

## Second Sunday of Easter – Year A

### Second Sunday of Easter – 16 April 2023

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Andrew Kimmitt, Minister at Aberlour Parish Church, for the use of his archive material from 2020 for the second Sunday of Easter.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the [Sanctuary First website](#).

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acts 2:14a, 22-32</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Psalm 16</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1 Peter 1:3-9</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>John 20:19-31</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Sermon ideas</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Prayers</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Musical suggestions</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Useful links</b> .....	<b>11</b>

## Introduction

The readings this week come in two fairly obvious pairs, a point worth considering when picking the readings.

The first pair is the Acts 2 pericope (from which we'll hear more at Pentecost) twinned with Psalm 16 – which Peter quotes in his Pentecost sermon at Jerusalem. Indeed, more than just quoting it, Peter's use of Psalm 16 is by way of exegetical proof that Jesus was to be resurrected and that the ancient King David had foreseen this.

The second pair is that favourite Eastertide reading of Thomas' doubting, found in John 20, paired with the commendation in 1 Peter 1 to those whom: "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, you believe in Him and rejoice."

In both cases a degree of dialogue presents itself between the two readings – both pairs have a 'major' reading which relates a key narrative of the apostles in the time immediately after Calvary (Peter's Pentecost sermon; Thomas' 'doubting') and a supplementary reading, which can be used to interrogate what we find in and learn from those episodes.

There are some ideas that can be adapted for sermons in each section of the exegesis below. In each case the preacher is faced with the task of unravelling the significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Themes of joy, doubt, trust, faith, hope, and promise are all available for mining. The plethora of emotions and the reality of the human condition found in each reading attest to the diversity of situations and experiences those of us hearing the Good News find ourselves in. A fact which was as true for the first disciples as for us today. The question is perhaps about how we can each – in our different life circumstances – hear the news of the resurrected Christ, and be transformed by the Spirit which is sent among us.

### [Acts 2:14a, 22-32](#)

Peter's point in this passage is simple, especially to the ears of Christians 2,000 years on: Jesus, the one who was crucified, is risen – for death could not hold Him. Whereas in the psalm (v10), David says faithfully 'you will not abandon my soul to Hades', Peter makes the point that David could not have been talking about himself – David's tomb is known to all – and was instead speaking prophetically about Jesus.

To those being addressed, however, Peter's message (and the grand authority with which it is delivered) must have seemed strange to the point of delusional. To those hearing, it perhaps seemed this speech about Jesus from His closest disciple is the grief-stricken

wishful thinking of one whose basis for hope and future has been lost. That, at least, would be understandable compared to the declaration that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from an ever-so-public crucifixion.

Yet Peter's tone is not one of wishful thinking – the speech is considered, precisely addressed, and voiced in the style of exegetical sermon. A little analysis of Peter's rhetoric reveals emphasis that would have been obvious to some listeners, but less so to our ears.

Peter knows that he is about to quote a psalm, attributed to King David, to the listeners. There is therefore significance in the words of address: first to people 'of Judea' and those in Jerusalem (famously David's capital city); and then to people 'of Israel.' To first-century Jewish ears, this dual address will carry connotations of the once-separated Jewish kingdoms, North and South, that King David brought together under one crown. Peter's address therefore begins with an appeal to the unity of the Jewish people he is talking to, but also of a universal relevance of the message. At Pentecost, the Church tends to focus on the coming of the Spirit to *all* the nations, and celebrate the unifying grace of God shown to all God's people, including the gentile. But it is interesting to note that Peter's sermon also carries implications for intra-Jewish relations among his hearers: Peter is presumably keen not to be seen as schismatic or separatist, and instead opens with the unifying figure of David.

The preacher might find in this a launch point for reflecting on the importance of finding unifying narratives even in the midst of upheaval, change, and new beginnings.

