

Written Service 16th April 2023
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev Alan Hargrave

Note: You may wish to use the [links](#) to access hymns on **YouTube** (apologies for any adverts that may pop up!) or simply sing them yourself from the text written below.

Welcome Welcome to our worship this morning. We are here to celebrate Christ's resurrection in this season of Easter. But before we begin, let us take a moment to still our hearts before God. You may care to say the following, slowly and quietly:

**Be still , Be silent, Alone,
Empty Before your God
Say nothing.
Be silent, Be still
Let your God look on you. Let God love you.**

Easter Greeting Now, let us proclaim the glory of Easter, which is at the heart of our faith:
Alleluia, Christ is Risen **He is risen indeed. Alleluia**

Hymn And let us proclaim Christ's resurrection as we sing: Led like a lamb
[https://youtu.be/ Tf_gYmJaig](https://youtu.be/Tf_gYmJaig)

**Led like a lamb to the slaughter in silence and shame,
There on Your back You carried a world of violence and pain.
Bleeding, dying, bleeding, dying.
*You're alive, You're alive, You have risen, Alleluia!
And the power and the glory is given, Alleluia, Jesus, to You.***

**At break of dawn, poor Mary, still weeping she came,
When through her grief she heard Your voice now speaking her name.
Mary, Master, Mary, Master!
*You're alive, You're alive, etc.***

**At the right hand of the Father now seated on high
You have begun Your eternal reign of justice and joy.
Glory, glory, glory, glory.
*You're alive, You're alive, etc.***

Graham Kendrick

Prayer

Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:
open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others
and walk the joyful road of service, peace and risen life,
to the praise of God the Father. **Amen.**

Confession Christ's resurrection renews our hope and faith. Yet, as we look at the world around us, we see that God's Kingdom has not yet come 'on earth as it is in heaven'. So let us bring before God everything in ourselves and in our world which spoils, hurts and disfigures what God has made.

Lord our God, in these troubled times, with a world in turmoil and an uncertain future, it is hard to hold onto faith in you as the Lord of all Creation.

When we doubt you

Reveal your presence to us

We wonder why you allow such atrocities in Ukraine, in Afghanistan, in Iran, in Yemen, in so many places around the world.

When we doubt you

Show us your hands and side

We find it hard to watch the news. So much of it is just too painful, too alarming. It is easier to switch over, to try and ignore it.

When we cannot face the reality

Speak peace to our hearts

We confess that, for years, we have not heeded the dire warnings about global warming.

For the damage done to your creation

Forgive us, Lord

Lord God, we have failed you and failed the future of our grandchildren. Yet you freely forgive us and offer us a new start. Help us to face the future with courage, hope and determination to pray and to work for a better world, in whatever ways we can. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

John 20:19-29

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have

you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

For the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Reflection

What happens to poor old Thomas is classic. We've all been there. You are watching England vs India in a tight, one-day international at Trent Bridge. But you are also bursting for the loo. Finally, you can wait no longer. But just as you get down the stairs, there is a tremendous roar from the crowd – a wicket has fallen and you've missed it. Worse still, just as you are about to go back up the stairs after your pee, another huge cheer. You've missed that one too!

Just like poor old Thomas. Out doing the shopping and missing all the action. And when he does get back the disciples are full of it. So, caught between disbelief and sheer annoyance, Thomas declares: 'Unless I see for myself the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the nail holes and put my hand into the wound in his side, I, for one, will **not** believe.'

A week passes – which is a long time to be stuck with his insufferable colleagues. But, sure enough, seven days later, Jesus appears again. This time Thomas *is* with them. And Jesus turns straight to him and says: 'Mmmmm. Didn't believe, eh? Well, what are you waiting for? Have a good look at my hands. Go on. Feel them. And give me **your** hand – put it here, into this still-open gash in my side. Don't carry on doubting, Thomas. Believe!' And Thomas falls down at Jesus' feet and says: 'My Lord and my God.'

But Thomas is not the only one who has trouble believing in the resurrection. Mary Magdalene fails to recognise Jesus at the tomb, mistaking him for the gardener. Two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus spend hours talking with this apparent stranger, not realising that it is, in fact, Jesus. The disciples return to Galilee and are out fishing when he calls to them from the shore, telling them to throw the net over the other side of the boat. But its only when their nets are breaking with a huge catch of fish that John turns to Peter and says: 'It's the Lord!' And at the end of Matthew's gospel, it says: 'When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some still doubted.'

Why? Why do these people, who have lived so intimately with Jesus for the past 3 years, fail to recognise Jesus? Why? There are a number of possible explanations. But personally, I think it is because of this: **trauma, suffering and pain** changes people. Like the suffering of Jesus, flogged half to death by the Romans so that he couldn't even carry his own cross. Hands and feet nailed through splintered bone. Left to hang, knees deliberately bent, so that he is gasping in agony, for every breath, an excruciatingly painful way to die. And after all that, Jesus is simply **not the same** as he was on Maundy Thursday. He still has those holes in his hands. Still has the open, raw wound in his side. Still, no doubt, has the deep furrows of the Roman lash on his back. And he still holds the appalling, traumatic experience of it all, etched deep inside him. Suffering changes us.

It has probably happened to many of **you**. It has certainly happened more than once to me. I go to visit someone in hospital and ask the nurse which bay she is in. But when I get there, I can't find her. Finally, I notice her name above the bed – which makes me catch my breath to see this robust, full of life woman I know, now so drawn and thin, so yellow and haggard, that I don't even recognize her. Cancer patients. Covid victims. People who've suffered severe trauma or a tragic bereavement – now hardly recognizable, a shadow of their former selves. Suffering changes us!

