

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 11 April 2021

Second Sunday of Easter

Welcome

Below is a service sheet for you to use at home. You can also find our Sunday morning reflection on YouTube channel, available at 10am on Sunday, (and afterwards). Please search for "Swaythling Parish" on YouTube to find and view it.

If we can support you in any way at the present time, or you would just like to chat, do please get in touch: 023 8055 4231 peter.dockree@outlook.com

Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the second Sunday of Easter and Ann will explore with us later what questions we can be asking of ourselves and society as we embrace a new chapter.

Greeting

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you.

The Lord be with you,

And also with you

Prayer of thanks and confession

Thankyou and sorry can be two words that can be hard to take time say.

This morning we first take a moment to say thankyou, thankyou for all those things we perhaps take for granted or forget to notice.

The encounters in our lives, the people we know and so much more for whom we are truly grateful.

We also take time to say sorry, sorry for the things which often lie as shadows on our lives, but which we do not need to let hold us back, and recognise the love of a God who forgives it all.

May the God of love
Bring us back to himself,
Forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

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.

Hymn: Now the Green Blade Riseth

1 Now the green blade riseth,
from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again
like wheat that springeth green.

- 2 In the grave they laid Him,
Love who had been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth
like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again
like wheat that springeth green.
- 3 Forth He came at Easter,
like the risen grain,
Jesus who for three days
in the grave had lain;
Quick from the dead the risen One is seen:
Love is come again
like wheat that springeth green.
- 4 When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,
Jesus' touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts
that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again
like wheat that springeth green.

Readings

Acts 4: 32-35

A picture of how the first Christians tried to organise their lives.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought

the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

I John 1: 1-2: 2

John proclaims the victory of life over death, light over darkness, forgiveness over sin.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20: 19-30

The evening of the first Easter Day, and its sequel a week later when doubt is turned to faith.

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.'

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.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

A Reflection by Ann Lewin

A year ago today it was Easter Day, and we didn't know how to celebrate it. We couldn't go to church and sing multiple Alleluias, or exchange greetings with our friends, or share Easter eggs or have an Easter feast. Resurrection seemed a long way from what we were experiencing as that first lock-down began. We may well have felt rather like the disciples on the first Easter Day – bewildered and afraid: our world, like theirs, had been turned upside down. Little did we know then, and perhaps it's as well that we didn't, that the pandemic would dominate our lives for a whole year and more.

And here we are, a week after Easter this year, able to go to church but not to sing; wearing masks and not able to receive Communion as we would want to; not able to greet our friends with a hug or a handshake; sitting/standing at a distance from each other; able to meet up to six people outside, but not invite them into our homes.

Some of us are carrying a lot of anxiety or grief because of what has happened during the year, some of us are anxious about what will happen next, what kind of future we are heading into. Many of us are tired – not as tired perhaps as those who have been at the sharp end of working in the Covid wards in hospitals, but tired of

having to be on the alert, longing for the pandemic to be part of history, longing for life to be different and better for everyone. We have been able to celebrate Easter, but Resurrection may still seem a long way off.

Our Gospel reading today tells us something of what the disciples were thinking and feeling around that first Easter time. On the evening of Easter Day, still not sure what to make of what some of them had experienced during the day, and behind closed doors because they were afraid the religious authorities might come after them, Jesus came to them, showing them the marks of crucifixion to convince them that he really was Jesus. He greeted them with peace, gifted them with the power of the Holy Spirit and sent them out to share the love and forgiveness of God with everyone. Thomas wasn't with them, and when the disciples told him that they had seen Jesus, he didn't believe them: 'Unless I see for myself, I won't believe.'

A week later and we join them again. This time Thomas is there too, but again the doors are shut because they are still afraid. Jesus comes again with his greeting of peace, and offers Thomas the proof that he had asked for. But Thomas doesn't need it; the presence of Jesus is enough for him. 'My Lord and my God', he said – the first person in the Gospel accounts to recognise who Jesus really is.

Thomas has suffered through the centuries from being called the doubter, as though that disqualified him from being taken seriously. Earlier in the Gospels he had been shown to be passionate in his desire to go with Jesus, even if that meant going into danger (John 11: 16-18; 14:

25). He only appears to doubt that Jesus is alive now because it matters to him so much. His doubt is not a contradiction of his faith, but a part of it, for

*Faith is not certainty
Precluding debate, forbidding doubt.
That is faith's opposite.*

*Faith invites discussion,
Requires our exploration,
Embraces doubt, and
Sets all in the context of
The faithfulness of God
Known in the past.*

*Faith keeps us looking
Forward, takes us deeper
Into the mysteries of God,
Encourages hope.*

Jesus went on to give his blessing to all who believe in him, even though they have not seen him, which is us as well, on this eighth day after Easter 2021. So we are commissioned to live the risen life, for as St Augustine said hundreds of years ago, 'We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song'. Even if we can't sing it at the top of our voices in church, we can still sing it in our hearts, and live it as we go about our socially distanced lives.

And what difference will it make when we do? We have had plenty of opportunities during the last months to think about the kind of world we would like to live in. There has been a shift from wanting to go back to normal, to realising that whatever normal is will have to be different. We have become aware of the gulf between those who have sufficient to sustain them, and whose

who are so disadvantaged that they cannot join in with what the rest of society enjoys. Can we bear to see people unable to feed their families, or live in adequate housing? Can we bear to see people with physical or mental needs go without proper care? How can we help those whose jobs and livelihoods are at risk? Can we go on allowing people who work to provide for the wellbeing of us all to be paid inadequately? Have we the courage to challenge the people with power to make decisions which will enable everyone to flourish and achieve their true potential?

And what have we learned about ourselves? What are the strengths we can build on in our own lives, and what are the weaknesses we need to address if we are really going to live Christ's risen life? The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of a new chapter in *our* story – we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to build a community of creative service. If we let ourselves be renewed by that Spirit we shall be able to take our part in whatever new normal lies ahead for our society, and perhaps we shall be prepared to get out of our comfort zone a bit more often to encourage new life to flourish.

Lord may we live in faith, walk in hope and be renewed in love, until the world reflects your glory.

Prayers

Let us pray for our world, our community and those in need around us.

Life-giving God, we thank you for the resurrection of Jesus, for the promise of new life and hope that he brings to us all.

Help us to share that life and hope with all whom we meet.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
Your touch can bring us back to life again.*

We pray for all who are going through the winter of grief: all who have lost loved ones, or livelihoods, or dignity as they find it difficult to make ends meet or feed their families. Touch us all with your life-giving grace, and renew our hope.

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all whose faith has been tested to the limit by what they have had to face. Renew your Spirit in us Lord, and strengthen us to face the challenges ahead.

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We thank you Lord for all who are making life possible for people who are struggling: for all who are putting their lives at risk in caring for the sick, in hospitals, care homes or in their own homes. We thank you for all who are developing and delivering vaccines against the Corona virus. We pray for all who live in places where the vaccine is hard to come by, and for generosity on the part of the countries who have plenty, that they will share fairly with those who have none. Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who are in pain: people with covid struggling to breathe, people with other illnesses whose treatment is being delayed; all whose mental health has been affected by the stress of living through a pandemic.

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

Thy Kingdom come, Lord. Give wisdom to all who have to make difficult decisions about managing public life. Help all who lead to use their influence with compassion and imagination so that justice will prevail, and people will be enabled to flourish.

Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who suffer in many parts of the world. In a moment of quiet we bring to you, Lord, those whom we carry on our hearts

Lord, give us all the healing that we need.
Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us**

We thank you for all whose lives have inspired us by their faithfulness.

We pray that with them we will come to share in fullness of life with you

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth th' Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand, at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call, one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Joachim Neander (1650)

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

In this Easter season may we embrace the new day dawning.

May the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen

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