

twelvebaskets



EASTER 2B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Second Sunday After Easter - Year B
7th April 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

3 STF – Eternal God, your love’s tremendous glory OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Opening Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining OR

33 STF – O Lord, we are always in your presence

Readings: Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

462 STF – Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship OR

686 STF – Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

Blessing

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Call to worship

God of power and grace,
We welcome you in this space,
We welcome you in our hearts,
We notice your closeness to us,
We look for you in all we do in this time together – speak to us today, through your Spirit we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

3 STF – Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Opening Prayers

God of great power and great grace, we gather today in your name;
your life is stronger than death - we worship you.

Jesus Christ, Risen Lord of all, we offer you ourselves;
here amongst us in your Risen presence – we worship you.

Holy Spirit, breath of Jesus, we receive you afresh today;
breathe through our worship with the energy of God.

As we worship today, our hearts overflow with thankfulness:

- Holy God, we thank you for the gift of life, for the wonders of creation, for the unending nature of your love for us.
- Risen Jesus, we thank you for the blessings of your grace, the love of family and friends, the hope of a new day, a new week.
- Holy Spirit, we thank you for joy even in times of lament, for strength even in times of weakness, for hope even in times of despair.

Aware of your presence amongst us, Holy God, we become aware of our failings;

- We have not treated our neighbours as your precious children... we are sorry.
- We have put ourselves in first place... we are sorry.
- We have not always received your gifts of courage, peace and hope... we are sorry.

In the quietness, we sense you with us now, holding out your hands to each of us, calling us by name and inviting us to see in you the grace which accepts us as we are, the forgiveness which transforms us and the love which offers us a new start. Thanks be to God.

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

[Materials required: 2 plant pots containing soil that is as dry as possible, a watering can, drip tray to avoid too much mess. Anointing oil.

There will be a time open to anointing with oil at the end, so prompt some helpers before hand.]

Oil has lots of uses. Oil ensures that the engine runs smooth. Oil can be used to keep a home toasty and warm in winter. Some oil makes your hair full of volume and life! And some is perfect to cook with or dress a salad in. It's an important part of our lives, and much of what we take for granted is because of oil.

Oil though is mentioned a lot in the bible for a specific reason: Anointing.

Anointing, within the church, is a practice that we still use today. It's an example of God's power and presence in our lives, the healing presence, the making of something holy. It's also a way of showing respect, reverence, and love towards others.

[Read Psalm 133 in a version you are comfortable with]

Psalm 133 speaks a lot about anointing and oil, but it does sound a little messy sometimes! "The oiling poured over the head, that runs down the beards, that runs down your clothes." That's messy!

Think of it this way: oil is a blessing, that gives life, love, and unity to all. The same can be said for water. We have here a pot of soil. It's very dry, and the soil is crumbly, and it will be difficult for things to grow. In this other pot we have the same soil, but let's pour some water on it. It becomes rich with moisture, is less crumbly, becomes thicker like mud and it all sticks together. This is ripe for planting seeds, which benefit from this soil and can, with love and care, grow big and strong.

Oil to us in the Church is like water to the soil: it nourishes us spiritually, brings us together, unites us and gives us the strength to go on as a community.

In that spirit, I want to invite those that feel able to enter a time of anointing. We'll anoint with a little oil, saying the words "For God bestows his blessing." In this time, we'll also hear the words of the psalm being sung.

[You might like to play some music as the anointing happens – allow us to suggest Stornoway – Psalm 133].³

Hymn:

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining OR

33 STF – O Lord, we are always in your presence

Readings: Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

462 STF – Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world

Reflections on the readings

Having heard today's gospel passage, let's play a little game of word association.

What word or phrase comes immediately to your mind when I say "Thomas"?

(Either ask for feedback, or suggest the following likely responses)

- Doubt?
- Lack of Faith?
- Grumpy?
- Awkward?
- Difficult?
- Weak?

Every year the lectionary gives us the gospel reading about "Doubting Thomas" and we have our annual dig at his lack of faith and usually try to let his weakness somehow be a source of strength for us so that we get ourselves to the magical, (theoretically) safe place where we have zero doubts about Jesus, our faith, and Christianity as a whole, and we are then sure of everything we have been told we are supposed to believe.

I mean, we wouldn't want to be like Thomas now, would we?

