

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

### 11 April 2021

#### Welcome & Call to Worship

A week ago many of us gathered on a beautiful morning in the car park of Weoley Hill Church or Weoley Castle Community Church and in word and song we proclaimed *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* It was a joyful celebration of Easter. Today is “the week after” and we are all worshipping at home again for the duration of the fifty days of the Easter season. But I think that the joy of Easter filled us with renewed hope that soon there will be *the new beginning* we look forward to when we can meet again in our churches. That is, meet inside or even outside for, who knows, we may feel that we could worship more often in the fresh air, especially in the warmer summer months.

Let us worship with joy for Easter continues. Let us celebrate the risen Christ among us and going ahead of us.

Hymn            Good Christians all, rejoice and sing

#### Prayer

God of new life, we come to you, rejoicing in the mystery of the risen Christ, present among us always, when we least expect him, and calling us to follow as he goes ahead of us.

We marvel at your constant love, your victory over evil and death, and your resurrecting hope which embraces us in every circumstance.

Trusting in these gifts, we seek to live as Easter people in every place and time. Strengthen us with the gift of your Holy Spirit in this time of worship, and bless us with your peace through Christ, our risen Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading            John 20: 19-31

#### Reflection

Today on the first Sunday after Easter the story we read takes us back to Easter day when, in the evening, according to John, Jesus appears to the disciples who have locked themselves in a house because they were

afraid. As the story goes....suddenly Jesus appears, despite the locked doors and the disciples see the wounds in his hands and his side. The Jesus says “peace be with you” and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, and the disciples believe. But one disciple is absent, that is Thomas. When he arrives and all the disciples tell him that Jesus had appeared to them, Thomas does not believe them. And does that surprise us? Would we have believed? But then, a week after, Jesus appears again and this time Thomas sees and believes. And Jesus asks him, “Do you believe because you have seen me?” And he tells him, “Blessed are those who do not see yet believe.”

And ever since Thomas has been called “doubting Thomas.” But let us not forget that he is also known to many as St Thomas. According to tradition Thomas went to India and was the first to spread the Christian message there. And the Mar Thoma church based in Kerala, a church part of the worldwide ecumenical family of churches, is named after him. Obviously, his doubt had been an important part of his journey of faith, a faith that gave him the confidence and strength to bring the good news to many others.

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; doubt is often part of the faith journey. Let me tell you a story: A young woman one day had this overwhelming spiritual experience. She knew God was present, and she felt God calling her to go somewhere and do something new, something that would be very challenging, very hard. But she felt the calling so clearly, that she could not ignore it. It was the sort of spiritual experience many of us might perhaps be looking for but are still waiting for. A moment of clarity, of knowing exactly what we should do, of “seeing and believing.” The young woman did go and for the next 50 years she did quite amazing things. But unknown to many, she doubted. She wrestled with faith. She had what is called a “dark night of the soul”. Sometimes she even questioned the existence of God. And her lack of faith bothered her. This woman, we could have called her, “doubting Theresa” but no, we know her as Mother Theresa, the woman whose life many call “saint-like.” She must have been so full of faith. She must have been so certain of what she was doing. But no, she was not. She wrestled with doubts, just like Thomas, and just like us. But it did not prevent her from doing what she did, looking after the sick and dying and serving the poorest of the poor.

I think many of us have our doubts. At least those of us who see faith as a life-long journey, with its ups and downs, not as a final destination.

Yes, there are times we have this amazing sense of awe and wonder or we are inspired to reverence by something we observe or experience but other times our faith may be shaken, we have many questions, we may be disappointed, and we may even be ashamed of our doubts. But we should not. Doubts have a place in the life of faith and as the story of Thomas and Mother Theresa tells us, doubts do not prevent us from acting faithfully. By acting out the Christian faith we put our trust in God even as we wrestle with questions and doubts. After all, you do not have to *believe* to practise (and certainly not believe “six impossible things before breakfast”) but practising you may well come to hear the risen Christ speak “Peace be with you” and feel the Holy Spirit breathed upon you.

As we read the resurrection story in Mark on Easter day, we were reminded that Jesus, the living Christ, goes ahead of us and we meet him when we follow him. Jesus goes ahead of us and does not ask us to *have* faith but to *practise* it, to imitate him and act justly and mercifully in the world. Yes, we can choose to live the life of faith, trusting in God, trusting in the vision of God’s kingdom, while our questions and doubts can lead us on a journey of discovery, growth and gratitude as we follow Jesus, the risen and living Christ, who goes ahead of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Musical Interlude

Surrexit Christus (Taizé)

Prayers & Lord’s Prayer

Thank you, loving God, for your renewing presence in our lives, and for the many ways you make yourself known to us: in words spoken in peace, in actions that embody love, in creation that awakens wonder within us, and in worship that inspires faith and understanding.

With memories of the grace you have shown us, and with confidence that you will yet show us more, we pray that all people will come to know the life-giving joy we have celebrated at Easter.

We pray for those who are feeling fearful, worried or overwhelmed, especially as the months of pandemic restrictions stretch on.....

We pray for those who face violence and unrest each day, in countries around the world and in our own country and community.....

We pray for our national and local leaders as they lead the planning for our communities to recover from the pandemic. Give them wisdom and compassion.....

We pray for our congregations, for churches in our communities, and for Christians around the world, especially those who face persecution.....

We pray for our neighbours, especially for those who live in poverty and those who know discrimination and experience abuse.....

We pray for those who are ill, in pain or in grief.....

We remember before you those on our hearts today.....(Silence)  
Help us to bring them comfort and strength.

**May the risen presence of Christ be revealed in all the situations and among all the people we have remembered in our prayers.**

With hopeful hearts we pray....OUR FATHER

Offering

Generous God, we thank you for the hope and joy we find in your resurrecting power. Bless our gifts so they may spread that hope and joy in the world you love. In the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn            Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord

Blessing

Go forth into this day and into the world in the name of God,  
the one who creates you;  
go in the name of the Jesus who shows us the way;  
and go in the name of the Holy Spirit, who is with us now and always.