So, it is worth noting just **how** it is that Thomas recognizes Jesus. He is certainly on the right track when he demands to see and feel the marks of the nails and of the spear wound in Jesus' side. After all, no one could impersonate those, could they? And so it is, that Thomas recognizes Jesus **not so much** by his riseness, but by his **woundedness**.

The thing is, the risen Jesus is not the same as the pre-arrested Jesus of Maundy Thursday. Jesus **is** risen. But he is **not** risen pristine or perfect. He is **risen-wounded**.

Just like many of us in fact. Scarred and wounded by life. By deep grief. By war. By betrayal. By guilt. By serious illness. By neglect or abuse or addiction. By pain and suffering - sometimes of our own making. These things mark us. They change us, often permanently.

Nicholas Wolterstorff was an American professor of theology and philosophy at Yale University when his oldest son, Eric, died in a climbing accident in the Alps. Wolterstorff writes about this terrible experience in his deeply honest and profound book '**Lament for a Son**'. What particularly struck me was his description of the time, months after Eric's death, when he begins to get his life back together. He even finds himself enjoying things, laughing. But he then struggles with his ambivalent feelings about it. Enjoyment almost feels like a betrayal of his son's death. But, as he is wrestling with these mixed feelings, he re-reads and reflects on this passage from John's gospel about doubting Thomas. And he says this:

'So, I shall struggle to live the reality of Christ's rising and death's dying. In my living my son's death will not have the last word. But as I rise up, I still bear the wounds of his death. My rising does not remove them. They mark me. And, if you want to know who I am now, put your hand in.'

I could say the same - and I dare say many of you could too. Resurrection living isn't about being pristine or perfect. It is about living as fully, as hopefully, as joyfully, as openly, as honestly as we can, **with** the scars and **with** the wounds, some of which may still be raw and open.

In many ways Thomas was lucky. He **did** see and feel the risen Christ. We are those who: 'have not seen and yet believe.' And we live like those addressed by Peter in his epistle when he says:

'Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.'

So, this Eastertide, as we emerge from Covid, but with Ukraine, economic and other troubles closer to home, hanging heavily upon us, Jesus says to us: 'Yes. I know what you have been through – I know what you **are going** through. The grief, the pain, the fear, the struggles, the scars, the raw, open wounds. But these things will not have the last word. So, instead, why not let **me** lift you up, **with** the scars, and **with** those raw, still-open wounds. Let me lift you up to live, and to love, and to laugh again, with me, your **risen-wounded Lord**?'

Amen.

Hymn And so, let us sing again of the one who is no stranger to pain, suffering and death

<https://youtu.be/ejCIBRsvkUM>

Come and see, come and see, come and see the King of love

See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears

Soldiers mock, rulers sneer, as he lifts the cruel cross

Lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill

We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet

And a guilty world is washed, by love's pure stream

*For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in
Deep wounds of love cry out 'Father, forgive'
I worship, I worship, the Lamb who was slain.*

**Come and weep, come and mourn, for your sin that pierced him there
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail
All our pride, all our greed, all our fallenness and shame
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him**

**Man of heaven, born to earth, to restore us to your heaven
Here we bow in awe beneath Your searching eyes
From your tears comes our joy, from your death our life shall spring
By your resurrection power we shall rise**

*We worship at your feet, where wrath and mercy meet
And a guilty world is washed, by love's pure stream
For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in
Deep wounds of love cry out 'Father, forgive'
I worship, I worship, the Lamb who was slain.*

C. Graham Kendrick Music

Intercessions Let us pray.

We come to God just as we are, with our scars, our troubles, our open wounds; with all that leaves us cast down, unable to lift our heads. So much so that we often seem unable to see Christ's risen life around us. Lift us up, Lord we pray, from despair to hope, from unbelief to faith, from cynicism to joy, from fear to courage, with you, our wounded, risen Lord.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray, O God, for all who are scarred by conflict, strife, wars. We pray for the people of Ukraine, for those who have fled to other countries, for those who stayed to fight, for those hugging traumatized children in cold cellars, for all who have lost loved ones. And, as the winter frosts melt and renewed fighting looks imminent, we pray for a swift and just end to this terrible & utterly unnecessary conflict.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray women in Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and many other places where they are denied the basic freedom to an education, to a career, to equality with men. Have mercy upon such women and girls, many of whom have suffered deep scars for demanding their rights.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

And we pray for those on our own hearts. Those who bear the deep scars and open wounds of their life's experience. Let us hold them before God now.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

And let us not forget to give thanks to God, in this Easter season, for all the signs of new life, of growth, of colour, of hope, of joy. Let us thank God for the many millions of decent, ordinary folk who, despite their troubles, live with generosity, kindness, hope and goodness in their hearts. Maybe there are people you particularly want to give thanks for now?

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Two prayers from the Australian writer and cartoonist, Michael Leunig:

Dear God, that which is Christlike within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken.
And that which is Christlike within us shall rise up. It shall love and create. **Amen.**

Dear God, we celebrate spring's returning and the rejuvenation of the natural world. Let us be moved by this vast, gentle insistence that goodness shall return, that darkness and cold shall give way to warmth and light, that life will overcome death; that love shall prevail. And help us to understand our place within this miracle, that, as a bird builds its nest, bravely, with small, unpromising bits and pieces, so we must build human life. It is our simple duty, the highest art, our vital role within God's miracle of creation. **Amen.**

Finally, let us remind ourselves, despite all that is going on in the world, that Jesus **is** risen and that **He will** have the last word.

Hymn Thine be the Glory <https://youtu.be/bPjTfw4a2ZE>

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;
life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

Blessing

**May the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,
strengthen us, in the power of the Spirit, to live his risen life of love and service.
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son & Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us, now and always. Amen.**

So, let us go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.