

Our opening music was part of a Chaconne by Pachelbel. It was played by John Crombie.

As we come into our time of worship we remember that Easter's new life is still fresh for us and we sing or listen to the hymn

**Hymn** Alleluia! Alleluia! Hearts to heaven and voices raise

### **Prayer**

Day by day, Lord God, we see the leaves appearing on the trees, we see the spring flowers blooming around us, we see the lambs beginning to appear in the fields. Day by day we see evidence of life bursting forth and bringing joy to our hearts and for that we thank you.

Day by day, Lord God we remember that we live on the far side of Easter and that in Jesus your new life is being offered to us: life that is rich in variety and that brings the comfort of your presence. And we thank you.

Day by day, Lord God, we find that we have new uncertainties to face, and new challenges to overcome, and in these days we remember that you do not and will not leave us to face and overcome alone, but that you lead and strengthen us. And so we thank you.

Lord God, if in these challenging times, we have used the difficulties of life as an excuse to do, or say, or think things that are wrong and unloving, forgive us. If in our anxiety we have in our minds or in our words looked more to judge others than to turn to you, grant us your mercy. We thank you that we follow Jesus, who lived through the hardest of times, and the most difficult of personal circumstances and who never flinched from caring for those around him. Give us your grace to follow his example and live by your Spirit, we pray.

And hear us as we pray together using the words that Jesus taught us and saying:

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 debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory

For ever. Amen.

So, how is the lock-down going for you, and how strictly are you adhering to it? I should imagine that the more strictly you keep to the lockdown advice, the harder you are finding it – though we all have our own personal strains and stresses. But if anyone tells me it is easy, I would seriously doubt them.

The idea of lock-down is nothing new, of course. All through history people have had restrictions and curfews placed upon them, for their own good or for the good of those who were in charge. Last week, on Easter Sunday, we read the beginning of the Easter story, and at the first Easter time we find that the disciples had put themselves into lockdown.

They were afraid. They were afraid for their lives. It wasn't the incalculable risk of an invisible virus which scared them, but the only too solid and visible risk of The Authorities. The Authorities had taken Jesus, their friend and leader, and had made an exhibition of his so-called trial and his execution. Any hint that he had followers left in the city, and they might decide that they had left the job half-done. So from Good Friday the disciples were in lock-down together.

They didn't all stay in all the time. On the Sunday Peter and John sneaked out to investigate the women's story of the empty tomb. They ran there, from eager curiosity,

maybe, or because if you run you will be exposed to danger for less time. How brief and infrequent do you make your trip to the shops? And what the two men found would not reassure them. Just an empty tomb. Just the grave clothes. Where was the body? What had happened or been done to it? You can imagine that when they went back to report on what they had seen – remember they had not yet encountered the risen Jesus – their story would tend to build rather than calm fear. Living in lock-down does that.

We know this, of course. Being shut in can make us more suspicious – of government, of neighbours, of ourselves and even of God.

Peter and the rest didn't know if The Authorities – the government at different levels – was really seeking them: but they would rather err on the side of caution. And how many of us, living in these non-voluntary lock-down days wonder if we can trust the government – their restrictions, decisions, facts and figures? And we have lots of time on our hands to listen to the voices of fear, on the internet or in our own heads. Just as the disciples did – barring the internet, of course.

Peter and the rest, who were not natives of Jerusalem, would not know if they could trust their neighbours – those who lived in the houses and rooms around them. Last week I heard a friend who lives in the greater Glasgow conurbation say that he found he was reluctant to leave his flat, where he is working from home, even for valid reasons, for shopping or exercise. He found that he began to suspect that his neighbours were watching him and judging his movements.

One of the temptations of this difficult time is the temptation of judgmentalism. As Christians we need to remember that we walk in the way of Christ who said “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make, you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.” (You will find that at the beginning of the seventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel.) Judging may make you feel superior for a while. But Jesus went on to say that we should look for the log in our own eye before we try to remove the speck in someone else's. *None* of us is perfect. *All* of us need forgiveness, and, in the light of that forgiveness, to forgive others.

