

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**ZOOM Service Sunday April 11, 2021; Easter 2B**

*Ed. 10.04.21*

**Introduction and Prayer**

*Good morning, wherever you are. We are not gathered in the same building, but we give thanks that we can worship together, from where we are, knowing that God can hear us all.*

Today we think about Thomas, and what it means to believe.

**A Prayer:**

At evening on that day, the first day of the week, the doors of the house were locked, yet Jesus stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

May we recognise his presence with us now, and acclaim him as our risen Saviour.

May his peace be with us, in our own spaces, but united in faith, as we gather in worship.  
 Amen.

**Hymn 522** The church is wherever God's people are praising

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Cold, dark, dead the earth; empty; dull, and silent.

God hidden behind the stone of a tomb, abused, crushed by human wickedness.

But, as rises the morning sun to women in a garden, and for us,  
 all is green, and fresh, and new.

We praise the God of creation, the God of resurrection,  
 that our sun-giving, life-giving God, breaking the bonds of death, bursting from the tomb,  
 came to the disciples behind closed doors, breathing his Spirit upon them,  
 bringing the Spirit of God to all the world.

We praise the Son of creation, the Son of resurrection,  
 because, this Easter, he brings us new life,  
 pushing aside the greed of the world, bringing down the powerful,  
 reaching out to the poor, the hungry, the oppressed.

Yet too often we turn from him.  
 Shielding our eyes from his light, and stepping back into darkness,  
 we do not respond to his love.  
 Our hearts become hard; we ignore him,  
 we hurt one another, living for ourselves, careless of the needs of others.  
 We remember our faults.

The Risen Christ comes, and comes again, to us, with words of peace,  
 for well he knows our doubts, our worries and uncertainties.  
 In love stronger than hatred, he brings new life out of death.  
 Dispelling our fears and our sorrows, he surrounds us with joy,  
 awakening the world, and awakening us, to compassion, to love,  
 to the life in all its fullness that he promised to bring.

In him there is renewed hope, new horizons, new beginnings,  
 and we bring to him honour and praise  
 as now we pray in the words he taught us...  
*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.*

**Readings: Susan will read for us**

**1st Reading:**

**1 John 1: 1 – 2:2; NRSV: *The Word of Life***

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.

***God Is Light***

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.

***Christ Our Advocate***

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.

**Hymn: Cornerstone**

**2nd Reading:**

**John 20:19-31; (NRSV): *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.'

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. 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.

*Amen. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.*

## Message:

As we read the Easter story we quickly realise that the risen Jesus was not exactly the same as he was before the crucifixion. The risen Jesus can enter a locked room; he seems to be able to appear and to disappear. His friends don't always recognise him, yet he can be touched. Thomas needed to touch him.

I have spoken to you in the past about Thomas. As 'Doubting Thomas', he gets a bad press, as though the other disciples had more faith than he did. The odd man out. His story is supposed to show that those of us who never had the chance to meet Jesus in the flesh are richly blessed because we have faith that Jesus really does exist for us as a living presence. Thomas was a practical chap, who needed to check things out for himself. The problem wasn't really with Thomas, but with the other disciples.

For whatever reason, Thomas was not with the others on Easter morning; not there to share their experience of the risen Lord. They had something he didn't have. Thomas had to take their word for what they had seen—and that wasn't enough.

Thomas never doubted Jesus, but he did doubt the credibility of the other Apostles. He needed what his friends had already experienced. The first part of our reading tells us that they had seen the risen Jesus; they had been given his peace and his spirit. Jesus had commissioned them to continue his work in the world, so it was now up to them to share the good news, as Jesus had told them to do. Yet their witness to the Resurrection wasn't even compelling enough to convince Thomas – a man who wanted to believe, and was ready to believe.

This starts to get uncomfortable. You might say that it's still the same with us, that the problem is out there, with all those unbelievers – like Thomas – and if they would only open their eyes and ears and their minds, things would be a lot easier. It is easier to do that, to claim that other people are not receptive, than to take a hard look at the words and actions of today's disciples – of those of us called to be witnesses to Jesus. Is it easier to call Thomas 'doubting', and all the people out there unreceptive, than to call the disciples – and ourselves – 'unconvincing'?

Thomas is here to make us uncomfortable. Somebody said that the job of every preacher – the job of every Christian – is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted: to offer hope and consolation to those who are hurting, while strongly opposing the evils of injustice and oppression and all the rest.

