

Reflections for Sunday 19 April



Almighty ever-present God, we worship you as one beyond all time and space.

We worship you as the God made known to us through Christ, fully human yet wholly other.

We worship you as the God who loves us as a parent loves their children, tender and protective.

We worship you as the God we experience within us, the God who comes to fire our imagination and set our hearts on fire through your Spirit.

Almighty God help us to catch a sense of your greatness, your tenderness, your love as we open our hearts and minds to your presence.

Amen

Video: <https://youtu.be/Ga6Qtzxd6vk> Lord I come to you

Jesus Appears to His Disciples -John 20:19-29

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

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

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

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!” 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.”

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

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believe

<https://youtu.be/4M-zwE33zHA> Because he lives are you do

Reflection

Often our Easter Services begin with the wonderfully joyous acclamation “Christ is risen! Alleluia!” and we reply “Alleluia! He is risen indeed!”

Yet that first Easter did not start that way. It began as a day of darkness, within as well as without. A day in which the disciples were afraid, cowering behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish authorities doing to them what they had done to their friend, teacher and mentor. In that upper room the atmosphere would have been charged with tension, the disciples questioning why had it happened, how had it happened and why did we do nothing. Accusations may have been flying around or simply self-recriminations. Peter, filled with guilt after his bold declaration of “I will never abandon you” and then fleeing the scene. Certainly, grief would have been raw with some sitting in stunned silence, paralysed by fear and uncertainty. They would have already been told by the women that they had seen him risen so may have been discussing this when suddenly there he is, standing amongst them. Picture the scene. Shock, disbelief, questioning their own eyes, followed by tears of joy and excited chatter.

Those words, “Peace be with you” calming their hearts, their minds and their anxieties. Not any peace but the peace which passes all understanding. A peace which comes in the face of danger and conflict, a peace which gives strength, purpose and resolve. He continued by telling them that he was sending them out just as God had sent him out. To go out into a world which rejected rather than accepted, a world which marginalised a great many of the people, a world where judgement was the order of the day. They were to go into the world and spread the message of hope, a message of reconciliation and unconditional love. Mmm look what that led to for Jesus. This is where the strength and resolve comes in. The time between Easter and Pentecost allowed Jesus to prepare the disciples to take on this task. He met with them several times helping them let go of the expectation of Jesus saving the world and taking up the mantel.

However not everyone was there that time in the upper room. Thomas was not there and no matter how many times or how many people tried to convince him he was having none of it. It was too fantastic for him to grasp and chose his own understanding of how things are rather than the many sources of differing views. Does that sound familiar?

Here we are in 2020, locked out of our churches and sitting at home behind our own closed doors for fear of catching and spreading the virus. This is an unseen enemy which some are choosing to ignore because they have not seen with their own eyes and disbelieve all that is being told them by experts and friends alike. We are being told to stay at home for the good of all. It should be out of love and not fear that we comply with this order.

What we are seeing, I believe is a shift in societal norms, a shift to unconditional acts of love and kindness, a pulling together with purpose. It is proving to be a time of letting go of old ways and embracing new ways of being. We as church members are mastering the art of Zoom (with varying degrees of success) and sharing in spiritual companionship in ways would never have believed possible. Our older members joining WhatsApp and communicating via email. We are becoming closer and getting to know each other at a deeper level. When this is all over I pray it will continue in this vain and we will be sent OUT by Jesus as he was sent out. I have found in Pool a true coming together of Church and community and look forward to taking that forward when lock down is over.

“Fear is an emotion induced by perceived danger or threat which causes physiological changes and ultimately behavioural changes, such as fleeing, hiding, or freezing from perceived traumatic events.”

Fear leads us to a dark place and can paralyse us from action. We become prisoners and our hearts and souls are locked away. Our fears can be buried and we are able to function but to be truly free we need to unlock the door and step out. We don't do it alone as Christ is always with us whispering “Peace be with you”. At the top you will see a picture of a locked door. I invite you to click on it and listen to the music whilst you open your own doors and contemplate what stops you from stepping out. What are the thing which trap you and make you fearful?

Video: <https://youtu.be/EAdRk9c1R1o> Do not be afraid

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember the trauma which your suffering and death brought to your followers, a grief which was beyond words and which seemed to be beyond healing.

We pray for those who suffer today, all who endure constant pain, who wrestle with illness, who are victims of violence. We especially pray for those living with symptoms of Covid-19. For those who have lost loved ones and have not been able to be with them and unable to be present at their burial.

Gracious God, where there is pain and sorrow, grant your peace.

