



Opening prayer

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
Your steadfast love extends to the heavens
and your faithfulness never ceases.
Illuminate our hearts with your wisdom
and strengthen our lives with your word,
for you are the fountain of life;
in your light we see true light.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

Hymn – StF 57 Let all the world

The heav'ns are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
My God and King.

The Church with psalms must shout;
No door can keep them out;
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
My God and King.

Prayers

A prayer of thanks and praise for Eastertide

Rejoice!

The stone is rolled away, grave clothes neatly folded,
no more the smell of death, behold the empty tomb! Halleluia!

Rejoice!

Scripture has been fulfilled, the sting of death is gone,
the victory has been won, behold the risen Christ! Halleluia!

Rejoice!

The curtain's torn in two, our God invites us in,
Christ's sacrifice enough to wash away our sins! Halleluia!

A prayer of confession

Like Mary at the empty tomb, we often cannot grasp the wonder of
your presence. Lord, have mercy.

Like the disciples behind locked doors, we are sometimes afraid to
be seen as your followers. Christ, have mercy.

Like Thomas in the upper room,
we are slow to believe. Lord, have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all
goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn - StF 306 Now the green blade rises

Now the green blade riseth, from the buried
grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth
green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love who had
been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps
unseen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth
green.

Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
Jesus who for three days in the grave had
lain;
Quick from the dead the risen One is seen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth
green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in
pain,
Jesus' touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have
been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth
green.

Reading: Acts 5 7 – 32

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Gospel Reading: John 20 19 – 31

⁹ 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!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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!” ²⁷ 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.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Word for Today

How long ago does Easter Day seem to you this morning? Of course, in reality it's only a week, seven days, ago. Perhaps you've been on holiday and time seems to have flown by. For others time may have been dragging and a week has seemed an awful lot longer. I wonder how long a week seemed to Thomas?.

Because last Sunday evening Jesus appeared to all the disciples except Thomas and it wasn't until a week later that Thomas himself saw Jesus and believed that he had risen from the dead. I would imagine it seemed like a lifetime especially as, at the time, he didn't know that Jesus would appear to him. Let's think about impact the events of that week might have had on him and then see what we can learn from his experience.

At first Thomas wasn't the only one who doubted. The Gospels have differing accounts of that first Easter Morning but they all seem to agree that it was the women who first brought the news that Jesus had risen from the dead – his body was not in the tomb. Luke tells us that the apostles dismissed their story as “an idle tale,” and they did not believe them. Perhaps they spent the day speculating about what the women had said – wanting to believe yet needing further proof. I wonder where Thomas went in the evening. Perhaps he just couldn't stand being stuck inside with all the others and needed to go out for some air and some time on his own to think. Whatever happened when he joined the others again he found them in a state of great excitement and joy bursting with the news that they had seen Jesus – they knew now that he had risen from the dead. Poor Thomas. You have to feel sorry for him. He and the others had been through so much over the last week which ended in Jesus being crucified. They were all devastated and ashamed of the way they had deserted Jesus at the end. It was just too much for him to believe that Jesus was alive again – he couldn't bear to risk his hopes being dashed once more. And it must have been so hard for him missing seeing Jesus.

So, perhaps Thomas spent a week agonising. He could see the impact that evening had had on the others – they were changed people. Maybe the others started calling him “the Doubter” during that week and kept trying to convince him by their words but, no, Thomas had to know for himself. Then, a week later, or this evening, they were all together again in the same place. Somehow Jesus was suddenly among them Jesus gave his usual greeting, “Peace be with you.” I imagine that Jesus looked at Thomas with such love, forgiveness and acceptance that Thomas's defences crumbled releasing all the love and faith that he'd been holding back. Jesus even invited Thomas to touch his hands and his side but Thomas no longer needed that sort of proof, he had seen all he needed to see and he believed.

We still call him the doubter or “doubting Thomas” – a name given to him because of just one week in his life when he struggled with his faith – one week which has lasted for two thousand years. Thomas often gets a bad rap. We, who have the benefit of reading this story with a fuller knowledge of what would occur, often dismiss Thomas' unbelief, assuming that we would have been less hesitant to believe or more faithful in our resistance of reasonable doubt. We too often

afford ourselves the benefit of the doubt when placing ourselves in another's shoes, assuming that we would not be subject to or would somehow overcome the same human weaknesses that others have displayed throughout history.

But is doubt a weakness? Or is it simply an opportunity, a space, a possible fertile ground in which faith might grow and ultimately blossom?

