



**St Peter's Wolvercote & All Saints Wytham
Sunday 19 April 2020 - Low Sunday**

Welcome to St Peter's newsletter for Sunday 19 April

Many Orthodox churches base their Easter date on the Julian calendar, which often differs from the Gregorian calendar used by many western countries. So today we wish our fellow Orthodox Christians a Happy Easter. Alleluia. Christ is risen!

For us, the second Sunday of Easter is often called 'Low Sunday'. No one really knows why, but it may have come about because of the contrast with the 'High' festivals of Holy Week and Easter. Traditionally we may expect 'low' numbers of people in Church after the busyness of Holy Week and Easter. This year we won't be able to tell the difference – but it's believed that far more people are 'being church' in their own homes than usually go to a church. For that we thank God.

The Gospel this week tells us of St Thomas's doubts. In his sermon Tony will point out that it was Thomas's faith that made him so special, not his doubts. But we thank God for Thomas' doubts; by not being afraid to express them he asked questions that revealed things to us about Jesus Christ. At this very difficult time many Christians may be having doubts of one sort or another, but this is part of being human and God often does wonderful things through our doubts.

Christ's resurrection assures us that, whatever pains and trials we have to go through, they will end. And the fact that the risen Christ still carries his wounds assures us that God, through Jesus Christ, accompanies and strengthens us through those trials.

Revd Viv Bridges

Church at home

Today, for our 'church at home' worship we offer a collect and readings, sermon from Tony Lemon and intercessions.

The Collect - Let us pray

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 sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father.

Amen

Acts 2.14a,22-32

On the day of Pentecost, ¹⁴Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ²²'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – ²³this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover, my flesh will live in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence." ²⁹'Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, "He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption." ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.'

For the gift of the Word **Thanks be to God.**

1 Peter 1.3-9

³Blessed 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, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so 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. ⁸Although 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, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

For the gift of the Word **Thanks be to God.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John 20.19-31. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹⁹When it was evening on 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.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.' ²⁶A 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.' ²⁷Then 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.' ²⁸Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son

of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Post Communion Prayer

Let us pray

Lord God our Father,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ
you have assured your children of eternal life
and in baptism have made us one with him:
deliver us from the death of sin
and raise us to new life in your love,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Intercessions for 19 April 2020, the 2nd Sunday of Easter (Low Sunday)

Prepared by Caroline Pepys

The Orthodox Church celebrates Easter Day today. We pray for all Orthodox Christians and remember especially the Orthodox Church in Canterbury Road.

Commemorations this week: *St George, martyr, Patron of England, c304, St Mark the Evangelist*

In the power of the Resurrection, let us pray to the Lord.

Grant that your church may respond with joyful eagerness to her risen Lord.

Bless all doubting Christian people with grace to follow Christ. We give thanks & pray for the unity & peace of the church worldwide; and for all fellow Christians facing discrimination & persecution.

In the Deanery we pray for our Ecumenical Parish; St Michael and All Angels, Summertown United Reformed Church, Wolvercote Baptist Church, All Saints Wytham and St Peter's. We pray for Gavin, Pauline, Viv (Edwards) and Charles, and for all who minister in any way.

We pray for everyone across the world effected by Covid 19. We pray for all those facing homelessness & famine as a result. We pray for Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Lord, you know what it is to be despised and rejected. Be near to those who suffer because they believe in you. Inspire them with your love and courage so that others may be won to your perfect freedom.

We give thanks for our community, and we give thanks for the way in which so many people in our neighbourhood have pulled together to help each other, and have honoured the 'lockdown' in order to try to slow down the spread of Covid 19. We pray for all health workers and carers, and we pray for all those who have lost their income and livelihoods.

We pray especially for neighbours living or working in Five Mile Drive, Rawson Close, Carey Close, Linkside Avenue, Sollershot, Rotha Field Road, Kirk Close, Lakeside.

We give thanks for God's creation and our environment – and we for all people involved in protecting the environment, and for wisdom and guidance to be good stewards of our beautiful earth and to look after the creatures in it

We pray that Christ may reveal the light of his presence to the sick, the weak and the dying, to comfort and strengthen them. Amongst the sick who have asked for our prayers: Margaret Williams, Jenny Gerrard, Trixie Collier, Marion Boulton, Vicki Shepstone, John Waugh, Margaret Ewart, Charmaine Anderson, Gordon Murray, Ian Kennedy, Ray Voss, Andrew Hosier, James Bastin, Holly, Alison, Kareem,

We pray for all the newly bereaved, and we remember those known to us alone.
Give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them joy of your salvation,

We remember those who have died in the faith of Christ.
We pray for: Tim Bravington who has recently died and we pray for his families and friends.
And we pray for those who died about this time in earlier years: Desmond Walshaw

According to your promises, grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.
We rejoice in the fellowship of St Peter, St Mark, St George, and all your saints.

