

## **Wimborne 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter**

“How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!”  
(*Lectionary Psalm for today 133 v.1. version from ‘The Message’*)

### **A prayer**

Christ, our risen Lord, no tomb can keep You, no door is closed to You, no heart is barred to You, no mind is shut off from You. Come, lead us out of darkness into light, out of doubt into faith, out of death into life eternal: Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

Amen

### **Hymn**

Christ has risen while earth slumbers,  
Christ has risen where hope died,  
as he said and as he promised,  
as we doubted and denied.  
Let the moon embrace the blessing;  
let the sun sustain the cheer;  
let the world confirm the rumour:  
Christ is risen, God is here!

Christ has risen for the people  
whom he died to love and save;  
Christ has risen for the women  
bringing flowers to grace his grave.  
Christ has risen for disciples  
huddled in an upper room.  
He whose word inspired creation  
is not be silenced by the tomb.

Christ has risen to companion  
former friends who fear the night,  
sensing loss and limitation  
where their faith had once burned bright.  
They bemoan what is no longer,  
they expect no hopeful sign  
till Christ ends their conversation,  
breaking bread and sharing wine.

Christ has risen and forever  
lives to challenge and to change  
all whose lives are stressed or damaged,  
all who find religion strange.  
Christ is risen. Christ is present  
making us what he has been —  
evidence of transformation  
in which God is known and seen.

*Words by John L. Bell & Graham Maule © 1988 WGRG,  
c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland. Singing the Faith 296*

### **Gospel Reading Jesus appears to his disciples St. John chapter 20 verses 19-31**

<sup>19</sup> 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!' <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

**Jesus appears to Thomas** <sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.'

<sup>26</sup> 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!' <sup>27</sup> 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.'

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

**The purpose of John's gospel**<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

### Reflections on the Gospel reading. The First Sunday after Easter Sunday – Low Sunday

The first Sunday after Easter day is often known as "Low Sunday". The reason why is not entirely clear, but one idea is that after all the excitement of Easter and the joy of knowing that Christ is alive we suddenly realise the implications and how challenging it might be for us to follow Him. We are not sure what we are letting ourselves in for!.

That is certainly reflected in the Gospel reading for today where we start with the disciples in the Upper room where they had last been with Jesus and shared supper with Him. They had continued to meet there, but they must have met in something like constant terror – let alone disappointment, and probably some doubt. They would have been afraid that the Jews who had crucified Jesus would soon be after them. Any knock on the door might have been from somebody coming to arrest them. What a horrible situation. Let's pause for a moment and put ourselves in that room. The only way in and out of the room is through the door – and that is kept firmly locked. No other visible means of entry, but suddenly Jesus appears! However would I have felt? Almost certainly very surprised I think and probably a bit afraid. I would think that's how those disciples must have felt too.

Thank goodness they did not get up and run away – they stayed and listened to Jesus. Now, some 2000 odd years later we can hear the story, read the report written by St.

John – who was there - and reflect on what Jesus told them as He spoke for the first time after the crucifixion.

His first words to them were “Peace to you.” Nothing else, just “Peace to you.”

Here are two scenarios. Firstly I am confronted with someone who is gripped with fear or anxiety of some sort. The usual advice is that the last thing I should say is “Don’t worry about it - everything will be alright!” That usually makes the situation worse – mainly because the terrified person finds it difficult to trust me to have any solution to the issue causing the concern. Even a trained counsellor can find it difficult to assure someone of a solution.

Now a scenario I remember from an insurance advert some years ago. A young lady bumps into someone else’s car and makes a big dent and scratch in it. An insurance agent appears and says very calmly and gently “Calm down, dear – calm down!”. Gradually she realises that she is insured and believes that the insurance company will take care of her troubles. Thankfully she has paid her premium and all will be well. I think she probably does calm down –

Now we return to think how Jesus speaks to His frightened disciples. Firstly His words are not an instruction. He doesn’t say “Don’t worry about it – everything will be alright!” or “Calm down, friends, Calm down.”. He offers Peace. “Peace to you”. He knows they are afraid – He knows what they need and He gives them Peace. The beauty of this gift is that, unlike the Insurance company who required payment, Jesus gave this peace free to the disciples. He had paid the price. He was able to show them the scars of the crucifixion and convinced them. Beautiful again is that the disciples accepted this gift. They trusted Jesus. They were then able to listen to Him speak more. They received Peace.

