



KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

Easter Two

10am – Sunday 19 April 2020

This service, led by Rev Jordan Redding, can be accessed from the Knox Church YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYksSjG0IfO0NeogNIGs7A> or, after the live service concludes, from the Knox Church webpage <https://knoxchurch.net/>

Pre service music from around 9:45am

Pre-service music and images of Knox Church community

Greeting and Call to worship

Based on 1 Peter 1:1-3

To all you who are exiled in your own home, dispersed throughout your community,
All you who are isolated and alone, who are cut off and locked down,
Grace and peace be with you in the name of Jesus Christ!

We gather, even in our isolation, to give praise
to the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
to the God revealed as the Abba of our Lord Jesus Christ
Who has given us a new birth into a living hope
Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Kia noho a Ihowa ki a koutou. The risen Lord be with you all. Amen.

Prayer of praise

Praise to you, living God.

For in Christ you have planted a hope in the world which is imperishable.

In Christ's birth, the seed was sown.

In his death, the roots reached down deep into our human condition: our sin, our suffering, our dying.

No part of our humanity is unknown to you.

In his rising, new life broke out from the earth stretching up into the sky,
the first fruit of new creation that promises so much.

And so hope has taken root in our world
and continues to grow and grow and grow and will not stop
Until the day when all heaven and earth will be made new,
When tears will be wiped from every face,
And when sin, suffering, and death will be no more.

Praise to you, living God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer of confession

Loving God,
Just as Jesus breathed living breath on his disciples
So we breathe in your Spirit, Holy Comforter and Reconciler,
Who brings peace between us and God,
Between one another, and with all creation.

And so in the peace of Christ, we breathe out our confession.
We confess all we are: all our worries, all our failures, all our frailties.
We confess on behalf of our community: all the isolation, all the distrust, all the anger.
We confess on behalf of our world: all the pain, all the disorientation, all the blaming.
We exhale these things and with Christ declare, *it is finished*. Peace reigns.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
We have been given a new birth into a living hope
And an inheritance that is kept safe for us in the bosom of God.
E te whānau ā te Karaiti. Brother and sisters in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.

Passing of the peace

The risen Jesus came and stood among the disciples, saying, "Peace be with you."
We too have received his peace.
Kia tau tonu te rangimārie o te Ariki ki a koutou. The peace of Christ be with you all.

Considering peace

Alison, Maya, Jack, Ana, Hayley, and Lincoln share what peace is for them

Hymn

Christ is alive (Truro) CH4 416 - Brian Wren

1 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

2 Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.

3 Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

4 Christ is alive, and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise

Readings – read by Geoff Swift

From 1 Peter chapter one

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.

From the Gospel of John chapter 20

¹⁹When 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.’ 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.

Interlude

As we reflect on the scriptures,
take a look at this mosaic.

What do you notice?

How is the artist depicting the scene?



Sermon “Peace be with you”

I.

I wonder what you notice about the mosaic. You can probably tell the scene it is depicting. It is our gospel reading for today when Jesus appears to his disciples in the locked room and invites Thomas to see and touch his wounds and know that he really is risen. You can see the other disciples gathered round in the locked room with the dim lighting, the candles, the empty dining chair inviting the viewer in to participate.

A peculiarity I noticed is that everything is slightly distorted. There’s no one perspective. Most paintings or mosaics have one or two perspectives so that things appear in proportion. But here, it’s almost like the disciples are standing on different levels, floating in space around Jesus. On the one hand, we peer into a confined and narrow space, a locked room. On the other hand, there is a spaciousness and liveliness to the scene.

I wonder if the artists are trying to tell us something of what resurrection reality is like. This is a reality that is similar, one we’re invited to participate in through the empty chair. And yet it’s dissimilar. It’s unlike anything we know, completely new, and outside our experience. The colour and light also helps to convey meaning. Jesus is clearly the central focus. The light almost emits from his body. And he’s dressed in vivid, fiery red robes, intermingled with a cool, light, soothing blue. The underside of his robe, around his wound, appears to flow out from his wound like a gushing spring of water. The fiery red, I think, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, breathed on the disciples by Jesus. The cool blue is perhaps a symbol of abundant peace: the peace that is won through the cross of Christ, poured out for all. Peace and Holy Spirit: these are the definitive signs of Christ’s resurrected life.

