

Issue 5
20th April 2020

For these days ...

*'Keep me safe,
my God,
For in you
I take refuge.'*

Psalm 16.1

Lectionary Readings

Easter Sunday

Acts 2,14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1.3-9

John 20.19-31

Hymns

430, 'Christ has risen
while earth slumbers'
(tune: Ode to Joy)

189, 'Be still for the
presence of the Lord'

528, 'Make me a
channel of your peace'

I don't know about you, but one of the things I am missing most on a Sunday morning is singing together. It's all very well sitting in the living room singing along to *Songs of Praise*, but there's nothing like being in the sanctuary and joining our voices together in worship and praise. Perhaps we should give it a go on Zoom sometimes before the lockdown ends! Failing that, and until such times as we can all be together, I'll include the hymn numbers from CH4 at the side of the page from the previous Sunday for those who can't watch the service online. If nothing else, you can close your eyes, hum along and imagine the day when we can all lift our voices and give thanks to our God in Waterfront and Dalmuir Barclay.

Prayer

In our homes,
Behind locked doors,
We come to you this morning, God,
To remind ourselves that in this new reality we find ourselves,
you are same yesterday, today and forever.
Your love for us is unchanging,
Your presence is with us,
and in you we find the Word of life.

And so, in the silence, we bring our thanksgiving,
We bring our praise,
And we bring ourselves honestly before you,
Acknowledging how we are feeling,
Naming our struggles and hopes,
And confessing to you our need this day -

Silence

Whatever it is we are looking and searching for today:
Strength, reassurance, answers, forgiveness -
Lord Jesus,

May we be open and find you standing with us,
 stilling our minds,
 filling our hearts with the joy of your mercy and grace,
 and nourishing our spirits with hope and new life.

As we turn to your Word,
 Breathe your peace upon us, we pray,
 That we may receive your Holy Spirit,
 be drawn closer into your love,
 and discover that there is nothing –
 nothing at all,
 that can ever keep you out of hearts that seek you.
 So be it,
 Amen.

Reading

John 20.19-31

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ 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!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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!” ²⁷ 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.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ 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

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

This week we received the unsurprising news that the lockdown we are all experiencing in the face of Covid-19 will continue for at least the next three weeks. Life as we have known it is very much on hold and we are allowed to venture out only for the essentials – food, medicine and exercise. Apart from that, we are to stay in and keep safe – and for some of us that may well be taking its toll.

Maybe we are on our own, and whilst the telephone is great, we are really craving some face to face, physical contact. Or maybe, we aren’t on our own, we’re in a house with one or a few others and that is proving challenging. Whatever it is, maybe you need some of that peace that Jesus offers his disciples today.

“In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to.”

David Hollis

It never fails to surprise me, how God’s words speaks straight into life and the circumstances we find ourselves in and this week is no different. For although we are a week on from Easter, the first part of our reading takes places on that first Easter Eve and where are Jesus’ friends? They are at home, behind locked doors. Not so much for others safety, but for their own. They are sad, overwhelmed, confused and grieving; and full of fear about what will happen next. They hadn’t countenanced the possibility that Jesus would die, but he had – in the most horrific of ways. Their hopes are in tatters and their lives very much on hold. You can almost imagine them holding their breath, not daring to think about the future.

It is into this scene, behind locked doors, that Jesus comes and stands among them. We don’t know how he gets beyond the door – that is a mystery – but suddenly Jesus is there, in the midst of them, saying ‘peace be with you’ and turning their fear to joy. He’s there – wounds in his hands and side – and he breathes upon them and into them the life giving spirit of God and makes them a sent people: called to go, in time, beyond their locked doors and share God’s love and peace with the world.

There is so much that I could say about this reading, and if things were normal, I would – and in the weeks to come, I will, but things are not normal and I think it's enough for today, to focus on this wounded, risen Jesus, who is able to get beyond closed doors and all that would keep him out and bring peace to those who need to hear it and receive it.

At the moment in our lockdown the essentials are all important – food for the body. Exercise for the body and mind. What about the spirit, our souls? So often on a Sunday I talk about taking time to be still. To seek. To nourish and grow. In the midst of all this awfulness, is there space and there is time perhaps like never before, to do just that? For sometimes, locked and closed doors are not a bad thing, they are necessary, like just now to keep everyone safe. Sometimes we lock ourselves away to recover and reflect and take stock and assess what is really important – where we've been, where we are and where we are going.

There's a great quote that keeps popping up on my Facebook newsfeed: "in the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to." I like that. It's helpful and as we remember today those disciples, for whom life could never be the same again post Easter, so we may well take the time to consider what kind of normal we are being called back to. In our homes, behind our locked doors, may we dare to sit quietly and wait. Take a moment to seek the mystery that is beyond us and be open to the possibility that God is there with you *and* always has been. Calling you and me, the church, from within and behind our locked doors, into something more and fuller and different and life giving, than we can ever imagine in the power of the Spirit – the life giving spirit whom Jesus breathes upon us and reassures us of His presence and peace. Let's not miss out in that essential this week as we consider life as an Easter people.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
 You met your friends behind locked doors,
 Turning fear to joy.
 You met Thomas in his doubt and grief,
 And reassured him of your presence and peace.
 And you meet us,
 here and now in our homes,
 showing up in our lockdown and inviting each person into new life with you.

and so, Lord,
 we praise you for the journey of faith,
 in all it's ups and downs,
 and give thanks that you never give up on us,
 even if we at times give up on you.

we pray this day for all those behind locked doors
 who are feeling sad and overwhelmed,
 confused and scared,
 full of fear and grieving,
 and pray that you would grant them your peace this day.

Silence

May your deep peace,
 Be breathed upon all who need it most,
 And may we, your church, be channels of it this day and always,
 For we ask it all in the name of Jesus,
 Who taught us to pray together saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...

Closing thought ...

May sadness be breathed out,
 And comfort breathed in.

May fear be breathed out,
 And trust breathed in.

May despair be breathed out,
 And hope breathed in.

And may the blessing of Christ's peace be with you now,
 And forevermore,
 Amen.

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