This moment in the gospel narrative seems to me to be a pivotal moment when Thomas declares 'My Lord and my God.' It is here that this uncertain, questioning man makes a connection that has been staring the disciples in the face: The Messiah, the son of David is so much more than a son of God, he is God the Son, the second person of the Trinitarian Godhead. In making this revolutionary statement Thomas is seen, the first to make a connection that joins the dots and so turns the events of the first Easter into the pivotal salvation event that we know it to be. If Jesus was merely a man, then his death on the cross would have been just another in a long line of sacrifices. But he isn't just a man, and this isn't any ordinary sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of God the Son, and that changes things irrevocably. Here is the once full and sufficient sacrifice, a sacrifice that shatters once and for all the power of sin and death and restores the way back to God for all.

The central tenet of this story is not the doubts but the insight and the faith, the whole purpose of this story and its placement at this point in John's narrative. It is the pivotal moment in the story of salvation when all that Jesus said in his ministry leading up to Easter was true. From now on everything that happened before the first Easter and everything that was to happen after, must be viewed through the prism of Thomas's statement – My Lord and my God. How exciting is that? A challenge for us to make the same acclamation and tell the gospel story. Amen.

Hymn - StF 418 We have a gospel to proclaim

We have a gospel to proclaim
Good news for men in all the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for He was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share His victory.

Tell of His birth at Bethlehem,
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim:
The Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of His reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified;
He sends His Spirit on His Church
To live for Him, the Lamb who died.

Tell of His death at Calvary,
Hated by those He came to save;
In lonely suffering on the cross
For all He loved, His life He gave.

Now we rejoice to name Him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel message we proclaim:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, as we rejoice at the news that Christ is Risen, we celebrate with our brothers and sisters around the world and proclaim the risen Christ. We pray for those who cannot profess their faith openly through fear of persecution or death. We pray that the Easter message will be heard in places that try to silence it. We pray for those without faith that they may hear and believe the Good News of the Risen Christ. May we and the whole church rejoice in your victory.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

We pray that the hope and joy of this Eastertide will flow into the troubled, war-torn, hungry and oppressed places of God's world. We pray for countries where disease is rife, where civil and tribal divisions bring oppression and political corruption keeps people in poverty. We pray for countries

reliant on food aid and international donations, for the work of the United Nations in helping to bring economic stability and supplies, for the major economies of the world that their responses may be generous, uncomplicated and consistent. For those struggling to subsist in harsh circumstances due to poverty and climate change, we pray for the work of Water Aid and similar charities. We pray for all aid agencies working to bring hope and support to those countries in need.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

We pray for all who lead and teach in our Circuit, that they may offer wise and sensitive leadership. For all who play a part in this church family, may we use all our skills and talents to help fulfil the vision for the future. May our hearts and minds be led by Christ, that we may show humility and recognise that all people are precious in the sight of God. May our faith radiate the love of Christ in our lives, homes and community and may we have the courage to proclaim the Good News with confidence, assurance and joy.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

For families struggling to buy the essentials of daily life, for children who may be going without food and for the work of the school meals service. For the elderly and vulnerable concerned about dwindling pensions and benefits, for the work of day services providing meals and social activities. For food banks, that we may be willing to serve our community, to be alongside those in need and to be generous with our giving and our time.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

We pray for family life, giving thanks for the joy and many blessings that families give us, for our own immediate families, our extended families and those that God has given us to love. We pray for those who are alone with no family to call their own, for the homeless and the lost, for them to experience the hand of friendship and love through those that they meet. For those whose family life is marked by anger, resentment, sorrow and despair; may they find harmony, reconciliation and peace.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

We pray for all those who feel trapped by pain, depression or a life limiting illness, for those suffering physically, mentally or spiritually. We ask that your gracious healing power will give them peace and love and that their lives will be filled with the light of your glory. In a moment of quiet, name the person on your heart this morning.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

We commend to your eternal love those who have died, that they may live with you for ever. We share with their families and friends at this time of loss and ask that you will comfort them as they grieve and give them strength to carry on as they cherish precious memories.

Lord may we know you:

And the power of your resurrection.

Faithful God, we give thanks for each new day that dawns and the opportunities they bring. As we go out into the world we pray that we may reflect your love in our families, our church and our community, so that the world can witness that we are followers of Christ and draw others into his loving care.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn - StF 322

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
and drives away his fear.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

Dear Name, the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy Name
refresh my soul in death!

Blessing

May the beauty of God be reflected in your eyes,
May the love of God be reflected in your hands,
May the wisdom of God be reflected in your words,
and the knowledge of God flow from your heart,
that all might see, and seeing, believe.

Amen.