

st JOHN'S

Living God's Love

Reflections & Prayers for the Second Sunday of Easter
11 April 2021



StJohnsAL5

www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

Thought for the week

Sometimes like Thomas, we will have doubts. Sometimes like Peter, we will continue to deny Christ by the things we do and the things we don't do. We will continue to be led astray by the deceptions of the world. Yet, amazingly, in spite of our failures and our frailty, our pains and our anxieties, Jesus calls each one of us to be his witnesses and to live out our lives to his glory. What a privilege! What a challenge!

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

Acts 4.32-35

1 John 1.1-2.2

John 20.19-end

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Jesus and Thomas

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

The Purpose of This Book

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection from Richard, Bishop of Bedford

"Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you' "

The disciples were afraid. Afraid that the temple authorities would hunt them down as compatriots of the criminal Jesus. A fear for safety and well-being.

It is a fear that went deeper – a fear of being shown up as having wasted a significant part of their lives backing a loser. Fear even deeper still of, as Bishop Stephen Verney once put it, 'of the pain and guilt within themselves and the self-knowledge of how they had failed in the crisis.'

The disciples were afraid – and like all such fear it diminished them; literally saw them hidden away behind locked doors.

Into that fear stepped the risen Jesus and he proclaims peace; that 'Shalom' that points to the eternal peace at the heart of creation; that peace which overcomes fear and quite literally in the power of the Spirit sets them free. Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'.

Fear can be a friend. Sir Ranulph Fiennes the renowned explorer writes of how 'fear can be a welcome mechanism which enables the body and brain to work at its best'. It is that fear that hones our survival instincts when faced with danger, or simply how to hang on when climbing a sheer rock face.

Fear equally, as with the disciples, can diminish us, damage us and even kill us. A well-known example is the impact of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion where fear of radiation damaged and ended more lives than the direct effect of radiation. An UN review concluded: 'The mental health impact of Chernobyl is the largest public health problem caused by the accident to date ... Life expectancy of the evacuees dropped from 65 to 58 years'.

It is fear that divides people – at the most basic level separates us from those who are different. Fergal Keane in a memoir of his time reporting on the troubles in Northern Ireland concluded: 'Fear was the most powerful weapon in the hands of ideologues on both sides'. Fear ratcheted up the hostility, made the hesitant into killers.

It is fear that so often inhibits us from being the people that we are called to be. It is the fear of the Priest and Levite faced with the man who had been attacked that is echoed in us and makes us hesitant to reach out to the person in need – fearful because we don't know them; fearful because it might cost us time and money; fearful that it will change who we are. Once again fear diminishes us; we are less than the person God desires. Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'.

Our reading from Acts, chapter 4, is that remarkable but challenging account of an early church who lived out their new-found faith with amazing generosity and mutuality. The resurrection is proclaimed, and great grace is upon them.

In my experience it is one of those passages that engenders fear. It is not so much about whether collective ownership is appropriate today, but the fear that we might be asked to give more than we are willing. Rather than responding to the call to generosity it perversely shuts us down. And yet if we don't allow the shalom to set us free then we are diminished; our discipleship is diminished.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing and its report 'Coming Home' makes several recommendations including releasing church land for social housing. The opportunity for grace to be at work is there; the danger is that instead it will be fear that dominates – fear of being imaginative; fear that somehow we won't get top dollar; fear that we might upset some neighbours; fear of simply being generous. Here as much as anywhere else we need Jesus and his words of peace to set us free.

Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'.

For the last twelve months some aspects of our life together has been like those first disciples. Whilst there has been much to rejoice in and much to celebrate, doors have been locked; access at times on-line has been limited; it has been hard to engage with the wider world; there has for many been a climate of fear and uncertainty.

As much as ever we need to welcome Jesus in – to let him stand in our midst bearing the marks of the cross and his loving sacrifice for the world – and hear his promise of 'Shalom'. To receive the Holy Spirit, so that we too may be sent as he has been sent by the Father.

So let us ask ourselves:

Amidst all that might still engender fear – the continued threat of infection despite vaccines, the toll of months of isolation, the uncertainty about a changed world – amidst all of that and more what does it mean to hear those words of our Lord and receive his peace; his shalom.

- What is it to be released to serve our neighbour in ways that echo the early church?

- What is it to be emancipated to reach out to those who are different from us in open and welcoming ways?
- What is it to be liberated to be God's people in ways that reflect the flexibility, imagination and creativity that we have discovered in being church in new ways?
- What is it to be set free 'that through believing we may have life in his name'?

Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you'

Prayers

Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,
 for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
 open the doors of our hearts,
 that we may seek the good of others
 and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,
 to the praise of God the Father.

We praise you and we bless you, our risen Lord Jesus, King of glory,
 for you come to us even in our doubting.
 Through the sovereign work of your Spirit,
 and the loving hands of your people,
 continue to reveal yourself where doubt is stronger than faith.
 To you, Lord Jesus,
 whose resurrection body bears the murderous marks of the cross,
 be honour and glory, now and for ever.

Resurrection Prayer

Christ our life,
 You are alive - in the beauty of the earth
 in the rhythm of the seasons
 in the mystery of time and space
 Alleluia

Christ our life,
You are alive - in the tenderness of touch
in the heartbeat of intimacy
in the insights of solitude
Alleluia

Christ our life,
You are alive - in the creative possibility
of the dullest conversation
of the dreariest task
the most threatening event
Alleluia

Christ our life,
You are alive - to offer re-creation
to every unhealed hurt
to every deadened place
to every damaged heart
Alleluia.

You set before us a great choice.
Therefore we choose life.
The dance of resurrection soars and
surges through the whole creation,
This is grace, dying we live.
So let us live.

Kathy Galloway (Iona Community)

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean
Monday	The Diocese of Bhopal – The (united) Church of North India
Tuesday	The Diocese of Bida – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Wednesday	The Diocese of Biharamulo – The Anglican Church of Tanzania
Thursday	The Diocese of Birmingham – The Church of England

Friday The Diocese of Blackburn – The Church of England
Saturday The Diocese of Bo – The Church of the Province of West
Africa

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday Parish of Old Warden (Deanery of Biggleswade)
Monday Parish of Potton (Deanery of Biggleswade)
Tuesday Parish of Roxton (Deanery of Biggleswade)
Wednesday Parish of Sandy (Deanery of Biggleswade)
Thursday Parish of Sutton (Deanery of Biggleswade)
Friday Parish of Tempsford with Little Barford (Deanery of
Biggleswade)
Saturday Parish of Willington (Deanery of Biggleswade)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday Paddock Wood, Parva Close
Monday Pendennis Court, Pennycroft
Tuesday Piggottshill Lane
Wednesday Pipers Avenue, Poynings Close
Thursday Prospect Lane, Queens Road
Friday Ranleigh Walk, Ravenscroft
Saturday Redbourn Lane, Rowan Way

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Chris and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Janet Carruthers, Pamela Richardson

On their year's mind:

Joyce East, William Hewetson, Owen Jones, Eileen Munnerley, Rose Douse, Violet Noon, Lavinia Mellor, Joan Luckhurst, Bow Kam Ng, Stephen McNairn, Michael Bentley, Richard Wood, Tom Newby

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).