We are silent before you, Lord as we offer our lives in thanksgiving. Help us to be open, ready for when you speak in the quiet. Keep us relaxed in both body and mind, constant in our love towards you.

Word, faith and mission

A sermon prepared by Lay Minister Dr Tony Lemon for St Peter's Wolvercote & All Saints Wytham on the First Sunday after Easter 19 April 2020

Refs: John 20, v.28 Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'; John 20, v. 21 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'

During Lent I read John Barton's wonderful book, 'A History of the Bible', and thanks to the extra time for reading afforded by our current situation of lockdown I was even able to finish it ahead of schedule - not my normal experience! It's a book that reflects deeply impressive scholarship and teaches us how carefully the books of the Bible need to be approached. Among many lessons, it made me realise that, although Jews and Christians share the Hebrew scriptures – what we know as the Old Testament – we approach them very differently. Peter's explanation to a Jewish audience in the Acts of the Apostles highlights the ways in which Christianity has sought to interpret what we know as the Old Testament as linked to, and foretelling, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

St John's Gospel chapter 20 is generally seen as having originally been its final chapter, and it certainly rounds off his Gospel, completing its central purpose, in our reading today. In doing so it brings together the Word, the resurrection, the giving of the spirit and the mission of the disciples: the whole story and basis of our Christian faith. And in the letter of Peter, as he addresses embryonic Christian communities in what is now Turkey, Peter encourages us to take stock of our basic Christian identity and recognise what it means. Enough material in these three readings for innumerable sermons!

Let's begin with Thomas. 'Doubting Thomas' has become the model for anyone who is reluctant to accept something. I wonder how many people, in our secularised society, use the phrase without knowing its origin. Paradoxically, doubt is far from the most important thing about Thomas. His loyalty to Jesus was clearly demonstrated at the time of Lazarus' sickness, when he exclaimed 'Let us go with him, that we may die with him'. Now, when Jesus had shown himself to the other disciples when Thomas was absent, he wants to believe, but his doubt is natural and honest. The Pharisees were denied a sign from heaven when they asked for it, because they didn't want to believe, but Thomas does, and Jesus gives him the evidence he demands. Thomas' reaction, 'My Lord and my God', is perhaps the very first confession of true Christian faith ever made. Surely it is for this that he deserves to be remembered!

During the course of St. John's Gospel, we have met many interesting characters and watched them interact with Jesus. Some have misunderstood him. Some have been downright hostile. Some, often their own surprise, have come to believe in him. Now Thomas adds to this vivid collection of portraits with this remarkable confession of faith – one with which John brings his Gospel round full circle, ending up where he

started. He begins with those wonderful, unforgettable words of the Prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' and continues in verse 18, 'No one has ever seen God'. Now, having taken us on the journey through Galilee and Jerusalem, through good moments and bad, until the events of that first Eastertide, someone actually sees and recognises God for the first time, in the risen Christ.

Jesus, in his ministry, frequently referred back to the Hebrew scriptures, because he knew that the Jewish crowds he addressed would be familiar with them – they provided reference points with which they could identify. Peter subsequently does the same in today's reading from Acts. He explains the resurrection as a fulfilment of the promises made by God through King David, quoting today's psalm, psalm 16, which both Luke and Peter take as having been written by David himself. It speaks of a path of life in which the one who dies will not be abandoned and will somehow come through death and out the other side, his flesh intact. Jesus who has been raised from the dead is, Peter says, the true heir of King David – and so the rightful King of Israel.

This may have been an effective way for Peter to explain the meaning of the resurrection to a Jewish audience, but Jesus is more than just the King of Israel, and Peter knows this. His is not a secular kingdom with territorial limits. The salvation God has brought to Israel is to come from Israel, but it is for the world. 'Salvation is from the Jews', Jesus says in chapter 4 of John's Gospel: the long story of God and Israel, in what we know as the Old Testament, has reached its climax in Jesus. Now the salvation he has brought to Israel is to come from the Jewish world, out to the wider world of the Gentiles – and the disciples are Jesus' chosen instruments to bring this about. Jesus' mission to Israel, reaching its climax in his death and resurrection, is now to be implemented by the disciples' mission to the known world outside Israel. 'Receive the Holy Spirit', he says to them: his spirit, to enable them to bring his mission to the lands to which they will journey.