But although there is so much to reflect on in the words of Jesus John records on this occasion, may we look a little further on – eight days later (verses 24-31) when they were again in the Upper Room. This time Thomas who had not been with them before and who could not believe what the others had told Him, was with them. Thomas had doubted what he had been told and said he wanted proof. He would only believe if he could see the evidence. “I can’t believe it.” He says

How frequently do we come across that expression? “I can’t believe it!”? I am sure we use it ourselves from time to time – especially when we read some of the news items reported these days. My late Father-in-law used to say to my wife when she was young “There’s no such word as Can’t!” That maxim has generally been used to good effect (though not always I have to say) but I think it might have been an appropriate expression if we had ourselves not been in the Upper Room when Jesus appeared. “I can’t believe it” is certainly what many people would have said. And of course that is what so many people say now when they are told how real and relevant Jesus is today.

So why do we say “I can’t believe it”?

The first question we could ask “Do I really want to believe it?”.

There are so many challenges, temptations and circumstances that make that a realistic question. Maybe I could say “No - I don’t want to believe”.

Here are some reasons I think I may say that,

Firstly, I may feel that people would not accept me as a Christian. Yes, peer pressure is a very important factor in belief. We can think of many young people brought up in Christian homes who are challenged by their peers as they grow up and sadly lose their faith. And of course peer pressure is there throughout our lives. Would I prefer to keep my good non-Christian friends rather than lose them because they think I'm stupid to believe, so I could say "I don't want to believe!".?

Another reason why I might say "I don't want to believe". Is that I might expect there to be a logical provable scientific explanation for any of my beliefs. Richard Dawkins always comes to mind in that context although it would be interesting to know if he really does not want to believe.

Then I might say "No – I don't want to believe?" when I have material and circumstantial evidence that may tempt me to, or give me, rich and pleasurable delight. My health is good, the sun is shining and all is well in my world. I feel happy because I am generally able to get and do what I want to do. Why should I believe? It seems an unnecessary burden to give up any of the pleasures which belief seems to imply. That's another reason that might make me say "No, I don't want to believe!"

There seems logic in all those points, so, if I say "No, I do not want to believe", then despite my father-in-law's wisdom, I can't!

The opposite of that logic, then, is that if I do want to believe, then I can. But there are still obstacles that seem to stop me being able to believe completely.

I look at the World around me, I see strife, warfare many human wrongs being committed, people committing themselves to a sincere and very committed Christian life, but going through really difficult experiences. Even though I may want to believe, doubt creeps in and I have to pray "Lord, I believe, but please help me in my unbelief." In those circumstances, how can I find the Peace that Jesus has on offer? It just doesn't seem to come!

The disciples clearly accepted the Peace Jesus offered. Thomas must have wanted to believe, but couldn't bring himself to do so until he had seen proof. Then he did. Jesus says "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who believe yet have not seen." Acceptance of the gifts Jesus offers us clearly bestows great blessings and assurance which I believe God wants us to have.

But what sort of Peace is on offer?

Jesus makes it clear throughout His Ministry that the Peace on offer is not the peace as the world understands it. In Matthew chap 10 v 34 Jesus says "Do not think I come to give you peace on earth!. St Paul, in Philippians chapter 4 verse 7 describes the Peace which passes all understanding." yet throughout his ministry highlights the wonderful news of the peace Jesus brings.