## [Psalm 16](#)

This is the psalm that Peter quotes in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. It is a psalm about God's protection and refuge. All at once the Psalmist is seeking: God's refuge in the present; praising God for protection in past times; and celebrating in the certainty of God's future promise. If the preacher takes up the theme of new beginning, change, upheaval (which this Easter/Pentecost season is ripe for) then Psalm 16 anchors the theme in the eternal and unchanging nature of God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If the Acts reading opens up questions around 'God doing a new thing' and the Spirit who 'blows where it wills' – which may raise uncertainty and even anxiety in us – then the psalm provides reassurance that God's protection and promise is unchanging in its assurance.

## [1 Peter 1:3-9](#)

Invariably, I find the epistles incredibly dense readings. A first reading/listening (and in church services, that is often all we get) leaves a sense of general edification, and possibly one or two of the more potent images stand out. In this instance it might be the image of the undefiled and imperishable inheritance awaiting us in heaven; or the image of trials working to put us to the test like gold in a refiner's fire. But beyond our receiving a general impression, epistles are hard work. On a grammatical level, single sentences tend to run on clause after clause, with multiple prepositional phrases, and numerous verbs relating to even more numerous nouns. And none of it is wielded lightly: the epistles are carefully constructed technical pieces of writing and teaching. A very close reading of each sentence bears much fruit – continually asking the questions of basic comprehension ('Who is doing what?'; 'In relation to what else?') as well as those of symbolic significance ('Why is that image invoked? What effect does that phrasing impart?'). I tend to pay particular attention to prepositions, which often hold the key to understanding what is going on. This has the effect of really slowing down the reading, and allows the full meaning to come through.

For example: in this reading I might note in the first sentence:

v3 begins with a blessing to God, specifically God the Father of Jesus Christ. This image of God frames the next statement: of us being reborn (i.e. of God the Father) *to* a living hope, *through* resurrection of Jesus Christ (whom God is also the Father of)...

v4 ... *to* an imperishable inheritance (keeping up the father-children metaphor; the multiple adjectives regarding the inheritance indicate this is an important image) kept in heaven for us...

v5 ... who are being guarded by God's power *through* faith *for* salvation, which will be revealed in the last time.

A similar approach to the rest of the reading reveals that the message centres on the observation: "Though you have not seen him, you love him." (v8) This obviously pairs well with the John 20 reading about Thomas, who refused to believe without seeing the risen Jesus in person.

## [John 20:19-31](#)

Thomas gets a hard time in the Christian consciousness. Where other disciples were constantly failing to 'get it' and made frequent mistakes (think Simon Peter, especially!), it is Thomas who is left with the moniker 'Doubting Thomas.' Verses 24-29 are a short story within themselves, focussed on the figure of Thomas. A tension is created with Thomas' adamant statement that he will not believe, "Unless I see..." This tension is allowed to sit unresolved for eight days, when Thomas is back with the disciples and has the certainty underpinning his previous prideful statement pulled out from under him. It is a well-known episode, and much preached upon – lending itself to multiple angles and methods of analysis.

But the Thomas episode is only one aspect of the reading. The first verses detail a hugely significant occasion: the breathing of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Where the Church tradition tends to major upon the Luke-Acts description of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, with the Spirit descending in tongues like fire; John's description of the same event is behind locked doors, more intimate and bookended by greetings of "Peace be with you." This is an important emphasis not to be passed over in this reading.

Also important, and worth some attention when preaching are verses 30-31. This is not least because they are addressed directly to us, as the reader. It is all very well analysing the gospel stories, learning them, even performing skilled and erudite exegesis upon them. But verses 30-31 are a statement of authorial intent, telling us precisely what the purpose of all this is: "*so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

## **Sermon ideas**

Sermon ideas and themes emerge in the treatment of the readings.

## **Prayers**

### **Prayer of approach**

Glorious God of all,  
You are the giver of new life,  
You are the one to whom we owe each breath,  
You are the reason for our hope.  
Send Your enlivening spirit, be present with us as we come close You,

seeking Your light to see what has been revealed  
seeking Your warmth to set hearts aglow with Your love  
seeking Your truth, that we might trust.  
As we proclaim the Easter gospel, that in You is life which conquers death,  
make us anew Your beloved children.