But what a fragile vessel that mission was! It was fragile numerically – just twelve disciples to bring this new faith to the known world, albeit supplemented by other converts, most notably of course Paul. It was also fragile in terms of the chosen few – together with Jesus so long, yet so often displaying their weaknesses and limited understanding. These were the same disciples who ran away when Jesus was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, the rock on which Jesus would build his church, was the same man who denied him three times after his arrest, in fear of what might happen to him if identified as one of Jesus' followers. How could it possibly work? Surely this new sect was destined for rapid oblivion, like so many others? How on earth did it not only survive but become the global faith that it now is?

The answer can only rest in the reality of resurrection, which – with the gift of the Holy Spirit – transformed and empowered those disciples and gave them the courage, strength and ability to spread the gospel, often in the face of overwhelming odds. When the first disciples were gone, others took up the torch of faith and enabled Christianity to survive many vicissitudes, including persecution. What would have happened had the Western Roman Emperor Constantine not himself converted to Christianity? – if there had been no Edict of Milan in the year 313, legalising Christianity and allowing for freedom of worship throughout the Empire, and no Council of Nicaea in the year 325, bringing us the Nicene Creed? One can only speculate on such 'what ifs' of history, but it is not unreasonable to guess that a faith which had survived from such fragile beginnings for three centuries in the face of such odds would still have survived and flourished in the face of all setbacks, just as it survived in Russia and Eastern Europe in the face of seven decades of state atheism, and continues to grow in China today despite official harassment.

Peter, in his message to those early Christian communities, reminds them who they are and what their faith means. They have a dual citizenship, as citizens of the countries to which they happen to belong, and as citizens of God's new world. He speaks of the trials and tests that they may suffer as experiences through which the true value of their faith may be discovered. This will strike a more immediate and secular chord with us all at the present time, as we are seeing so many good things come out of the public health crisis we face – the

courage of those on the front line, the countless acts of good neighbourliness and concern for others, the sense of community, the positive response of the great majority to restrictions that would have been inconceivable until a few weeks ago. Perhaps this arises from a basic humanity that resides in all of us. But perhaps it also reflects the influence of a greater Christian heritage in our society than we sometimes realise to be the case. Many voices are asking at the present time how society will be different when we return to 'normality'. I hope it is not too naïve to hope that our current shared experience may strengthen our shared Christian values of social justice and fairness and their reflection in our political and economic life.

Amen

A quote for our times - kindly submitted by Revd Shei Crowther.

Settle yourself in solitude, & you will come upon God in yourself.

Teresa of Avila

Devastating coronavirus - Written by Margaret Broadbent

Devastating coronavirus
your spread requires us
to STAY AT HOME
in isolation.

Nevertheless coronavirus
you do inspire us
to help each other and
give consolation.

NOTICES

The next **e-newsletter** will be distributed on Wed 22 April. We will share poems, images and photographs submitted by our readers. If you have any stories you'd like us to publish, please phone Val (01865 559316) or send to 2 Cyprus Terrace, OX 2 8AT.

The Quarterly – Because of 'lockdown', the next Quarterly will be produced in electronic form. Hard copies will be printed when current restrictions are lifted for those who would like one, and for our records. Contributions, including book reviews, are welcomed, preferably by e-mail, to any of the editors, Ann Stedman (ann.stedman@btinternet.com), Michael Daniell (michaeldaniell51@gmail.com) and John Harding (john.harding22@gmail.com). Submission deadline is Sunday 17 May. If possible, your contribution should not exceed 600 words. The Editors

The Flying Goose - the next issue, due end of May, will be produced in electronic form and available for download from St Peter's website news section. Copy deadline is now Wed 20 May. Contact the Editor for May, Stephen Drew 01865 554352 to reserve space.

Stewardship: A number of people at St Peter's, wishing to contribute to the Stewardship campaign for the first time, were unable to submit their donor forms to the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) due to the pandemic. PGS is now accepting post in the usual way so donor forms may be posted to: 76, Kingsholm Road, Gloucester, GL1 3BD. Be aware, this is not the address on the donor form. From Monday 20 April, the PGS will be able to receive donations by phone: 0333 002 1260. Further details will be published soon. Peter Bridges.