

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit
Sunday Worship Sheet 24 April 2022 (Easter 2)

Our worship for this week was written by John Hay. You may wish to have your Bible and copy of the weekly prayer sheet to hand. Please note the hymns are now at the back of the sheet for ease of printing. CCLI licence 556292

Be still, be quiet....reflect on your journey with God which has brought you to this point today when you are worshipping God using this sheet. Reflect also on who else might be using it or worshipping God in some other form today, whether in a live, Zoom or hybrid service. Be reminded that God is present with you, joining you to many others doing the same thing as you. Imagine as you say those prayers with bold responses that you are all saying this as one together. Be still, be quiet.....

Prayer of approach

Eternal God ever present, ever loyal, we come to you in this quiet space, each with our different experiences of faith, but with one longing to serve you; each with our own questions and doubts, but with one heart to learn from you; each with our own burdens and joys, but as one in our desire to worship you in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn STF 316 When Easter to the dark world came

Prayer of Adoration

God of all the world, we believe in the fact that you created us, we believe in the fact that you love us, we believe in the fact that your Son died for us – even when it seems too good to be true, even when we long for a deeper encounter, even though there is so much that is mystery. We believe that you are our God, and we praise and adore you, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Reading – John 20 v 19 - 31

Prayer of confession

Living God, forgive us when in our hearts we say unless our prayers are answered, we won't believe. **Deepen our encounter with you and show us the truth of love.**

Forgive us when we say unless we can go our way, we won't follow you. **Deepen our encounter with you and show us the truth of love.**

Forgive us when we want to be disciples but on our terms. **Deepen our encounter with you and show us the truth of love.**

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn STF 314 This joyful Easter time

Reflection

I like Thomas. As much as I would like to be a Peter, of all the disciples, it is Thomas who resonates most with me. A brooding, half empty kind of guy; a loner, prone to feelings of being overwhelmed or even perhaps depression. Where was he, what was he doing when Jesus appeared to the ten in the locked room? He was a man who cared, felt and thought deeply, so it takes no great leap of imagination to envisage him somewhere weeping, trying to digest what had just happened, beating himself up, alone. But above all, I resonate with his questioning nature, his demand for truth and his desire to understand. As a child I used to drive my parents and relatives mad with my endless questions. “What if, why, who, how, when???” Question after question, sometimes wearing to endure, but the product of someone wanting to find out what is going on. If Truth and understanding are to be found a degree of cynicism is sometimes desirable also, and Thomas had that. In my book, the fact that Thomas did not accept the word of the others just like that, is fair play. I would have been the same.

We are not asked to disengage our brains as we come through the church door. It is okay to question, to scrutinize, to doubt. The philosopher Onora O’Neill writes about the importance of trust; “Well-placed trust grows out of active inquiry rather than blind acceptance. In traditional relations of trust, active inquiry was usually extended over time by talking and asking questions, by listening and seeing how well claims to know and undertakings to act held up.” This is very much the process described in John’s Gospel, where questioning and listening, hearing words and seeing acts, doing and knowing belong together. The Gospel is about “relations of trust” and Jesus is helping Thomas not to doubt him but to trust him.

Thomas’s story is the story of someone who longs for a new way of knowing, and a reminder to us that doubt and faith are not mutually exclusive. Doubt, questioning and some healthy skepticism are part of developing faith and can lead to deeper commitment.

There is something else too we can take from another well-known story, which comes in different versions. Six blind men encounter an elephant, each touching and feeling a different part of its body. No one recognizes the animal as an elephant because each person’s partial experience and limited perception gives them only a small part of the whole truth, leading to great argument about what the truth really was.”To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together” concludes some versions of the story. “How can each of you be so certain you are right?” asks another.

There is nothing to be feared about someone raising questions, doubts. Truth is not to be grasped too tightly, or we risk choking it. It is like an onion with many layers. We can learn much from each other, gain insight and understanding, but we have to be prepared to engage with others, to explore the possibility that there are more layers to peel off and we may not know the full truth right now. That can be unsettling.

History has treated Thomas harshly. “Doubting Thomas” we derisively call him. If we were being fairer, perhaps it would be Thomas the Questioner. Or better still, “Thomas the Understanding” or “Thomas the Affirming”, for when faced with Jesus, he was immediate in his affirmation of faith, his understanding of who Jesus is. It was he, not Peter, who first twigged that Jesus was not just a man, but God too! “My Master and my God!”

Finally, this. Thomas had his questions, his doubts, but that did not keep him away from being back with the others a week later. He may have been cynical, but he was open to the possibility of the truth of what he had been told, otherwise why would he be there at all? Nor did he think his way to faith on his own somewhere. He was with the others when Jesus came to him, and he saw for himself. Together is better.

Prayers of intercession *(use in conjunction with weekly prayer sheet)*

In places where there is conflict between nations leading to violence and destruction, on decision-makers and ordinary people: Spirit of unity, **bring comfort and peace.**

To the leaders of different religions and to their faithful followers, where there is difference and dispute: Spirit of unity, **bring comfort and peace.**

In homes where people live in fear of violence and abuse; where there is neither safety nor sanctuary: Spirit of unity, **bring comfort and peace.**

In communities fragmented by greed, disagreement and discord, to peacemakers and those who seek to bring healing: Spirit of unity, **bring comfort and peace.**

May the risen Lord be present through the Holy Spirit to heal, renew and fill people with hope. In his name we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn STF 297 Christ is alive!

Closing Prayer

God beyond our understanding, yet always with us, we offer to you: our minds to think of your words and your promises; our hearts to show your love for the world; our imagination to dream big for your kingdom; our hands to work for a better world, and all of our lives to love and serve you always. **Amen.**

Hymn 316

- 1 When Easter to the dark world came,
fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame :
*at Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*
- 2 When Mary in the garden walked,
and with her risen Master talked :
- 3 When John and Peter in their gloom
met angels at the empty tomb :
- 4 When ten disciples met in fear,
then 'Peace' said Jesus, 'I am here.'
- 5 When Thomas' heart was hurt and
grieved,
then Jesus' wounds his doubt relieved :
- 6 And friend to friend in wonder said :
'The Lord is risen from the dead !'
- 7 This Eastertide with joyful voice
we'll sing : 'The Lord is King ! Rejoice !'
*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,
O sing, all the world, for Eastertide.*

W. H. Hamilton (1886–1958)

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Hymn 314

- 1 This joyful Eastertide,
what need is there for grieving ?
Cast all your cares aside
and be not unbelieving :
*Come, share our Easter joy
that death could not imprison,
nor any power destroy,
our Christ, who is arisen !*
- 2 No work for him is vain,
no faith in him mistaken,
for Easter makes it plain
his kingdom is not shaken :
- 3 Then put your trust in Christ,
in waking and in sleeping.
His grace on earth sufficed ;
he'll never quit his keeping :

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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Hymn 297

- 1 Christ is alive ! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.
- 2 Christ is alive ! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.
- 3 In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.
- 4 Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.
- 5 Christ is alive and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

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