



Leura Uniting Church
Easter 2 Year A
19 April 2020

A SERVICE OF THE WORD

The Gathering of the People of God

Hello everyone. This is William. It is good to be with you wherever you are.

As we come to our time of worship you may like to prepare a space where you can be peaceful and focus on being accompanied into the holy presence of God.

You might like to light a candle. Be comfortable and warm wherever you are sitting.

Wherever you are you may like to look at your garden or some flowers or a plant in your living room.

You may like to have a photo nearby of family or friends or a special person.

Remember you are not alone. You are in God's presence and have those whom you love and are loved by in your heart.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come into God's presence with joy.

**In God, we have an inheritance
that is imperishable.**

Come into God's presence with hope.

**In Christ, we have an inheritance
that cannot be taken away.**

Come into God's presence with longing

**In the Spirit, we have an inheritance
that never fades.**

Come into God's presence with love.

**In God, we have an inheritance
that brings new life.**

HYMN: 'All my hope on God is founded' (TIS 560)

You can, if you like, follow the music for this hymn on Youtube; either Google 'All my hope on God' or go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2oYTtyBSxk>

All my hope on God is founded;
all my trust he will renew,
through all change and chance he guides me,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust,
all we build with care and labour,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness lasts for ever,
deep his wisdom, passing thought;
Splendour, light and life attend him.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily the almighty giver
will his bounteous gifts bestow;
in his will our souls find pleasure,
leading us where'er we go.
Love will stand
at his hand,
joy shall wait for his command.

Still from earth to God eternal

sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Hear Christ call
one and all:
those who follow shall not fall.

OPENING PRAYER

God of signs and wonders,
 breathe new life into us this day,
 that our spirits may awaken
 to the joy and the hope
 of our glorious inheritance
 through the living Christ.

Clear our vision, Holy One,
 that we may see the promise of Easter
 in the stirrings of this precious earth
 and in the life energy
 flowing through our bodies.

Help us find the faith to believe
 where we have not seen,
 that others may see,
 in our living and loving
 the glory of the risen Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,
 you come offering peace,
 but we hold onto our fears;
 you come offering faith,
 but we cling to our doubts;
 you come offering us a future filled with promise,
 but we retreat to pleasant memories of the past.

We want to believe that you offer us an inheritance
 that is imperishable, indestructible, and unfading.

We want to see ourselves as you see us.

We want to live as you would have us live.
We want to believe that life is stronger
 than the death we see all around us.
Help our unbelief, O God,
 that we may truly know and live
 your gift of resurrection. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The inheritance that God promises us
 is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.
Even when we are consumed by doubt,
 God is always faithful.
Even when we lose our way,
 God is able to find us and bring us home.
Even when we are at war with ourselves,
 God is able to bring us peace.

Thanks be to God!

BIBLE READINGS

Epistle: 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, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 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. 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.

Gospel: John 20:19–23 (19–31)

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 in and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be among you." As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we have been surprised by your resurrection, caught off guard by your lively return to us, astounded by your power to defeat death. Of course we have doubts. Do not reject us in our doubts. Come to us, heal us of our reservations, our timidity, and our unwillingness to believe that which the scriptures so boldly proclaim. Give us the imagination and the courage, the vitality and the boldness to proclaim with the saints, "He has risen! He has risen indeed!" Then help us to live each day in the light of that proclamation. Amen.

ENCOUNTERING THE TEXT

On this Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, it is our custom to concentrate on the second part of today's Gospel passage—that concerning the doubts of Thomas. The story of Thomas, the patron saint of all those who have difficulty conceiving of and believing in the resurrection, is an important story because it tells us about how the risen Christ ministers to doubt. My focus today, however, is on the first part of the Gospel story where the risen Christ ministers to fear rather than doubt.

REFLECTION ON THE WORD

Peace be with You

There are some uncanny parallels between today's Gospel reading and the world situation we are currently finding ourselves.

The disciples are in lockdown in Jerusalem, hiding behind closed doors.

We, too, are in lock-down, more-or-less confined to homes, unable to move as freely as we would like.

The disciples are fearful. They are afraid of being arrested and executed, terrorised that what happened to Jesus might happen to them. All kinds of rumours are spreading about them: they have been accused of stealing Jesus' body and of even threatening to burn down the Temple.

We, too, are fearful. The sheer repetition of terms such as 'pandemic' and 'economic meltdown' conveys a sense of alarm and increases our anxiety. A dark sense of foreboding engulfs us. People avoid one another. We feel the world is becoming far more dangerous than ever as one catastrophe seems to follow another.

As Christian people we must be careful not to allow this so-called 'culture of fear' to overwhelm us.

Yes, fears and anxieties are inescapable facts of life, but they can be challenged, altered and transformed provided we remember who we are and hold fast to the values we stand for.

The temptation is to bunker down and adopt a passive, risk-averse and fearful response to Corona virus pandemic? Alternatively, we embrace a more courageous, risk-taking and compassionate approach based on what we believe to be Christian? I believe the Christian response is obvious.