I'm not sure that's fair either on him, or on ourselves.

Today's reflection is written by Kevin Dobson, a local preacher from Wakefield, and his reflections continue:

I typed "Doubting Thomas" into my search engine and one of the responses I found was an article entitled "*How can I avoid being a Doubting Thomas?*"

I read on to find a particularly lecturing piece of writing which told me I probably wasn't praying enough, because if you don't pray enough that's apparently what allows doubt to creep in, and I was encouraged to "just turn to God" and ask him that my faith be bigger and stronger and then I would stop having these damaging feelings.

Who knew it was that easy...?

I didn't feel helped. I didn't feel encouraged. Instead, I was made to feel chastised and weak. In my opinion, when it comes to faith, doubt is healthy.

Faith is only called faith because there is an inherent element of doubt, otherwise it would be called certainty. So, our natural, human urge to question is something that should be embraced and seen as a healthy part of our faith journey, and it can lead to productive discussions where we dare to share our feelings in the light of scripture and our life experiences.

I do not believe Jesus would have the slightest problem with us bringing our doubts to him, through our conversations with others. The comedian Milton Jones gives a wonderful definition of faith:

"Faith is like standing still in the noise, knowing that the bus is coming... and occasionally, through the fog and the traffic, catching a glimpse of something big and red"

What's more, I find that being unshakeably sure on something is a dangerous place to be. Often when we tell ourselves and those around us that our faith is so "strong" that we won't entertain any flexibility of thinking at all, it can completely close conversations down and it is not a fertile place for relationships to thrive.

Anyway... as Thomas once more grabs this week's Lectionary-based headlines, I looked at the whole set of readings for this Sunday I found what for me was a hidden gem. A beautiful message came forward to me from within all three of the other readings. So, let's thank Thomas for his encouragement for us this week and move on... Let's take a look at these other readings in turn:

Acts 4:32-35

In Acts we get many hints about the dynamics of the "early church". I love the sense of excitement that Luke conveys to us in his recollections of that time. We hear about the energy amongst the new believers, the pace at which people are hearing the stories and wanting to join in, the sharing of the stories about Jesus... his life, death and resurrection and the sense that they are all wrestling together to share and understand what this all means to them... especially given the shocking and unexpected way things had unfolded around them. They start to create social structures and in this very short passage today we hear about a network of support with admirable principles about sharing resources across the community which is so directly aimed at equalising wealth and ensuring that the weakest in society are noticed and helped to be able to have enough to thrive and survive.

I manage a charity in Wakefield, West Yorkshire and we provide hot meals, clothing and other resources, and most importantly support and encouragement to many people every day who simply cannot afford the basics in life (over 23,500 hot meals provided last year, to help put the size of this into perspective). We are a charitable organisation that exists frankly because the model of society that we have now is a long way away from the beautiful model described in this reading amongst the early Christians, and we should keep this model at the front of our mind as we think about social justice and action in the communities around us.

A message emerges for us from this passage: ***there is strength to be found in working effectively together.***

Psalms 133

I have a beard, but I could never be described as a committed male groomer. A bit of shower gel is usually enough to get me through the day as far as my facial hair is concerned. I get a sense of what some of the better grooming products might be like however as David does his bit for the industry in this reading today. In this short, punchy psalm, he expresses his passionate belief about the power of unity and togetherness by comparing it to the delight of the feeling of sumptuous beard oil dissipating down his face. There is a real sense of decadence and richness in these words. It obviously meant a lot to him.

Whilst we may all choose different ways to describe the positivity, he is absolutely right. The joy of making changes to the way we work and go about our lives when we work together with others and feel that sense of energy coming from a joint collaborative enterprise is wonderful and it is the kind of thing that can result in real change for the better in many of our circles of friendship and connection.

A message emerges for us from this passage: ***there is strength to be found in working effectively together.***

1 John 1:1-2:2

John's letters were the last New Testament books to be written chronologically, near the end of the first century. There is a sense of maturity and great wisdom to be found there.

This passage conveys so strongly John's belief that fellowship with Jesus and God comes as a direct result of actual connection and fellowship with each other. Making strong relationships with those around us is so important as a mechanism for bringing our faith to life, and making it effective in the world, bringing the love and goodness that Jesus represented into reality.

