



Second Sunday of Easter

23 April 2017

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A note on the lectionary readings

This week's Lectionary Readings are like well-tuned instruments of an orchestra all playing in joyful harmony the same magnificent melody of the resurrection.

Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

This selected passage is part of Peter's sermon at Pentecost; it is his eye witness testimony to the fact of the resurrection (v. 32). It was a powerful, Spirit filled sermon winning three thousand new converts! It is a sermon every preacher should study, says James Montgomery Boice! It is centred on Scripture (Peter quotes from Psalm 16), and on the person of Jesus Christ, and on the fact of the resurrection! Peter brought into contrast all that was known about Jesus of Nazareth the man (v. 22) and all that Scripture, in this case Ps. 16 testified about Him, in conclusion he proclaimed that the two together pointed at the resurrection, of which he and the other apostles were all witnesses! The emphasis here in the text and for us as preachers on this Sunday, the first after Easter, is on bearing witness to the resurrection! Being encouraged by the testimony of Scripture, by our personal knowledge of Jesus and his acts, being empowered by His Spirit, our preaching needs to be bearing witness to the power of the resurrection.

Psalm 16

This is a Psalm of David, his praise of the faithfulness and the might of God. David is still a refugee, but he already has been promised the kingdom, even though in his present circumstances it seems to be in the distant future, if at all, but David takes God's word as good and as real as if he would sit on the throne already. The Lord has assigned his portion for him, the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places, and he has delightful inheritance. David's heart is glad, and he is rejoicing in praise, and rests in security even as he is on the run, for he focuses with the whole of his being upon God, who is his only good thing. David is assured that the Lord will not abandon him even in the grave! He set the Lord always before him, as soldier looks at his officer, musician at the conductor, sailor at the captain, so does the believer set the risen Lord before himself in all circumstances (v. 8).



Psalm 111

This Psalm is a sheer delight in the Lord and in His works. It is an acrostic poem (each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet). The psalmist with great artistic ease praises the Lord, and recalls, line by line the whole of the salvation history of his people, saving them from Egypt, commanded them the Passover, provided for them in the Sinai, presented them with the conquest of the Promised Land, made an everlasting covenant with them. In the view of such majestic action, and love from God the wise can just put their trust into the Lord, and worship Him in obedience.

1 Peter 1: 3-9

Peter is overflowing with joy and praise! His letter is a letter of hope. He who denied his Master (Luke 22:54-62) lost all hope when Jesus was crucified. But on Easter morning he ran to the empty tomb, his hope was awakened; and later at the Sea of Galilee he jumped into the water and swam ashore to meet his risen Master before anyone else! He has been given new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ! It was a life changing experience to him, as it should be to all of us! So Peter is looking ahead, forward towards that inheritance that now he has through Christ! An inheritance that he never deserved (by the way no inheritance is ever deserved, or earned – it is an inheritance because of the relationship the heir has with the one that leaves the inheritance). It is a sure inheritance that is kept in heaven for every believer; just as every believer is kept safe (shielded) by God's power till reaches heaven. This is the joy of the believer in the present, even if they go through trials and grief. Those challenges just strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ whom they have not seen, but love Him, and have faith in Him.

Peter's words are an outburst of joyful praise and hope! Such praise and joy should describe us on the Sunday after Easter and not the usual quietness that we so often experience.

John 20: 19-31

John's gospel here gives the account of the events of two evenings, of two appearances of the risen Lord. They are separate, yet they belong together. The second is the consequence of the first.



The risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in the evening of Easter Day, He came to them to fill them with His Peace, to send them out to continue with His ministry, to enable them for the task by His Spirit. The disciples are becoming apostles. They were gathered to Jesus as disciple, however it was always Jesus' purpose for them to send them out to preach the good news, to send them out as apostles (cf. Mark 3: 13-15). Jesus appeared to the disciples for their sake as a group.

A week later Jesus appeared for the sake of one disciple, Thomas. Thomas is not forgotten by the Lord. He is not missed out. Thomas seems to struggle, he is a bit lost. The risen Lord appears for his sake too! Jesus cares for him, as Good Shepherd cares for the one lost sheep. Thomas is just as important to the risen Lord as the rest of his team! How encouraging it is to read this, learn this that the Lord does not forget about the individual in the midst of the congregation! While He has words for the whole group, He also has words for the individual member! He does not forget about the individual, or neglect him/her when they struggle, or feel being lost in the pew, or at home! As Jesus came after Thomas to offer him His Peace and Word of encouragement He comes after us to grant us His Peace and renew our faith.

The risen Lord comes to the disciples in His risen power and risen body! His presence with them is proof He overcame the power of death and of the grave. He is not weak, or feeble, but powerful! Jesus has come to send them out, to commission them to continue with His ministry! The risen Lord offers all that they need for this mission.

a) **Peace of the Lord.** Jesus greets them in the usual manner: Peace be with you! He says this a second time, but this time it is not a greeting, this time it is His gift to them. Jesus called us not for a quiet, leisurely life, but for an active mission that faces challenges, problems, and various trials. He gives us first of all His Peace to carry out the mission. A true peace over and against fear, and doubt.

b) **Purpose of the Lord.** The Lord gathered you to Himself that you will be a witness for Him, you will go out to preach the coming of His Kingdom, of sharing His Good News. He never meant us to be armchair theologians, locked up in an upper room, but apostles, people sent out moving about people, taking the Good News to them. As He was sent by the Father to save the world (cf. John 3:17) we are sent with the message of the very same Salvation.



c) **Power of the Lord.** Jesus does not expect us to do His mission just on our own, relying on our own abilities and strength. He gives us His strength, His power, the Holy Spirit. The mission can be accomplished only through His Spirit. Jesus knew very well Thomas will not be able to fulfil the calling on his own, so He came back for him, to empower him also as He empowered the other disciples.

d) We are the people of the Resurrection, let us move in the Peace of the Lord to fulfil His Purpose as He enables us by His Power.