But the red and the blue aren’t contained within Christ’s person. It’s almost as if the light and colour is spilling out from him, leaking, seeping into the disciples around him and into the world. It’s as if the artists are suggesting this resurrection reality is contagious. It can’t be contained by Christ’s material body but all who come into contact with the risen Jesus are vivified, energised, agitated. Their whole world is distorted. The perspectives by which we make sense of the world are shaken up. This resurrection reality is not just something that happened to Jesus but something that we all participate in as we encounter the risen Christ and receive his Holy Spirit.

II.

And then there’s Thomas. I couldn’t figure out why the artists gave him light blue hair... perhaps to convey that moment of conversion, of realisation. I noticed his eye as well. It’s out of proportion with the rest of his body and with the eyes of everyone else in the scene. Thomas is the one who demands to see in order to believe. He demands proof that Jesus is risen. But I wonder if the artists are going further. For Thomas, his demand to see is a hindrance to believing. Seeing too much can in fact blind us. Like when we look at the sun. Our eyes take in too much light and we become blind. Perhaps with his oversized eye, the artists are suggesting that Thomas saw too much. He was so overwhelmed by recent events, by the fear of death, by the persecution against Jesus’ followers, by the imminent reality in front of him that he couldn’t see anything else. He was unable to believe from testimony alone that Christ is risen. He reaches out but he cannot see.

Look at Thomas’ halo. All the other disciples have a halo as well. It is a symbol of holiness and of solidarity with the risen Christ who is one with them by the Spirit. Unlike the others, Thomas’ halo is starting to disintegrate, to fall apart, right in front of his eyes, in his field of vision. And his hand doesn’t actually touch the wounds of Christ like it does in other artistic depictions of this scene. Instead, his hand hovers in a black abyss: Thomas can see and yet is blind, unable to truly believe. He is thrown into despair, locked into the fear of death.

I think Thomas actually gets a bit of a hard time. And eventually of course he does believe. Christ does not abandon him to his disbelief and despair. Thomas is much the same as the other disciples except that they were lucky enough to be present in the room when Christ appeared in the room the first time. But were they just as overwhelmed by their circumstances as Thomas? Like us, they were in lockdown, in self-isolation. They had locked themselves away, not because of a virus but, we’re told, for fear of the Jews

(which in John's Gospel is a blanket term for the group out to kill Jesus and by extension his followers). It's quite rational that the disciples should want to lock themselves away from such a real threat. And yet, as we are discovering, a physical lockdown is never just a physical lockdown. It affects our whole being, our daily rhythms, our mood and emotions, our social wellbeing (as we can't be physically present with others as we used to), our spiritual wellbeing... It affects our wellbeing at every level. It's similar, I think, with the disciples. Yes, they have locked themselves away physically, but they have done so out of fear and this fear is crippling them, holding them captive, locking them in until it's their whole reality and all they can see ... until Christ breaks into their lockdown and declares peace and banishes their fear from them.

III.

Their locked room is not just a room. It is a tomb. A self-made tomb. John wants us to see it this way, I think. That's because it mirrors Jesus' resurrection. You may have noticed that our reading today takes place (at least the first part, without Thomas) on Easter day, the day of Jesus' resurrection. But unlike Jesus' resurrection that happens at the beginning of the day, this happens at the end of the day. The beginning of the day we know well. We heard it last week: the rising dawn of new creation, the empty tomb, the astonished, disciples, the weeping Mary, Jesus breaking out of his tomb and appearing to her in the garden.

