

Traditional Home service

Sunday 11th April

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty Father, you have given your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification:
grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

**All Lord our God,
in our sin we have avoided your call.
Our love for you is like a morning
cloud,
like the dew that goes away early.
Have mercy on us;
deliver us from judgement;
bind up our wounds and revive us;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*And can it be*)

READINGS - JOHN 20:20-29

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

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.

HYMN 2 (*Love Divine*)

CONCLUSION

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for
me?

Refrain:

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for
me?*

'Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above—
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ
my own.

Love divine, all loves excelling
Joy of Heaven to Earth come down
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling
All Thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus, Thou art all compassion
Pure, unbounded love Thou art
Visit us with Thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart

Breathe, O breathe, Thy loving spirit
Into every troubled breast
Let us all in Thee inherit
Let us find that second rest
Take away the love of sinning
Alpha and Omega be
End of faith, as its beginning
Sets our hearts at liberty

Come almighty to deliver
Let us all Thy life receive
Suddenly return and never
Never more Thy temples leave
Thee we would be always blessing
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing
Glory in Thy perfect love

Finish then Thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee
Changed from glory into glory
'Til in Heaven we take our place
'Til we cast our crowns before Thee
Lost in wonder, love and praise

Sermon Notes - Matthew Beeby
John 20:20-29

I wonder how many times you have missed out on something extraordinary. One of those memorable moments, when your friends said – “Oh you just missed it” or “you should have been there.”

Poor Thomas is the man who misses out on an extraordinary encounter with the risen Christ, because he was somewhere else. As the community experiences the event he becomes the one who missed it.

It was that point in the story, post crucifixion, with the disciples wondering what to do next. Grieving, hiding away in an upper room, with none of the confidence and reignited hope that is to come.

We have this wonderfully human account of Thomas full of doubt and wanting evidence of their unbelievable claims. There is a real sense that he needs to catch up and understand.

What Thomas does know is that their encounter with Jesus has changed them.

Here is Thomas full of incredulity wanting to see for himself in order to believe.

Generally, our rational minds want evidence to get to the truth rather than the claims of others.

That is probably even more true today in a world of fake news and the mistrust of grand narratives.

If we think of our criminal justice system, the accounts of the witnesses and the gathering of evidence are vital to making a judgment – but we know too that even the expert witnesses, and indeed our own moral leaders, can come under heavy scrutiny in the search for the truth.

There has always been room for a healthy dose of doubt and a bit of tussling with the questions in the journey of a living faith.

Graham Ward, Regus Professor of Divinity at Oxford has spent many years exploring the question: What makes faith believable?

He suggests it is not just a cognitive exercise about knowledge and reasoning. Assembling evidence will always be subject to human manufacturing, bias and prejudgments.

Ward suggests that belief is also shaped by the way we perceive things – according to our hopes, our cultural traditions and in the case of Thomas our suspicions.

Belief appeals to the views and understanding of the collective, the tribe.

It will be evidenced in the way that we choose to live out belief and embody it through our actions.

When we look at the texts before us this morning – from our faith tradition – we encounter more than words on the page. We know the impact it had on those who testified to the resurrection.

If we look at the account in Acts this morning we discover a radical change in the behaviour of Christ’s followers and the development of a flourishing community, infused heart and soul in unity of purpose, living generously, full of the bonds of love.

From other accounts we know that from a community that ran away, and huddled together, they became people who spoke with a new found authority and power, braving hostility to proclaim the message and teaching of their risen Lord.

History confirms that Christian faith caught like wild fire and spread to the ends of the earth.

And Thomas the doubter moves from disbelief to the confession: “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus goes on to say to him:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

So what might convince the doubters? What convinces us?

What is it that makes faith believable?

Surely it is the little miracles of transformation that we witness? The love and light shining through the lives of Christ’s followers?

The same outpouring of grace and blessing that continues to ignite hope and causes us to embody love in action. Like the work of food banks, street pastors and night shelters.

The early Church took hold and grew because of the authentic witness of those first disciples.

Evidenced in the amazing transformation that moved them from people of fear to people of joy.

Early commentators observed: "See how those Christians love one another."

They fearlessly faced persecution and death for the sake of Christ and owned an authority that urged them on in proclaiming the power of Christ crucified, risen and alive.

Making faith believable is witnessed in the courage and faithfulness of persecuted Christians around the world. We see it in the Coptic church as they joyfully celebrate Easter today despite the ongoing threats of violence and physical attacks to their communities.

We see it in the resolve of Liya Sharibu a young woman, taken by Boko Haram in the Chibok kidnappings who is still being held because she refuses to renounce her faith in Jesus Christ.

We see it in all the enacted hope of Christian communities towards the needy and the vulnerable and the exploited in our communities.

It challenges us in our own witness to the resurrection.

Do others see something worth believing?

How are we living signs of the resurrection?

Is there something radical about the way we live our lives?

Has believing transformed us?

Well of course, of ourselves and in our own strength the answer will be no. Human frailty gets the better of us.

What energised a living faith in those disciples in the upper room is the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is what equips us to be Easter people, testifying to the power of resurrection in our own lives.

It was the support too of the collective – the community of Christians gathering to express a faith that is nourished by the living bread of Christ which we receive in this and every eucharist, as we proclaim that Christ has died and Christ is risen and Christ will come again.

There is a story from the 1930's of a Communist leader called Bukharin who

journeyed from Moscow to Kiev to address a huge assembly.

His subject was atheism.

For a solid hour he aimed his heavy artillery of words at Christianity, hurling argument and ridicule. At last he was finished and viewed what seemed to be the smouldering ashes of the people's faith.

"Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. A solitary man arose and asked permission to speak.

He mounted the platform and moved close to the Communist. The audience was breathlessly silent as the man surveyed them first to the right, then to the left. At last he shouted the ancient Orthodox greeting, "CHRIST IS RISEN!" The vast assembly arose as one person and the response came crashing like the sound of an avalanche, "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

I want to end with a poem from Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer.

He invites us to consider our own witness to the resurrection through our own stories.

Ask anyone who's ever shoved aside the rock of life

and uncovered the light of God...

They'll tell you a story...

About the power of hope, the power of faith, the power of love.

A story about transformation...

a story about what it's like to die of suburban boredom,

or body addiction or emotional dismay...

only to be born again, be new again, live life again.

A resurrected life,

an eternal, never-ending life.

All because of Christ.

Hear their stories

and think of your own.

The event that changed you.

The influence that formed you.

The sacraments that save you.

*Because, somehow, someway,
you too have brushed up against Christ
and, somehow, learned the truth about God.
Somehow, some way,
Christ has called your name.
You've seen his face.
You've heard his voice.
You've touched his scars.*

Alleluia Christ is Risen!

Response: He is risen indeed Alleluia!