

## Second Sunday of Easter – Year B

**Sunday 7 April 2024**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Jade MacLean, Assistant Minister at Ardgour, Morvern and Strontian Parish Church linked with Acharacle and Ardnamurchan Parish Church (the Peninsula Churches), for her thoughts on 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: <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

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 4:32-35 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Psalm 133 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 John 1:1-2:2.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>John 20:19-31.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sermon ideas .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Prayers .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Musical suggestions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Reflecting on our worship practice .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Useful links .....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Introduction

Today is the second Sunday in the season of Easter, also known as Low Sunday. We are not sure why, but it could be connected to coming down from the wonderful Easter celebrations which we held last weekend, or simply because so many clergy are exhausted after all these services – but other reasons are available.

April 7 is also the WHO [World Health Day](#), and the chosen topics and themes may be incorporated into worship, however at the time of writing, they have not yet been publicised.

As normal, there are many different subjects and topics found within the chosen lectionary readings, as the books were written by different authors in vastly diverse times and places. As such, at first glance it can be hard to discover one theme, or topic, to reflect on. I however, have discovered that reading and re-reading the weekly passages over a number of days can help to open my eyes, ears and heart to God's message, both the original meaning in its context and how it applies in our world today. It is also important to read the chapters around each passage to be able to grasp a deeper understanding of each reading. While this week the readings offer us many different subjects to study, some themes do jump out more than others and I have listed these below.

### Overarching themes

*Community and Unity:* The readings from the book of Psalms and Acts emphasise the beauty and strength found in the unity of God's people. In Acts, this is demonstrated through the shared life of the early Christians, and in Psalm 133, it's portrayed as a blessing from God.

*Fellowship with Christ:* Both John 20 and 1 John stress the importance of fellowship with Christ. 1 John speaks of the reality of this fellowship, and John 20 describes the peace and faith that result from encountering the risen Christ.

*Generosity and Sharing:* Acts 4 describes the generosity and sharing within the early Christian community, reflecting the selfless attitude of believers who considered others' needs as their own.

*Peace and Assurance:* John 20 and Psalm 133 both touch on the theme of peace. In John 20, Jesus brings peace to His disciples, and in Psalm 133, the unity of God's people is likened to a harmonious and peaceful experience.

These themes collectively portray the richness of the Christian experience, emphasising the importance of community, fellowship with Christ and each other, generosity, and the peace that comes from a life of faith. There should therefore be something for all of us to work with, even on Low Sunday.

Once settled on the theme or message for a week, I do like to look at commentaries, but also at various other sources such as poetry, secular authors/artists, film, TV and the news, to find inspiration for worship.

## [Acts 4:32-35](#)

*Theme: Unity and Generosity in the Early Christian Community*

The Book of Acts, often referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Traditionally attributed to the physician Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, Acts provides a detailed account of the early days of the Christian Church, chronicling the events that unfolded after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book spans a period of approximately three decades, capturing the journey of the disciples, the spread of the gospel, the birth of the early Christian community, and the remarkable activities of key figures such as Peter and Paul. Acts not only serves as a historical record but also explores the theological foundations of the Christian faith, exploring themes such as divine intervention, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the enduring mission of the Church.

Interestingly, the author does not try to make everything appear wonderful and includes examples of the many difficulties, differences of opinion and struggles that the fledgling Church encountered.

The passage for this week, however, is not looking at the negatives, but is emphasising the positive attributes of the early Church, with believers being described as having “one heart and mind” (v32, NIV), sharing everything they had, and caring for one another. The theme here focuses on the unity of believers and the generosity that flowed from their deep sense of community. This theme of unity is also found in today’s Psalm and these two passages would work well together as a base from which to build a service.

## [Psalm 133](#)

*Theme: Blessings of Unity*

The Psalms are a collection of 150 poetic and lyrical works found in the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible, and are attributed to various authors, including King David. These ancient

songs and prayers encompass a wide range of human experiences, emotions, and expressions of faith, providing a rich tapestry of worship and reflection from which to find inspiration.

Psalm 133 is a celebration of the beauty and value of unity within the community of believers. It uses vivid imagery to convey the richness of blessing that comes when God's people dwell together in harmony and mutual support of each other. An example of this imagery being the striking descriptions of oil being poured on Aaron's head, flowing down his beard and onto the collar of his robes. This description symbolises consecration and blessing, as anointing with oil was a ritualistic act associated with God's appointed leaders. This psalm serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of fostering unity and communal harmony within our faith and worship.

The opening statement: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (v1, NIV) could be used as a platform from which to begin your Call to worship, it could also be used as the central theme for your sermon, combining both this psalm and the reading from Acts.