But don't forget that our reading today also happens on Easter Sunday. For John the day of resurrection begins with Jesus breaking out of his tomb and it ends with Jesus breaking into the self-made tomb of the disciples. It begins with the empty grave and ends with Jesus declaring peace and breathing the Holy Spirit on the disciples. I wonder if John is suggesting that resurrection isn't just something miraculous that happened to Jesus 2000 years ago. Rather it is an ongoing reality that begins with Jesus rising and the empty grave, but continues even now as the risen Christ breaks into our self-made tombs by the Spirit. The risen Jesus is busy liberating creation from the bondage of fear and death and giving us the Holy Spirit that we may share in his work of peace-making, reconciliation and forgiveness. In other words, resurrection continues even now and will continue until the end of all things when heaven and earth will be made new: the new creation of all, the renewal of all things in Jesus Christ.

It's significant for us that Jesus appears to his disciples in self-isolation and lockdown. In other words, we should expect that we will be disrupted in lockdown. Expect Jesus to break in. Before Easter, we played around with the idea that self-isolation can be like a tomb: we looked at the raising of Lazarus in John 11 and then on Good Friday we dwelt on Jesus' own death and burial in a tomb. But now, after Easter, I wonder if John is inviting us to imagine our self isolation less as a tomb and more as a womb, as a place of new birth, of new creation; the place in which we receive the peace of death-defeated and receive the Holy Spirit that we may be continually born again and share in the resurrection reality.

Could our self isolation -- as hard as it has been and as difficult as it will continue to be in the subsequent months as we jump between levels 2, 3, and 4 -- be a time of rebirth, of recreation, of renewal as we receive anew the peace of Christ and are called to share in the work of peacemaking? May we join with Christ in bursting from the tomb in anticipation of the day when all heaven and earth will be made new and all will dwell in the presence of God.

Peace be with you!

Prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer – led by Beulah Dunstone-Leitch

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

1 Alleluia! Alleluia!
hearts to heaven and voices raise;
sing to God a hymn of gladness,
sing to God a hymn of praise:
he who on the Cross a victim
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ, the King of Glory,
now is risen from the dead.

2 Christ is risen, Christ the first-fruits
of the holy harvest field,
which will all its full abundance
at his second coming yield;
then the golden ears of harvest
will their heads before him wave,
ripened by his glorious sunshine,
from the furrows of the grave.

Benediction

(Blaenwern) CH4 427 - Christopher Wordsworth

3 Christ is risen, we are risen;
shed upon us heavenly grace,
rain, and dew, and gleams of glory
from the brightness of thy face;
so that we, with hearts in heaven,
here on earth may fruitful be,
and by angel hands be gathered,
and be ever, Lord, with thee.

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Breath Prayer

As Jordan introduced during the prayer of confession, you might like to practise a breath prayer this week. A breath prayer is a meditative form of prayer that focuses on your breathing. At its simplest, a breath prayer can be a way to calm oneself and to be fully present in the moment.

However, often words or phrases may be associated with a breath prayer. Read John 20:19-23. Jesus gives peace to the disciples and breathes the Holy Spirit on them. As a way of participating in the story, we can model our own breath prayer on this simple act of Jesus breathing on the disciples: the act of inhaling becomes an embodied way of receiving God's presence through Christ by the Spirit. The act of exhaling becomes an embodied way of giving to Christ all that burdens you and of dwelling in the peace of the Spirit.

1. Settle into a comfortable position. Sitting with feet evenly planted on the ground with a straight back and relaxed shoulders can be conducive to settling.
2. Focus on your breath. Don't force the breathing. Just focus on your breathing in and out. Feel the breath fill your lungs and be thankful for the breath of life in you.
3. Once you've found a rhythm, allow your inhale to become a receiving of the Holy Spirit.
4. Allow your exhale to become a confession of all you are before God. Acknowledge these things but don't dwell or stew on them. Instead place them onto Christ, who carries your burdens.
5. Repeat as long as is helpful. You might like to set a timer as a way to discipline yourself to be still for a certain amount of time.