John 20:19-31

**Hymn** O sons and daughters let us sing

Psalm 18:25-30

Thomas certainly doubted even his friends. They spoke to him of the risen Jesus, but he had missed the experience they shared, and he dared not believe it. The fears around lock-down meant that he felt he had to doubt, to question – even his friends, even himself.

And which of us, these past weeks, has not known such a reaction? Which of us has not so longed for good news that even when we have heard a breath of it, we have found we daren't cling to it with any hope? We cannot trust because the longing is too great.

We cannot, sometimes, even feel that we can trust God. How could God have dumped these disciples into a situation beyond their experience or their capabilities? How could God – a good God – allow the situation we – and not only we but the whole world – find ourselves in? Sometimes doubt is a sensible reaction to circumstances. At no time is doubting or having difficulty with faith wrong. Not if, like Thomas, we stick with his possibly deluded friends, we stick with the faith that raises the questions.

Thomas stuck with his questions. And he stuck with the community of fearful faith whose answers he could not quite bring himself to believe. And because he hung on in there, he was in the end able to receive the good news. Seven long days after Easter Sunday, nine days into lock-down, Jesus came again and stood among them.

Jesus came. Walls and closed doors could not keep him out. To disciples in lock-down *that* was the good news. They didn't need to risk their lives to be with Jesus: he came to them.

He came and he spoke to all the fears which tormented their days, saying "Peace be with you." Peace. Shalom. The peace of his presence, of God's presence, which can transform the most difficult and impossible situation. And he gives his Holy Spirit, which is his presence with them always, as near and as vital as breathing.

And here we are at the end of week four of lock-down. Here we are with four weeks of fears having been knocking on our closed doors – fears of government, of neighbours, of ourselves or even of God. And to us, in our various homes, because we can't do lock-down together, Jesus still comes and says "Peace be with you." And "Receive the Holy Spirit."

"By my God," said the Psalmist, "I leap over a wall." Whether we leap out and over or Jesus comes in to us, walls are no barrier to the power and presence of God. Walls are no barrier to God's gift of shalom – peace of heart and mind.

And the God who gives us shalom is the God who, as the Psalm tells us, shows himself to us best when we are humble, blameless and loyal. The God who lights a lamp for us in the darkness and who will never leave nor forsake us.

**Hymn** How often we like Thomas, need proof before we trust

Prayers of intercession

In a week when we have seen news of infection and death in our land and around the world grow and grow, and when we have seen people live with daily and growing fear, it seems to me that our prayer should be that of the old spiritual, asking God to Kumbaya, or Come by here.

Lord God, we need your presence, at least as much as the disciples did when they were locked in the upper room. We need your presence in our daily lives as we live with uncertainty and loss. *O Lord Kumbaya.*

Lord God we need your presence around the world with families who grieve.  
We need your presence in our community with vulnerable people who live in fear.  
We need your presence in the innumerable small losses of life at this time. *O Lord Kumbaya.*

Lord God we need your presence with medics, doctors and nurses, who labour on.  
We need your presence with care workers who continue to love.  
We need your presence with willing volunteers who bring a lifeline to those who are shut in.  
*O Lord Kumbaya.*

Lord God, we need your presence with epidemiologists facing a new situation.  
We need your presence with politicians as they strive to make right decisions.  
We need your presence with church leaders who seek to help people see your face.  
*O Lord Kumbaya.*

Give us your peace, your shalom and your presence we pray. Give us your peace in our hearts and in our homes, in our community and in our world. Give us your peace and even your joy and give us courage and confidence in you to bring us through these days.  
*O Lord Kumbaya.*

We pray for Jesus' sake, Amen.

**Hymn** I danced in the morning when the world was begun.

May the blessing of God's presence, the presence of the risen Christ, the comfort of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.

Our postlude is Adagio from Organ Concerto in G minor by Matthew Camidge, played by Alan Buchan on the recently overhauled pipe organ at Laggan.