## **1 John 1:1-2:2**

*Theme: Fellowship, Light, and Atonement*

The opening verses of 1 John 1 sets the tone for the entire epistle. The author, traditionally believed to be the apostle John, begins with a declaration about the nature of Jesus Christ. This introduction emphasises the reality of Christ's existence from the beginning, highlighting both His divine nature and His human presence here on Earth. It also focuses on the importance of fellowship, the themes of light and darkness, confession of sin, the advocacy of Jesus, and the practical implications of genuine faith. The letter challenges believers to live authentic lives, deeply rooted in the truth of the Gospel and characterised by love, obedience, and discernment.

This is a fantastic passage to tease out what it means to have faith; what are some of its important aspects. Some time could be spent reflecting on the benefits of light, investigating how the call to walk in the light should become a helpful, guiding principle for believers. Light exposes truth, and honesty about our strengths and weaknesses in our journey of faith is crucial. We must remember that confession isn't a mark of weakness but a pathway to forgiveness, cleansing, and deeper fellowship with God. The issue of confession of sins is another topic which an entire service could be structured round or it could be incorporated into more focused areas of worship, such as within the prayers.

Another theme for reflection and/or discussion which this passage emphasises, is the communal nature of our faith. It reminds us that we are not isolated individuals on this journey, rather we're part of a fellowship – a shared life with one another and with God. Time could therefore be spent unpacking what this means for us as the Church, as a congregation and as individual believers today.

## **John 20:19-31**

*Theme: Resurrection, Doubt, and Faith*

In John 20:19-31, we find two pivotal moments in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection. The first scene unfolds on the evening of the resurrection day. The disciples, fearing the authorities, have locked themselves in a room. Suddenly, Jesus appears in their midst, greeting them with the reassuring words, "Peace be with you." (v21). He shows them His hands and side, providing tangible evidence of His identity.

In the second scene we hear the story of Thomas, one of the disciples, who was absent during this encounter. When informed of Jesus' appearance, he expressed doubt, declaring that unless he saw and touched the wounds, he would not believe. A week later, Jesus appears again, inviting Thomas to touch His wounds. Overwhelmed, Thomas believes, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" and Jesus responds, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v29, NIV), acknowledging the faith of future generations.

I love this story. It is one of these passages when I can truly place myself in Thomas' sandals and I think many others will feel the same. This passage beautifully encapsulates themes of doubt, faith, and the transformative power of encountering the risen Christ. It emphasises the importance of faith that goes beyond mere physical evidence, allowing the reader to acknowledge their own moments of doubt, doing so in the light of Jesus' forgiveness and love for Thomas.

This is a wonderful passage to reflect and ask questions on:

- What does it mean to have faith?
- What does it mean to have doubts?
- How can we introduce people to the risen Jesus?
- What do you think Thomas felt when the others told them about Jesus' visit?
- What do you think Thomas felt before/after he touched the wounds?

This passage could also be used as an aid to help people share their own testimonies, to tell how they met and believed in the risen Christ.

## **Sermon ideas**

As you may have noticed, within these passages there are a lot of different themes and topics which could be explored in a sermon. Take time to reflect on each reading – spending time in prayer and meditation, allowing God to speak to you, to guide you in the right direction. This could end up being a full sermon, looking at the topics of fellowship and unity, of Christian community or of doubt and belief amongst other things.

But perhaps a sermon is not being used. Instead, could you spend time in groups discussing what these themes and topics mean for people today? For example, trying to understand and unpack why our idea of fellowship is significantly different from that of the early Church, and what are the problems or benefits that this has caused within the Christian community.

Maybe some prayer stations could be set up, looking at the themes of light, doubt, sin, forgiveness, belief, fellowship, blessing etc., allowing people time to move around a space, either in groups or as individuals, delving into some of these topics on a deeper level.

Finally, as mentioned above, this might be a day when people are stirred to share their testimonies, to tell others how, like Thomas, they came to truly believe in the risen Christ. This is not something we do very often within Sunday worship, so people may need clear instruction and encouragement. However it is an important part of sharing our faith story with the wider community.

## **Prayers**

Public prayer did not come easily to me as it was not part of my traditional Sunday worship. As I became involved in leading services I had to be taught how to pray and I found that, for me, prayer was a difficult part of leading a worship service. I would suggest therefore, that the prayers are best kept short and to the point. Children are very good at doing this and we have much to learn from them when it comes to prayer.

I also find it helpful to allow time for personal prayer to be incorporated within worship. As I mentioned earlier, this is World Health Day and while I am unsure what the theme for this year will be, once known, it may be beneficial to include it within the prayers.