We pray for all those who are considered keyworkers and putting their lives at risk, unable to stay behind protective doors. For their families as they live in fear for them. For the unseen sacrifices made by many during this time.

Gracious God, where there is fear and uncertainty, bring your peace.

We pray for our Government and the leaders around the world who are having to manage this Pandemic. For the WHO and may aid agencies fighting to bring much needed aid to all regardless of state or nationality. Gracious God, where there is indecision and division, bring your peace.

We pray for ourselves as we respond to your call to be Christlike and bring your love and peace to others. Gracious God, where there is doubt and questioning, bring your peace.

Let us pray as a dispersed unity of the Body of Christ the prayer that Christ taught us.

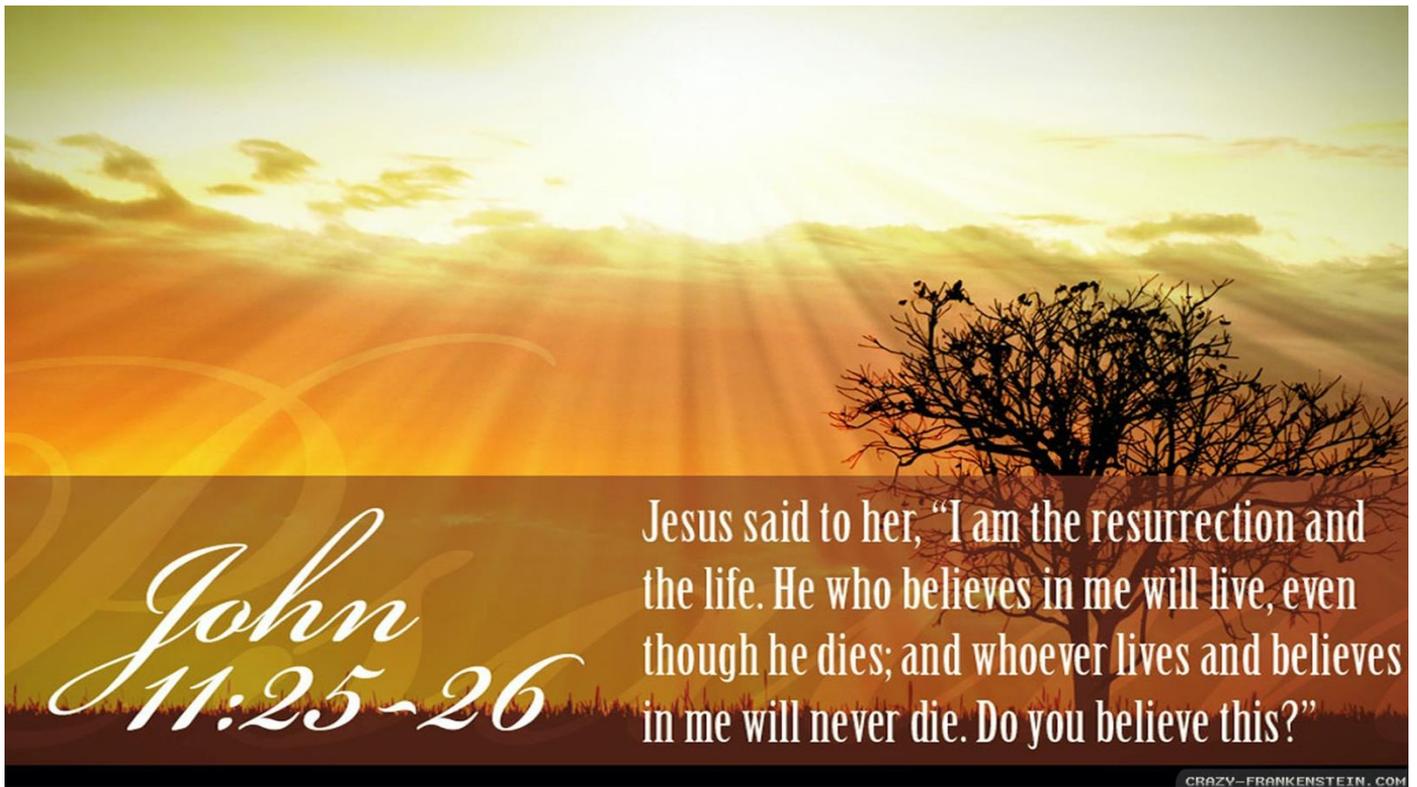
Our Father.....

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of Christ, and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love, today and always. Amen

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

God bless and until we meet again may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Leonora



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