background,
whatever their past and whatever their pain.

The Church is wherever God's people are seeking
to reach out and touch folk wherever they are --
conveying the Gospel, its joy and its comfort,
to challenge, refresh, and excite and inspire.

The Church is wherever God's people are praising,
knowing we're wanted and loved by our Lord.
The Church is where we as Christ's followers are trying
to live and to share out the good news of God.

Blessing

Go now, sent by the one who was sent by God.
Walk in the light; testify to the resurrection of Christ;
forgive the mistakes of all, and live at peace with one another.
And may God bless you with life forever;
May Christ Jesus breathe his Spirit and peace into you;
And may the Holy Spirit lead you into the life and light of God. Amen

Music to end: If you believe and I believe (Zimbabwe) © 1991 WGRG, Iona Community