Jesus offers an inner Peace, a spiritual peace. It gives an assurance that God is in control and that He will use everything for good. Throughout His Ministry, Jesus states categorically that evil (Satan) abounds and is present – and will be present in the world and poses a threat to us. But He has defeated Satan and there is no danger to us if we believe in Christ and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour. If we do that, then we will have eternal life and we are accepted into His Kingdom. His Resurrection, and the joy of Easter Day prove Him to be true. Knowing that is the basis for accepting the Peace Jesus offers.

I would like to quote from the Every Day with Jesus notes of Easter Day this year which I found very helpful. *"It appears that no matter how much we listen to God, the challenge is in recalling God's Word in each specific situation. Jesus carefully taught His followers about His death and resurrection. Yet, whilst they had heard His words, they failed to understand their meaning. Listening to learn so that we might live the Christian life lies at the heart of our spiritual formation. When we can't make sense of something it's easier to doubt, even deny, what we don't understand. Understanding actually means 'to stand among'. We must choose if we believe through the lens of*

*logic or intellect or our conviction that God's word is true. This then demands learning to live by sightless faith as surely as a blind person relies upon their guide dog. ..."*

All of the disciples in the Upper Room clearly wanted to believe. They had given up their lives to follow Jesus. Verses 30-31 of our reading shows St. John is recording the story so that we too will believe.

For all of us who have now experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit the fact that Jesus has paid the price, we are asked to proclaim God's love to others. Jesus actually offers us more than peace. I pray that we will be able to believe and accept the Risen Christ in our lives, show Him to others through the way we live, and experience the full well-being of Life as He intends. I pray that all who truly want to accept Christ will be able to accept His Love, follow His commands, know His Peace and be lifted from any low.

The next hymn describes some of the situations in which we doubt. The first line of each verse is posed as a question. The second line gives the answer.

- 1 Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?  
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.
- 2 Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?  
To do the will of Jesus—this is rest.
- 3 Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round?  
On Jesus' bosom naught but calm is found.
- 4 Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away?  
In Jesus' keeping we are safe, and they.
- 5 Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?  
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

#### Our prayers of intercession

Lord, we pray for all who witness to Your resurrection, for those who speak of Your presence, for preachers of the word and ministers of the sacraments; for those who reveal Your presence by the way they live, for all who live simply that others may simply live. We pray for all who are in doubt and for all who are seeking You. We pray for unity in the church and in the world.

#### **We call to You, our Lord and our God.**

We come today with the oppressed peoples, with all who have lost their freedom, all who have lost hope. We pray for all who have been taken hostage, all who have been imprisoned because of their beliefs; that in the darkness they may find Your love.

#### **We call to You, our Lord and our God.**

We pray for the fellowship to which we belong, for communities and clubs for welfare organisations, for social groups, for those with whom we share our worship. We give thanks for Your appearing in the Upper Room, and we pray for our homes and loved ones.

#### **We call to You, our Lord and our God.**

We remember all who are despairing, those who doubt their abilities. We pray for all who lack confidence, those who are afraid to trust themselves or others. We remember those who are lonely, all who are fearful. We pray for those in sickness, looking to You in hope, O risen Christ.

#### **We call to You, our Lord and our God.**

Risen Lord, in You is our hope; in life, in death and to eternity our hope is in You. We rejoice with all who have entered into the fulness of life eternal. We pray especially for loved ones departed; may we, with them have a share in Your eternal kingdom.

#### **We call to You, our Lord and our God.**

#### The Lord's prayer

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

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  
Thine be the glory  
Risen conquering Son  
Endless is the victory  
Thou o'er death hast won  
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  
Thine be the glory  
Risen conquering Son  
Endless is the victory  
Thou o'er death hast won  
No more we doubt Thee  
Glorious Prince of life  
Life is naught 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  
Thine is the glory  
Risen conquering Son  
Endless is the victory  
Thou o'er death hast won  
Hallelujah, Amen

**A final prayer**

May the Peace of the eternal Father be about us.  
May the Peace of the Risen Lord be within us.  
May the Peace of the Holy Spirit be upon us.  
May the Peace of the Lord be always with us.

**Amen**