

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Nancy Hands. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Welcome to this service recorded for you by the Enfield Methodist Circuit, for the second Sunday of Easter.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

I greet you in the words of Revelation 1 : ‘Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was and who is to come’ .

**StF 297 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NOrc6doudc>

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.

Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine.

but saving, healing, here and now,  
and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war,  
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,  
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, where even hope has died.

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.

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.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Mighty God, beyond all space and time, greater than our minds can fully grasp or imagine, ruler over all that is, and has been and shall be, we worship you. We worship you as the God made known to us in Christ, a God all good and wholly other, and yet a God who loves us as his children; a God who has shared our humanity. We worship you as the God we

experience within us, the God who fires our imagination and sets our hearts aflame through the Spirit of Christ. Mighty God, help us to catch a glimpse of your greatness, opening our hearts and minds to your presence made known through Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Forgiving God, we know we let you down; we lose sight of all you have promised and all you are able to do. Distractions crowd in to drown out your voice and deny everything we believe about you. Doubt can sometimes get the upper hand, but you are always faithful to us, refusing to let us go. Come to us now, and help us to glimpse a little more of your glory, so that we can confess not just our sins, but confess you again, with Thomas, as our Lord and our God, in this time of worship and in the days ahead. Thank you for the peace and forgiveness you promise us when we turn to you in repentance, in the name of our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Introduction to reading

For our first reading from Acts, we skip forward to after Pentecost, when empowered and emboldened by the Holy Spirit, Peter and the disciples have been preaching in the Temple precincts and healing many people. Their following has grown amazingly, alarming the chief priests to the extent that they had the disciples arrested and imprisoned. As we know,

doors, locks and chains don't stop the power of God! Peter and the others are miraculously sprung from jail and, rejoicing, go right back to where they were arrested.

Our Gospel reading takes us back to the evening of the first Easter Day.

Acts 5: 27-32 NIV

**27** 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 Saviour 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.'

John 20: 19-31 NRSV

**19** 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 and stood among them

and said, "Peace be with you." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

**24** But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So 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."

**26** A 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." **27** Then 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." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his

disciples, which are not written in this book. **31** But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[c]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

#### Reflection

How daring does our faith make us?

Every year, on the Sunday after Easter, we have the story of Thomas: doubting Thomas. In fact, he was no more disbelieving than any of the other disciples, when Mary (and the other women mentioned in both Matthew and Luke) came to them on Easter morning, saying that Jesus was alive again. In Luke's account, the women were dismissed as talking nonsense and Peter was 'confused' when he went to see for himself and saw the linen cloths lying in an empty tomb; even his own eyes had not been enough to believe Jesus was alive. And whichever account is the more accurate, by that evening, the disciples were cowering and afraid in a locked room, for fear of the Jews.

They were Jesus' hand-picked, chosen band of friends, fellow travellers, apprentices - his disciples - and they were not in great shape on Easter evening. They were frightened, disappointed, crushed and grieving; guilty for leaving Jesus

friendless when he was most vulnerable, and for running away. Hopes and beliefs had deserted them. The faithfulness, power and compassion of God had fled from their consciousness. They had nothing to look forward to. Everything seemed final - and over.

Some were probably very angry that Jesus hadn't attempted to use common sense to avoid trouble, hadn't defended himself properly, hadn't used his power as he should have; angry that he had let them down, after three years of promising life in all its fulness. How complex our emotions are, when a loved one dies: the regrets, the 'if only's', the blame, the pain, the denial, the fear for the future. And for the disciples, imminent fear for their own safety.

And Jesus comes; Jesus knows; Jesus understands.

Maybe it would be better to refer to this familiar passage as 'Jesus believes', rather than 'Thomas doubted'. He believed in the other ten - and Thomas as a worthy disciple - and he cared enough to ensure Thomas received what he needed - just as he had given Mary what she needed. As a result, Mary became the first evangelist - going to tell others immediately what she knew to be true. Thomas, by tradition and documented evidence, subsequently spread the gospel as far as India, where he is said to be buried.

Jesus came to the disciples in the locked room to take away

their fear and negativity, and give them peace in their hearts. He was trusting them to take the Gospel of truth to the ends of the earth, when he returned to his Father, and so he breathed his Holy Spirit on them to enable and empower them.

This is John's account of the giving the Holy Spirit, different to Luke's account in Acts on the day of Pentecost 50 days later. John's reflective, theological Gospel is written 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.' He began his Gospel, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' Here, at what is believed to be the original ending, Thomas declares, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus really is who he claims to be - spanning earth and heaven. The author of John sees the continuity of God coming in Jesus to save the world, and through Jesus giving the Spirit to the disciples, to spread the Gospel and continue building his Kingdom on earth. It is all one great plan of salvation, restoring harmony and for all people to know life in all its fulness.

We don't have the possibility of seeing Jesus in human - albeit resurrected - form, but we can know personally and convincingly of his being present with us through his Spirit: presence that doesn't come and go as the resurrected Jesus did, but as a constant living reality.