The clues were there in the earlier New Testament writings. There is a Greek word "*koinonia*" which was used around 20 times by the writers of the gospels and Paul - and again in this passage by John - which means powerful and effective fellowship, connection and togetherness. This message matures throughout the New Testament writings, and it points us to the ways in which we can bring our faith to life through connection and unity with others.

A message emerges for us from this passage: ***there is strength to be found in working effectively together.***

As my thoughts on the readings unfolded, it turned out I wasn't finished with the gospel passage after all.

If we return to our reading about Thomas and note another aspect of the passage which has nothing to do with Thomas apart from his specific desire to see Jesus' scars.

This story is "post-resurrection", and we see that Jesus' scars are *still there*.

The powerful gospel message of Jesus' resurrection is everything we need to hear about new starts, new life and excitement about the way things could be, but here we note that even though the story says he has a "transformed" body, his scars remain.

We all carry our scars, and it's important to acknowledge their existence and importance, but they do not need to limit our potential to grow and flourish.

The American researcher, professor and author Brene Brown says: "*If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.*"

As we bring ourselves into unity and fellowship with others, we must bring our real selves, "warts and all", so to speak, and we must dare to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in order that these relationships have integrity and wholeness. We must bring honesty and trust in order that these relationships have true depth and meaning.

At times, we are the ones who are strong and can reach out to help others. At times we are the ones on our knees and needing to open ourselves up to be supported. This is the powerful way these relationships can work. The song "*This Light is Ours*" by Martyn Joseph encapsulates this so beautifully. The final verse says this:

*This light's not mine, this light's not yours
This light is brightest, when the light is ours
If you're in the dark, but the light's breaking through
That sense of just maybe, that's us, holding you*

Jesus welcomes us, as we are, into fellowship with each other where we can be free to share doubts and fears, joys and encouragement. We can truly share ourselves, so that with him at the centre of our lives, we can make a difference and inch forward each day towards a world that might just be a little better than the one we started the day in.

A message emerges for us today: ***there is INDEED strength to be found in working effectively together.***

Let's do it. In Jesus' name.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Kevin Dobson

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim

Prayers of intercession

Imagine the world around us and let us go on a geographical journey as we think about the distances between us and the people that we share this life with.

Please join in the following response after each sequence:

Leader: Today, Jesus, help us to look for ways in which we can work together with our fellow human beings

All: There is strength to be found in working effectively together

Our world

- We think about anyone we know personally in countries across the globe. We think about the lives they lead, the situations they find themselves in, and we think about our connections with them. When were we last in touch, and is it time to connect again?
- We think about the billions of people we don't know in the countries across the globe. Our news channels tell of joy and horror for so many people. We think about what life must be like for many of them. Is there anything we can do?

Leader: Today, Jesus, help us to look for ways in which we can work together with our fellow human beings

There is strength to be found in working effectively together

Our country

- We think about those we know and those we don't know that live in our country today. We think about politics and the way things work in the country. We think about what works well. We think about where things don't feel right. Who do we connect with to harness the good and address the not so good?

Leader: Today, Jesus, help us to look for ways in which we can work together with our fellow human beings

There is strength to be found in working effectively together

Our county

- We think about those we know and those we don't know in our home county or region. What are the good things about our local area? What are the issues we are facing where things are not serving people well. Who do we connect with to harness the good and address the not so good?

Leader: Today, Jesus, help us to look for ways in which we can work together with our fellow human beings

There is strength to be found in working effectively together

Our city, town or village

- Who are our neighbours? What does life feel like on our doorstep? We think about the things that are wholesome and good. We think about the things that do not serve people well. Who do we connect with to harness the good and address the not so good?

Leader: Today, Jesus, help us to look for ways in which we can work together with our fellow human beings

There is strength to be found in working effectively together

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus, Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all gifts, for which we are truly grateful,

Today we return a little bit of what we have received to you,

Today we offer up our lives for your kin-dom here on earth: may we play our part in bringing about a safer, kinder world in which your justice and joy reign, and may these gifts play their part in that too.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship OR

686 STF – Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

Blessing

May you go out and find a God of love who is already at work in all things, who is changing lives and bringing hope and opening hearts.

May you be a people of peace, welcoming the stranger wherever you meet them.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Kevin Dobson

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker