

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES: A Service for second Sunday of Easter 19th April 2020

'You show me the path of life. In your presence is the fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.' Psalm 16: 11

PRAYER: (written by Michael Leunig and found in his book, *When I Talk to You*, (2004, Harper Collins))

Dear God, give comfort and peace to those who are separated from loved ones. May the ache in their hearts be the strengthening of their hearts. May their longing bring resolve into their lives, conviction and purity to their love. Teach them to embrace their sadness lest it turn to despair. Transform their yearning into wisdom. Let their hearts grow fonder. Amen.

COLLECT:

Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred: open the door 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

BIBLE READING: JOHN 20: 19 – end

20 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."

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 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."

26 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." 27 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." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 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."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 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: Surprised by Peace and Empowered by Breath (by the Revd Liz Howlett)

This passage focusses on the risen Jesus' appearances to his group of disciples, initially on the evening of Easter Day and then a week later. (John has told us of his appearance to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb earlier in this chapter.) I wonder what words or phrases stand out for you in this passage. Below, I share some of my reflections on phrases that strike me.

‘Peace be with you.’ These are Jesus’ first words to his friends and he repeats them. The disciples are shut away out of fear – they are self-isolating as a household, if you like, for fear of what the outside world, including their own kin, might inflict on them. Jesus’ greeting of peace is not a formality and he repeats it once again a week later – this small band of frightened people needs continuing help to hear this message, as theirs is a household full of fear and lacking peace. The outside world really is a dangerous place and this peace does not mean pretending but rather it is about facing the fear and realising that God and God’s peace are with them in that fear and in the very real danger.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ These are astonishing words to say to a group of people afraid to leave their house. They are not just empty words of exhortation, for Jesus breathes on them and says, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ This is a wonderful, tender image of empowerment. And I notice that even after this divine breath has filled them, they do not immediately go out and take action. They are being prepared for their unknown future, even whilst they stay within their four walls of the present.

‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’ At times over the years I have longed to have seen what Thomas saw, when the risen Jesus appeared to him to offer the assurance he needed. By the time he is writing his gospel, perhaps towards the end of the first century, John knows that the vast majority of people following Christ have never seen him in the flesh and of course that is our experience too. John says explicitly that he has written his book to help people come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He realised that ‘those who have not seen’ would need help in their journey of faith. Personally, I take great heart and hope from today’s passage: that Jesus comes to his disciples in their fearful self-isolation, bringing deep peace and that he gently empowers them with his breath but does not require them to be ‘active’ before they are ready or the time is right.

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples
and said, ‘Peace be with you.’
Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

PRAYERS: (by Mr James Webster)

In joy and in hope we pray to Jesus our risen Lord.

Jesus. Risen Lord.

As you came to your Disciples, locked away in their fear in the upper room, so visit us and those we know and love in our confinement at this time.

Let us too wonder at your risen presence. Lighten our spirits calm our concerns. Grant us patience and fortitude. Fill our hearts with the joy of your life giving resurrection.

Jesus Lord of life. Hear us.

Jesus. Risen Lord.

Inspire your people, your church, as you inspired those early often scattered and isolated believers. Encourage our leaders, our Bishops, our Rector Jane and all who minister in your name, to invention and creativity in the expression of your love and care. Through them let your risen presence shine out as a beacon of assurance and hope throughout our communities.

Jesus Lord of life. Hear us.

Jesus. Risen Lord

In the upper room you said "Peace be with you." And again you said "Peace be with you".

Let your peace enter the hearts of all peoples. May the examples of selfless love and co-operation brought to the fore at this time continue, blossom and grow, that there may be an end to enmity and your peace may be in all the earth.

Jesus Lord of life. Hear us.

Jesus. Risen Lord

As you brought healing and comfort to all who asked it of you, hold in your tender care those who are suffering. The lonely. The sick. The afraid. Those grieving. The angry. Those enduring separation. Reveal the light of your presence to them, comfort and strengthen them.

In a moment of quietness, we call to mind those we know to be in need of prayer, our own concerns and those who are foremost in our memories at this time.

Pour down your blessing upon all who in their essential work serve to bring care and relief to others.

Jesus Lord of life. Hear us

Jesus. Risen Lord.

At your behest, the gift of the Holy Spirit came to rest on your Disciples in the upper room. Let us too be possessed of that same spirit, strengthening our faith that we in our turn may be witnesses, raised with those who have gone before to eternal life

Jesus Lord of life. Graciously hear us. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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

As we say the following prayer for blessing, let us pray for God's blessing on each other

BLESSING:

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. Amen.