Keeping up to date with important world, community, church and individuals' issues and events (both the good and the bad) and including them within public prayer – where possible and appropriate – is also helpful.

### **Call to worship**

*The call to worship could be as simple as reading Psalm 133, or there could be a call and response aspect to it, using the Acts passage for inspiration.*

Let us gather with hearts united,  
drawn together by the bonds of faith and the spirit of unity.

**For the early believers were of one heart and mind,  
sharing all they had,  
creating a harmonious melody of love.**

As we enter this sacred space,  
let us embrace the spirit of generosity and communal love,  
just as the early Christians did in Jerusalem.

**May our worship be a reflection of this fellowship and unity –  
where no one claimed private ownership,  
but all things were held in common.**

In this shared sacred moment,  
let us open our hearts to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit,  
who moves among us, binding us together in love.

**We come, not as individuals alone,  
but as a community,  
where the needs of one are met by the abundance of another.**

Let our worship be a symphony of selfless love,  
echoing the chorus of the early believers,  
testifying to the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Together, let us worship in unity,  
offering our hearts, minds, bodies,  
souls, and possessions,  
knowing that in our shared devotion**



**we encounter the presence of the risen Christ.**

May our worship today be a testimony  
to the boundless hope,  
joy, grace and faith that unites us,  
over distance and time –

**One body, one family, gathered in love.  
Amen.**

**Confession / Repentance** *(Based on the story of Thomas from John's Gospel)*

Gracious and merciful God,  
We come before You with humble hearts,  
acknowledging the doubts that linger within us  
and the moments when our faith wavers.  
In the stillness of this sacred space,  
we confess our shortcomings and seek Your forgiveness.

*[Hold a time of silence]*

Like the disciples in the locked room,  
we sometimes find ourselves paralysed by fear –  
fear of the unknown, fear of inadequacy,  
and fear of the challenges that lie ahead.  
In those moments, we have doubted Your presence  
and questioned Your plans for us.

Lord, forgive us for the times we have struggled  
to fully trust in Your resurrection power.  
Forgive us for the moments when we've allowed doubt  
to overshadow the profound truth of Your victory over death.  
In the spirit of Thomas,  
we confess that there are times  
when we demand tangible evidence,  
seeking assurance in what we can see and touch  
rather than trusting in the unseen reality of Your love and grace.

We repent of our limited vision  
and ask for the faith to believe without always needing to see.

Grant us the strength to embrace the blessedness  
of those who trust in Your word  
without demanding visible proof.  
Lord Jesus, just as You showed Your wounds to Thomas,  
reveal to us the areas in our lives  
where healing and transformation are needed.  
Make us aware of the woundedness around us,  
and guide us in acts of compassion, mercy, and reconciliation.

*[Hold a time of silence]*

May the same Spirit that breathed peace into the locked room  
breathe forgiveness and renewal into our hearts today.  
Empower us to go forth with courage,  
sharing the good news of Your resurrection  
and embodying the love that casts out fear.

We offer this prayer in the name of the Risen Christ,  
who continues to transform doubt into faith  
and darkness into everlasting light.  
Amen.

### **Thanksgiving / Gratitude**

*A prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude could simply involve people voicing the things that make them happy and give them joy. Alternatively, you could hand out post-it notes and ask people to write down the things they are grateful for before placing them at the front, or on a wall, table, etc. If using Psalm 133 as the main text for your service, this is a possible approach you could take for a led thanksgiving prayer.*

Creator God,  
as we come before You in prayer,  
our hearts overflow with gratitude and thanksgiving  
for the precious gift of unity and fellowship.

We thank You, Lord, for the bond that unites us as a community of believers.  
Like the precious oil that flowed down Aaron's beard,  
we acknowledge the anointing of Your Spirit,  
covering us with grace, love, and the assurance of Your presence.

We are grateful for the refreshing dew, as on Mount Hermon,  
symbolising the life-giving essence of our shared faith.

Your grace descends upon us,  
bringing renewal, strength, and a sense of connectedness  
that transcends our individual lives.

Thank You, Father, for the harmonious symphony  
created when we, Your children, live for each other,  
no matter our differences.

In our diversity, You weave a tapestry of love,  
understanding, and compassion,  
echoing the beauty of Your kingdom on earth.

As we reflect on the goodness of unity,  
we offer our thanksgiving  
for the moments of laughter, hope, happiness, togetherness,  
of comfort, strength and the ability to share the weight of our burdens,  
which is found in genuine fellowship.

Your presence among us, Lord, brings harmony to our gatherings  
and peace and joy to our hearts.

May our gratitude be expressed not only in words  
but also in our actions toward one another.  
Empower us to love sincerely, to forgive readily,  
and to bear each other's burdens willingly,  
embodying the harmony that the Word we heard today celebrates.

