**SUNDAY SERVICE APRIL 18TH 2020**

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 ST MICHAEL’S CHURCH HOOLE

**From Fear to Faith**

***“My Lord and my God”***

**Welcome to our service this morning. We are celebrating the central truth of the Christian Faith -Jesus Has Risen from the dead; through His death on the cross He has conquered sin and Death. We too can join in the disciples’ journey from fear to faith.**

**EASTER GREETING**:

 We are risen with Christ

 **The Lord is risen**

 Eternal life is ours

 **The Lord is risen**

 Death has met its master

 **The Lord is risen**

 The way to heaven is open

 **The Lord is risen**

 He is risen indeed

 **Alleluia! Amen**

**HYMN** Our first hymn is a great triumphant hymn of praise for what God has done for us: ***To God be the glory: https://youtu.be/-15v9iworAU***

1. To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.
	* *Refrain:*
	Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice!
	Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!
	Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
	And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.
2. Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.
3. Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

**Let us pray:**

**PRAYER OF THE WEEK:**

**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. Amen.**

**“FROM FEAR TO FAITH”**

**BIBLE READING** *John 20: v 28.*

**READING John 20: v19-31.**

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

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!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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.”

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!” 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.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

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

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**SERMON: From Fear to Faith**

So here we are - in lockdown! No, not in Lancashire in the twenty-first century, but with the disciples, 2,000 years ago. They are in the Upper Room, a room redolent with memories. They could think back to Jesus washing their feet, Jesus breaking bread and sharing wine at the Last Supper. Now, they are there with the doors locked - the original lockdown; locked we are told, because of fear of the Jews. Jesus had been put to death, and the normal thing for any movement condemned by the authorities would be for the followers to be dealt with next. Also a rumour was being put around that the disciples had stolen the Body, so we can understand their terror, at the thought of a knock on the door. So the furniture is stacked up against the door, and the frightened disciples huddle together.

But there is no knock at the door - rather, Jesus just appears and again reminds them of an earlier time. On the night before He died, Jesus had said "My peace I leave with you. " This was what Jesus was bequeathing His followers in His will. Now that Jesus has died, that will can be put into effect, that peace from Jesus can now be given to them. And so Jesus says "Peace be with you".

Then He gives them a fact to base their peace on. Because peace is no good if it is just a feeling not based on fact. An ostrich can bury its head in the sand and feel safe, but if a lion is approaching and is only four feet away, no amount of head burying will make the ostrich safe.

But this peace from Jesus is based on the fact of His death. He shows them His hands, and He points to His side . See - it is really me - I died, yes, but I am alive again. I have been through death, I have conquered death. That is why you may have peace. That is why I say peace be with you. And the disciples are overjoyed.

There was just one problem - there were only ten of them. Judas the traitor is off the scene. And Thomas, for whatever reason, is not there. Some have pictured Thomas as more brooding, more introspective than the others, deciding to pace the streets on his own, to work out what's going on, perhaps to brood. We don't know. But we can picture the scene on his return. He knocks on the door "It's all right, it's not the police, it's only me". So they let him in, and one disciple says "We have seen the Lord". Thomas replies "I don't think so - I watched Him die." "Yes", says another, "Really, truly, we have seen the Lord". "Oh come on, " says Thomas, "Pull the other one - you can't have". By this time, all the other disciples are joining in, saying "Yes, it's true". And Thomas has had enough. "Look," he says, "Unless I see the marks and put my fingers where the nails were, unless I put my hands in His side, I won't believe."

And so Thomas spends a week, doing more brooding, and getting crosser and crosser at being absent. And although this is not the best time, during self-isolation, to make this application, it reminds us of the blessing we receive when we meet with other Christians, and the blessing we may well forfeit or miss out on, if we feel we can't be bothered to turn up on a Sunday morning or a midweek housegroup. God blesses the meeting together of His people, and there is even a verse in Hebrews saying to Christians "Do not neglect to meet together , as is the habit of some." I think that, when this self-isolation is over, we will all have a renewed joy at being able to meet together again.

But back to Thomas, plagued by his doubts. And it is doubt that needs to be dealt with. Someone has said that doubt is the dark room where the devil develops his negatives. Let's notice the good things about Thomas though, at the same time as his doubt.

a) he is honest about his doubt - he can't believe, and he says so

b) he is reasonable in his doubt - he demands evidence. And Christianity has never been frightened of that - it is a rational faith.

c) and lastly Thomas seems to have realised how important the resurrection is . The resurrection is vital - it is everything, or Christianity is nothing. It was essential that Jesus' body had come through death, and that the resurrection is true.

And then a week later, perhaps at the same time, we don't know, Jesus appears. Again Jesus greets them with peace, and immediately turns to Thomas. OK then , do what you demanded; but stop doubting and believe. And Thomas it seems doesn't even need to touch Jesus - he just makes this confession - My Lord and my God, the first human being in the Gospels to address Jesus as God. And then Jesus continues the rebuke. your belief is not so blessed, Thomas, as those who have not seen. You'll probably spend the next week wishing you had believed the others in the first place. And then, in a lovely verse, Jesus refers to all subsequent Christians, including people in 21 century Lancashire "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe". That's us - that's you and me, together with millions of others who have listened to the Gospel story, and who have believed; who have not seen Jesus physically, but have nonetheless believed.