It was that Spirit-presence of Jesus which empowered and

emboldened Peter and the apostles to go right back to the place where they had been arrested, after God had sprung them out of jail; right back to the place where Jesus himself had been condemned. Nothing was going to stop Peter preaching the Gospel, pronouncing the truth, declaring what had to change for the world to be saved. He knew God was in control.

It is a banal analogy perhaps, and a controversial one, but I couldn't help but think of the actions of the Extinction Rebellion protestors, as others before them, who having been released from police custody, went straight back to protest again - knowing the consequences.

When you believe something so strongly, you have to act. The wisdom for a Christian is to know you are acting at God's prompting, in God's timing, and not for a political or other aim. It needs the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

In the verse leading in to our passage from Acts, we are told that the Temple guards did not re-arrest Peter and the others by force, because 'they feared the people would stone them'. The Spirit-filled apostles were doing so much good in Jesus' name, crowds were flocking to them, believing in the Lord and bringing their sick in to Jerusalem from other towns for healing. The apostles had become the people to go to for forgiveness and cleansing and new life; the Temple was losing its power. No wonder the High Priest and the Sanhedrin were

furious with them. The verse following our passage for today tells us the priests were so enraged, they wanted to put them all to death. They didn't want truth; they couldn't begin to believe that Jesus, who they killed, really was divine, or that these men were acting on God's authority. It would totally undermine their whole existence.

Peter in his defense, reminds them that it is God they all serve; they are not on different sides. They are all in the business of worshipping and obeying that same God. He points out that though they - the religious authorities - have done wrong, the reason Jesus lived and died was to offer repentance and forgiveness of sins to all Israel; he was all about restoration and a right relationship with God, just as the priests should have been. Peter tells the truth: yes they were responsible for Jesus' death, but he doesn't condemn them - just as Jesus hadn't condemned him, or Thomas. As Jesus offered peace and forgiveness, so Peter does the same, but they are gifts which must be sought and received. The apostles, including Thomas, were desperate for both peace and forgiveness; they wanted their relationship restored; they wanted the love of God in their hearts. The Temple authorities, sadly did not.

The meaning of disciple is 'learner'. The meaning of apostle is 'one who is sent'. While Jesus was with his friends, they were learning from him. After his death, resurrection and ascension,

and empowered by his Holy Spirit, they became the ones sent out to carry on Jesus' mission. Luke calls them disciples in his Gospel, but apostles in Acts. The resurrection and power of the Holy Spirit changed them.

Do we consider ourselves the learners, or has the impact of the resurrection hit us to the degree that we know ourselves to be the ones sent out? I hope we aspire to be both, for we never stop learning and following, but it takes courage to believe you are being sent by God to be active for him wherever you live or work. Are we willing to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit directing our lives, to share what we know to be true and to stand up for that truth; to truly believe in the abundant life God offers us, so that we trust him more than we fear for ourselves?

With Christ's peace and the Spirit's power, how daring does our faith make us?

Grace and peace to you, from him who is and was and is to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

The response to 'Lord of resurrection' is 'show your saving power and bring us peace.'

Let us pray.

Father of all, you have brought us together as family - from all places, all peoples, all times, all tongues - and you have placed

us in fellowship with one another, with those who are like us, and those who are different. We share communion through time, with the witnesses of your resurrection - those who saw and believed, those who doubted, those who spread the news, those who hid. Fill us with your Holy Spirit as you filled your disciples, despite their faults and fears, so that we can boldly proclaim the Good News of your Kingdom Life through our everyday living. And may all your people, dwelling together in unity, so display your love and grace that others may come to believe, and through believing, have life in you.

Loving God, sometimes things seem so final: the world is continually torn apart by wars; the environment is ruined by our greed and thoughtlessness; love is extinguished by hatred; joy is overshadowed by sorrow.

Lord of resurrection: **show your saving power and bring us peace.**

Life can seem so final: friendships are destroyed by angry words; families are separated through lack of love; future plans are shattered by illness; relationships are broken by death.

Lord of resurrection: **show your saving power and bring us peace.**

It all seems so final: the crucifixion of a Saviour; the disappearance of a Master; the loss of a Friend; the absence of a Leader.

Lord of resurrection: **show your saving power and bring us peace.**

Teach us Lord, that with you nothing is final except your loving purpose. Yours will be the last word, the final act; the decision that the end has come. Until then, may we entrust ourselves to your care, and may the power of the resurrection transform our lives and your world. In the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

### **StF 662 Have you heard God's voice**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ\\_TRU6aPbY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ_TRU6aPbY)

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?  
Are you still prepared to follow?  
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?  
Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow.

Jacqueline G. Jones

Blessing

With the courage of Peter and the honesty of Thomas, may we  
go from here to share the Good News and rejoice in our risen  
Saviour.

And the blessing and peace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us now and for evermore. Amen.

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