Thank You, Lord, for the precious gift of unity –  
a gift that reflects the essence of Your nature.  
We are grateful for the fellowship we share  
as brothers and sisters in Christ,  
bound together by the love that surpasses all understanding.  
In Jesus' name, we offer this prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving.  
Amen.

**Prayer for others / Intercession** *(Based on 1 John 1:1-22)*

*Keep an eye on the news and an ear to the ground, listening for the significant issues within your community, so that you can pray for key situations as they occur.*

*I have worshipped in congregations where individual people and circumstances are publicly prayed for, however this is not something that happens everywhere, so adapt this prayer according to your local custom.*

Gracious God,  
As we lift our hearts in prayer,  
we intercede on behalf of Your beloved children,  
recognising the challenges and joys  
that shape our shared journey of faith.

We pray for those who, like the disciples,  
may be wrestling with doubt or fear.  
May the light of Your truth dispel the shadows,  
bringing reassurance and peace.  
Strengthen their faith and grant them the courage  
to walk boldly in Your light.

Lord, we intercede for those burdened by the weight of unconfessed sins.  
May the spirit of confession and repentance bring healing and restoration.  
Shower them with the assurance of Your forgiveness,  
cleansing them from all unrighteousness.

We lift up those who long for genuine fellowship  
within the community of believers.  
May Your Spirit foster unity, understanding, and love,  
creating a bond that reflects the beauty of the fellowship  
the early Church aspired to.  
May our shared life be a testimony  
to the transformative power of Your grace.

We intercede for those who feel isolated or lonely,  
yearning for connection.  
Wrap them in the warmth of Your love  
and guide us to be instruments of companionship and support.

May we actively seek out those in need  
and extend the hand of friendship.

Lord, we bring before You  
the broken relationships within our communities.  
Heal wounds, reconcile hearts, and inspire forgiveness.  
May the love that binds us together overcome any discord,  
and may *our* unity reflect the unity found in Your Triune nature.

We pray for those facing adversity, illness, or distress.  
Embrace them with Your comforting presence  
and grant them strength to endure.  
Use us, Your church, as channels of Your love,  
bringing practical help and compassion to those in need.

In our intercession, we remember those  
who have not yet encountered the fullness of Your light.  
Illuminate their hearts and minds,  
drawing them into the fellowship of believers.  
May our lives be living testimonies,  
inviting others into the transformative relationship found in Christ.

And now Lord, we bring before You the names and situations  
that lie heaviest on our hearts.

*[Hold a time of silence]*

Lord, as we intercede for these needs,  
we place our trust in Your boundless love and mercy.  
In Jesus' name, we pray.  
Amen.

### **Blessing / Closing prayer**

*The Grace is always a good and acceptable way to finish a service.  
If you want something different then take your theme of the week and work it into a short  
prayer, such as the following, looking at the theme of unity.*

Remember God loves you.  
May the Spirit of unity hover over your hearts like a gentle dove,

knitting you together in the love of Christ.  
May your bonds of fellowship be strong,  
your understanding deep,  
and your shared purpose unwavering.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
may the peace, grace, strength, joy and love,  
given so freely by God  
be your constant companion,  
not to be kept, but to be offered in fellowship  
and shared with all whom you meet. 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.

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 90 – “How good it is when God’s will is done” – Psalm 133 set to music for worship today.
- CH4 419 – “Thine be the glory” – Apart from being a fabulously rousing hymn there are links here to the John passage and the emotions of all the disciples as they came face-to-face with the risen Christ
- CH4 528 – “Make me a channel of your peace” – a wonderful hymn which can be used in connection with both the Acts passage as well as the 1 John 1: 1-22
- CH4 540 – “I heard the voice of Jesus say” – verse 3 is particularly suitable if you are taking the theme of light
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness” – also suitable for the theme of light, but equally can be used with the Acts passage, with phrases such as “Let us be

servants to one another”

- CH4 786 – “May the God of peace go with us” – a lovely hymn to finish the service
- MP 54 – “Bind Us Together, Lord” – a cheery hymn to use when looking at the theme of unity
- It might also be useful to play a gentle piece of music during the service to allow for private prayer and reflection to occur without a defining silence. Some music from the Taizé community can work for this, as can many classical pieces and [Ruth Fazal](#) has some beautiful tracks to choose from.

## 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’.
- If singing in our congregations is 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

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. If you would like to reproduce this material for commercial purposes, please contact the copyright holders, the Faith Action Programme, for permission: [faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:faithaction@churchofscotland.org.uk)

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.

©Faith Action Programme