And this peace that Jesus bequeathed is available to us. It does not remove problems like the coronavirus, but Jesus' peace has made all the difference to Christians who over the years have had to face all kinds of problems and difficulties , worries, concerns and anxieties. Jesus' peace can transcend the things we face , and give us a new confidence to go forward, knowing that the future is in His hands.

And in some ways, the account of Thomas is the climax of John's Gospel. Indeed, John breaks off writing the narrative here, to point out that his whole aim in writing the Gospel is that we should believe. And believing, should come to the same position as Thomas and say "My Lord and my God".

Let us pray: Lord, we praise you for the wonder and the joy of your resurrection appearances Thank you that you showed Thomas your new resurrection existence, and thank you for the blessing that you give to us who have not seen, and yet, through your grace, mercy and love, believe. In your Name we pray. Amen

**HYMN** Our next hymn is a great new Easter Hymn : ***See What a Morning https://youtu.be/57C7uBkbO5E***

See what a morning, gloriously bright
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes
Tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God’s salvation plan, wrought in love,
Borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives,
Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping: ‘Where is He laid?
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name:
It’s the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope,
Bringing peace to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit
Who clothes faith with certainty,
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned
With power and authority!
And we are raised with Him,
Death is dead, love has won
Christ has conquered;
And we shall reign with Him,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

**The Apostles' 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**

Lord at this time when we are still in an unprecedented situation in our country, we need to turn to you every day. Help us to pray – for each other, for our families, our friends, and for our fellow members of this congregation. It is not always easy to pray, or to make the time and space to do so effectively. But we are now living in a time when many of us have far more opportunity to think, to reflect and to turn our thoughts to you. Help those of us with more space in our lives to value and strengthen our relationship with you, to think about others who are struggling, and to hear your will for us.

We are also in a time when many are feeling chaotic as they manage new challenges daily – teaching and supervising their children while they cannot attend school; working from home, often covering unfamiliar roles for colleagues; suddenly becoming unable to attend work for various different reasons; or adjusting to different routines as we can no longer live our lives as we wish. Lord help us all to turn to you for guidance, to read your word, and to take inspiration from our faith so that we remain positive, strong and able to manage challenges well.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for all those charged with managing this pandemic, especially our government, their advisors, and our Prime Minister as he starts to recover. Give them wisdom Lord and be with them as they try to plan the way ahead for our country.

Help us Lord to play our part too. Help us to stay positive, to rejoice in the many kind acts of people in our communities, and to take inspiration from people like Tom Moore, who has proved this week that everyone, whoever they are, can do something to make a contribution in helping those around them.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord we pray this morning especially for everyone suffering from Covid 19. For those mourning loved ones who have died, for those struggling in intensive care units all over the country, and for those managing symptoms as best they can at home. Place your healing hands on them Lord and bring them through. We pray for medical and nursing staff who are working so hard to care for these people, often at great personal cost to themselves and their families, and for carers and others trying to offer comfort and reassurance at this terrible time.

Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

We also give thanks this morning for the positives we see around us each day. For the technology that helps us all to stay connected, for the work involved in maintaining virtual services here at St Michael’s, for our online bible study group, for our village support group, for the food bank donations now being made through our church. We celebrate the beauty of the natural world around us, the kindness of our neighbours, and the strengthening bonds of our families. We pray also for those who are far less fortunate than ourselves, remembering those who are afraid, lonely, isolated and with limited resources and resilience to help them cope.

Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Finally Lord we pray for all who are sick, especially (....). We give thanks for the lives of those known to us who have died recently, especially Dorothy Rimmer whose funeral took place at St Michaels this week. May her family feel your loving arms around them Lord as they mourn with the added constraint of separation.

Help us to remember Lord that you are with us at the beginning and end of each day, that through you we have hope, and that your Word to us contains so many words of comfort.

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We join now in the prayer Jesus taught his followers to pray:

**Our Father who art in heaven**

**Hallowed be thy name**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done**

**On earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us**

**And lead us not into temptation**

**But deliver us from evil**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

Our final hymn focuses on the glory of Jesus’ Resurrection: ***The Day of Resurrection;*** ***https://youtu.be/qeqBCX8p7o4***

1. The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
The Passover of gladness,
The Passover of God.
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over,
With hymns of victory.
2. Our hearts be pure from evil,
That we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal
Of resurrection light;
And list’ning to His accents,
May hear, so calm and plain,
His own “All hail!” and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.
3. Now let the heav’ns be joyful!
Let earth the song begin!
Let the round world keep triumph,
And all that is therein!
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes in gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord hath risen,
Our joy that hath no end.

**BLESSING**

May the Love of the Risen Lord Jesus draw you to Himself

May the Power of the Risen Lord Jesus strengthen you to serve Him

And may the Joy of the Risen Lord Jesus fill your hearts this Eastertide.

 And so may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all those whom you love, now and for ever more. Amen

***I know that my Redeemer Liveth:*** https://youtu.be/4Q0qho\_hKEg

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