Faith almost always comes to people through the faith of others, through the life and ministry of the Church. The uncommitted people 'out there' – including perhaps our own children and grandchildren – depend upon people who already believe to point them toward faith. They depend on us.

The other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord." But they were scared, hiding behind locked doors, talking only to one another. Only a week before, Jesus had stood among them, but they were not acting as though something wonderful had happened that first Easter Sunday, so, even though he wanted to, Thomas didn't believe them. That's the way it was, and maybe that's still the way it is. Thomas wasn't the problem. Today's doubting Thomases are not the problem. The problem is the conviction, the power, the persuasiveness of the Church. That's the bad news.

But there is good news as well: good News for Thomas, for the disciples, for the Church – for us, because Christ is risen, and he comes to us. The risen Christ comes to the Church—even when the Church continues to huddle in fear behind locked doors. Just as he brought to

completion the work that a weak and all too human collection of disciples could not do alone, he comes also to us to support us in the work that we cannot do alone.

St Augustine said, "*Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not.*"

The good news is that Jesus continues to be with us, continues to be for us, continues to speak to us, and to his world, his words of forgiveness and of peace.

That doesn't mean we can sit on our hands, with no responsibilities, and do nothing, or that Jesus will do it all for us. It does mean that, despite our frailties and failures, we can continue in hope and confidence. Yes, we will have our failures, but we don't give up; we do our best, even if it seems risky. There is always room for improvement, but there is never cause for despair, because Jesus continues to be found among us.

Today's story is not really about doubting. It is about the call of the Church to witness to the truth of the Resurrection. The best news for us is not that Thomas believed, but that the Risen Lord still comes to his Church.

What then, if we have our own genuine, personal doubts about parts, or all, of the story? Doubt is part of the life of faith, and doubt is not a bad thing. Doubt is a natural and necessary thing that helps us to mature into our faith. One thing we do learn from Thomas: Thomas didn't believe the disciples, but he hung in there, knowing that his doubts were most likely to be resolved within the community of faith.

It's the same for us. In the face of doubts, we continue doing the right things. Read the stories; meet the community – in whatever way we can. Pray.

That was all that Thomas did, or needed to do.

The risen Jesus did the rest. He will do the same for us.

With Thomas we can say, "My Lord and my God".

*Alleluia, Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia.*

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

**Hymn 21** Lord teach me all your ways

### **Prayer for Others and Blessing**

*Let us pray:*

In the evening, when, bewildered and frightened,  
the disciples met behind locked doors,  
the Risen Lord came to them with words of peace,  
for wicked and misguided plots had failed;  
the betrayal, and the denial of friends, had not prevailed;  
the cruelty of the world had come to nothing.

We bring thanks to the God of Life  
that Jesus has risen, and comes to us with words of peace.

We pray that the Risen Lord will come, with words of wisdom and peace,  
into government rooms where politicians meet;  
to board rooms where executives plan;  
into court rooms where lawyers debate;  
that he will bring his peace to lands torn apart by violence;  
to communities divided by the gap between rich and poor;  
to nations divided by creed and culture and prejudice,  
where people live in fear, and children starve.

May the crucified and risen Christ come with words of peace  
into creation marred by greed and cruelty.

In the midst of the Covid Pandemic, may the risen Christ come

into hospital rooms where people suffer and die,  
where many wait and worry;  
come to bodies diminished by illness,  
and minds tormented by memories and guilt;  
into homes where people struggle to make ends meet,  
into families fragmented by broken relationships;  
into lives scarred by addiction;  
come to those who sleep rough in city streets, or uneasy in prison cells.  
To all those may the Living Lord come with words of peace

May the Living Lord come to the Queen, and to all her family as they mourn the loss of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

May the Risen Christ come to us all whenever we are afraid,  
or worried, or grieving.

May he come to us now as we pray in silence  
for Linda Scott, and for all those for whom we have special concerns today.

*Pause*

Despite the strong and solid doors we lock  
to protect ourselves, to shut out the world,  
may the Risen Lord come to us with words of peace.  
May he breathe his Spirit into our hearts  
and into the hearts of all who cry to him today,  
that, renewed in the power of his Spirit,  
and strengthened for the work he gives us to do  
we may more clearly discern his will for us  
and go out into the world  
with words of peace for the people we meet.  
For his love's sake. Amen.

May you stay safe in the ways of the Risen Christ,  
and may the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you, and remain with you,  
now and evermore. Amen.