Think of your neighbours. What's happening for them? Can you help them in any way? Next door to us, there are two ninety something year-old sisters living together. One is almost blind. Two doors up there is an elderly couple, both with compromised health; she has acute asthma and he manages with one lung and only a month ago had a stroke. Across the road there is a professional woman who has recently lost her job...

Throughout history, even in times of plague, Christian people have tried to be compassionate and caring. Instead of fleeing, they nursed the sick and cared for the dead. And people noticed. The love Christians showed to others is one of the reasons why Christianity in the first place grew so quickly, spreading beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, even as far as India by the Third Century.

* * *

I take some comfort in the fact that Jesus' first gift to the disciples after the resurrection was peace. The peace Jesus offers is not the absence of war, violence, sickness or death, but a freedom from fear. It is true that the salutation 'Peace be with you' is an ordinary everyday Middle Eastern greeting meaning no more than 'May all be well with you', or 'May you be saved from trouble', but its repetition three times in our Gospel reading (vv. 19, 21, 26) makes it clear that John means much more by it. John would wish us to read into the word 'peace' the content of 14:27:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

and 16:33

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.

Notice the words 'do not be afraid' and 'courage' in these verses. Jesus' bestowal of his peace dispels fear and gives the disciples the courage they need to follow him out of their locked room. This same peace is given to us as well. In the monthly Taizé services we often sing '*Nada te turbe*' ('Nothing can trouble'). The song goes as follows:

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
God alone fills us.

For many people at Leura Church, passing the peace is a favourite part of the service. It provides an excuse to move around—to stretch across pews and vigorously shake hands or a chance to hug a friend. We can, however, bring more meaning into our passing of the peace if we remember its origins. It has its origins in Jesus' first words to the disciples after his crucifixion and resurrection. Offering peace to the disciples was Jesus' starting point; it should be our own as well. In the words attributed to St Francis we are called to be 'channels of peace':

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Offering the peace seeks to establish something new and better. It is the channel of forgiveness. It's the beginning of the Church's mission of reconciliation. Peace stands at the centre of all God's operations in this world.

TAIZÉ SONG: "Come and fill our hearts" (Songs & Prayers from Taizé 28)

You can, if you wish, find the music for this song on Youtube. Either Google 'Come and fill our hearts' or go <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVaiJlyU3ZE>

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.
You alone, O Lord, are holy.
Come and fill our hearts with your peace,
Alleluia! (x 4)

THE PEACE

At this moment, put your hand over your heart and pass the peace to another in the room or in your heart.

The peace of the Lord be with you.

And also with you.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (*Linda Petersen*)

Gracious God,
you have bound us together in this unexpected way
at this time of unexpected crisis.
Give us the courage to be open to new challenges facing us
and the grace to appreciate
how our lives depend the faithfulness, the industry,
the honesty and the integrity of our fellow human beings.

Silence

And so we bring before you
our prayers for others
and for ourselves...

Jesus, the one who stands amongst us in the midst of our fear,
bring us your peace.

Jesus, the one who illumines and reveals,
bring us your light.

Jesus, the one who calls us beloved,
bring us your love.

God, we pray for your guidance and comfort and strength in these
challenging and despairing times.

There are many who suffer,
there are many who have lost life,
there are many left destitute,
there are many alone and afraid.

We pray that you will bring help and comfort.

God, we pray for those who have given their lives
in service to the sick and dying.

Please keep them and their families safe and well.

We pray they might find times of rest.

We pray for

those who don't have the comfort of isolating in their own homes,
for those who don't have a home,
for those who must continue to work despite the risks.

We ask for your protective love to keep and guide.

We pray for world leaders

that they would govern with humility, wisdom and care for all peoples.

But especially those on the margins of their societies
and who were isolated before this crisis began.

We pray for decisions made in the present and those for the future.

May this be an opportunity to reflect and bring change
to how we live and how we govern.

God, where there are no words we can bring to you,
in the silence hold our hearts and spirit.

We pray for our Blue Mountains community.
Keep us strong in your love and light.
Encourage us to reach out in safe and loving ways.
Keep us in unity and closeness despite the distance we endure.
May your Holy Spirit speak to our hearts
and keep us through the coming months ahead.

Jesus, light and love of our world, we praise and adore you.
Jesus, light and love of our world, we trust and listen to you.
Jesus light and love of our world, please come to us.
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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

HYMN: "Love divine, all loves excelling" (TIS 217)

You can, if you wish, follow the music to this hymn on Youtube; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGGcqhKShQ8> or simply Google 'Love divine, all loves excelling'.

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown:
Pure unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more they temples leave:
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be,
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

BLESSING

May the love of God comfort you,
the wisdom of Christ guide you,
and the truth of the Spirit strengthen you;
and may the blessing of the risen Christ
dispel your fears and anxiety,
now and forever.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

MUSICAL POSTLUDE “May the feet of God walk with you” (TIS 779)

You may, if you wish, follow the music on Youtube; see

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X5FHNGM2HA> or simply Google the first line of the song.

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear you cry.
May the smile of God be for you,

and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.