### **Prayer of confession**

Merciful God,  
We confess that too often we have lived lives of those not worthy to be called Your children.  
Though You are light, we have preferred to lurk in shadow,  
though You are truth, we have made idols of lies and falsehood,  
though You are love, we have been hard of heart.  
Too often You show us the Way, and we have wandered far off course.

We turn to You with repentant hearts, and seek Your forgiveness.  
We lay claim to your promise, and pray that You will transform us, re-make us,  
that we will live as Your children, and by word, thought and deed,  
we might lead lives worthy of subjects within Your kingdom of love, peace and mercy.  
Amen

### **Prayer of thanksgiving**

God of bountiful blessing,  
we thank You for the promise of Jesus Christ,  
who is the Life by which we live,  
and the perfection of Your holy glory.  
We thank You for the faith to believe that which we have not seen,  
and for Your mercy upon us as we clumsily grasp the significance of Your love.  
We thank You for Your sustaining strength as we try to lead lives which reflect Your glory,  
and for Your ever-present Spirit as our guide, helper and advocate.  
With thankful hearts we give You praise.  
Amen

### **Prayer of intercession**

We offer our prayers for those whom we trust will be fed by Your goodness:  
who will be nourished by Your presence.

We pray for all people around the world in fear of such violence:  
acts of war and destruction committed in the midst of peaceful civilian lives.

Where terror has a grip, where violence dominates,  
Lord, bring justice, bring peace.

We pray for those who know the harshness of natural disaster;  
where lives are lost in unpredictable catastrophe.  
Where floods ruin crops, where there will be no bountiful harvest this year;  
we pray for generosity and provision for all Your people.

We pray for those who are of poor health.  
We pray for those known to us, where poor health prevents full living;  
where pain is a daily reality; where frailty causes bodies to falter.  
Lord, give healing, give comfort, give perseverance.

We pray for those who mourn:  
those who mourn lives that have been lost;  
long lives well lived, which have come to an end;  
and lives which had still much promise and feel to us to have ended far, far too soon.  
We trust each life to You, saving God,  
and we trust that each soul finds its home in Your eternal love;  
but for those who mourn, who know any loss;  
give comfort, give reassurance,  
give Your gentle presence in the lives of us still living.

We pray for all those growing:  
for young people who so often are at the heart of a story of faith that we can overlook.  
We trust them to Your nurturing,  
and we pray that all those involved in the lives of young people and children  
will empower them to flourish today and tomorrow.

We lift all of these things to You now  
Offering the prayers of our own hearts; trusting them to You now  
in a moment of quietness

*[PAUSE for silent prayer]*

In all our prayers, we pray trusting in Your sure and certain promise,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen



## Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

- A playlist of suggested songs for Easter can be found online: <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/easter>
- You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.
- CH4 9 – “O God my refuge, keep me safe” – An elegant and relatively modern setting of the words of Psalm 16. If the given tune is unknown, it is in Common metre, and can be readily substituted.
- CH4 434 – “Jesus is risen from the grave” – Simple words with an easy ditty of a tune. Devising actions would be easily done. Verse 4 is particularly apt for John 20 reading
- CH4 459 – “Crown him with many crowns” – A rousing hymn, redolent with Eastertide imagery. Verse 3 is especially fitting with the John 20 reading (“behold his hands and side...”)
- CH4 469 – “Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name!” – This hymn echoes well the reading from 1 Peter, in a relatively modern worship style
- CH4 566 – “When I receive the peace of Christ” – It is telling that Jesus’ first post-resurrection words to His disciples gathered together are: “Peace be with you.” This is a wee jig of a tune in which we sing of the consequences of accepting Christ’s peace

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- While singing in our congregations is still restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?

Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?

How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?

How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?

- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and  
download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc., but reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.