Sermon ideas

John 20:27b Do not doubt but believe.

Our text this morning is a direct command of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. *Do not doubt but believe". Although these words are directed at Thomas, they can be addressed to everyone who hears the story of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection for the first time.

Today, we will consider three things - confusion, confession and confirmation, These are often the three stages or milestones on the road to proclamation of the Christian faith and commitment to discipleship. All three are elements of our Gospel story this morning.

In this passage, Christ focuses on Thomas. We often refer to him as Doubting Thomas, but here he is called The Twin (verse 24). There is no clear indication in the Bible of who his twin might have been, although scholars over the years have speculated about who it might have been. It's likely that Thomas was a nickname rather than his given name. Parents of twins would not name one of them "Twin". Yet by translating "Thomas" to "Didymus" three times, the Gospel of John makes it clear that as an adult Thomas was known—even among Greek speakers—as "the twin".

In Dr John Brown of Haddington's Dictionary of Bible Characters, Thomas is described as "very ignorant" and "all-captivated with such condescension" that he never did accept the challenge to feel Christ's wounds.

So what **do** we know about Thomas? When he heard about the death of Lazarus, "Thomas (called the Twin) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us all go along with the Teacher, so that we may die with him!" (John 11:16). He expected Jesus to be put to death if he went to see the sisters of Lazarus,



because he would be endangering his life by returning to Judea. Nevertheless, he was prepared to die along with Jesus if this did happen?

It is a brash statement, and, it would appear, a pointless one. It would seem that Thomas does not stop to think of God's plan. Either for him, or for Christ. His lack of understanding can be further seen in John 14:5-6 - Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?" He is rewarded with the answer - "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me."

So poor Thomas is not a very good role model. He has doubts, makes rash statements and clearly lacks understanding. And yet Christ deliberately seeks him out in the midst of his confusion, so that finally Thomas exclaims,

"My Lord and my God!"

However this confession by Thomas does not lead to approval by Christ. Quite the opposite in fact, as Jesus says to him - "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

It is interesting to read the biography of Thomas Dorsey by Margo McKenzie, in which she describes how the son of an itinerant preacher and church organist became known as the father of gospel music.

Dorsey had been resisting God's call, preferring to make a living in the secular world of blues music. He suffered two bouts of severe depression.

McKenzie chronicles how Dorsey "had reached a point in his life when he could not produce the lyrics or the music he so easily created in the past. In fact, he could do nothing at all. He could not practice, compose or perform.

The doctors called it a nervous breakdown; Dorsey called it a "God interruption." His mother travelled to Chicago to nurse him back to health.

During this time, his mother advised him to select the divine music over the devils. However, once he recuperated, he returned to the music that paid—the music of jazz and the blues.



The conflict between Dorsey's secular and spiritual strivings would not rest, causing him so much anguish and despair that he could no longer perform his duties in either realm. During this second "God interruption," he was in so much despair that he considered suicide.

As a remedy, his sister-in-law invited him to her church and the pastor there told him, "Dorsey, the Lord has too much work for you to do to let you die." Then the pastor pulled a serpent from Dorsey's throat. This supernatural experience coupled with the death of a neighbour inspired Dorsey to write his first gospel blues song entitled "If You See My Saviour, Tell Him That You Saw Me." He was on his way to recovery."

When someone reaches the point of confession of faith. it involves submission. Thomas the twin submitted himself to Christ; Thomas Dorsey submitted to God's will and pattern for his life, using his musical talents to extol the majesty of God and his kingdom.

Confession is followed by confirmation. The last two verses of our Gospel lesson act as a confirmation or statement of who Christ is.- "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 that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

The dictionary links confirmation with certainty and proof. All the Scripture lessons today ascribe glory to God for victory and defeat of our enemies, even death the last enemy. The Psalmist gives no credence to doubt; the author of the Book of Acts of the Apostles affirms the sovereignty of God and the Lordship of Christ; John reminds us of the words of Christ - "Do not doubt, but believe".

But how do we reach the point of belief; of certainty; of proof of God's love for us and of Christ's resurrection? Most people, like Thomas, go through a process of Confusion Confession and finally Confirmation. The eminent Swiss theologian., Karl Barth, points out that all this is possible only by the grace of God. It is God alone who replaces confusion with confession and confirmation. God does not require to set this process in motion, but freely chooses to do so. When we , in our turn, are caught up in the process we can deny Christ, or we can confess him as Lord and Saviour and affirm that we have life in his name.



Time with Children

Who Am I?

Hasbro's Guess who? Game is a classic guessing game in which players have to try to identify a character from a series of clues and answers to questions.

This morning, we are going to try to identify a Bible character from a series of clues.

- I was called the twin
- I asked Jesus about the way to God
- I offered to die with Jesus
- I was known for my doubts

Any ideas? Hear the answers from various people (add in other clues if you feel they are needed).

Reveal the answer is Thomas.

One day Jesus was with his disciples and he asked them, "Who do men say that I am?"

"Some say you are John the Baptist," said one of the disciples.

"Some say you are Elijah or one of the prophets," answered another.

"But who do you say that I am?" asked Jesus.

"You are the Christ," answered Peter.

On another occasion, Thomas was forced to confront his doubts when he confessed Jesus as "My Lord and my God!"

Because Jesus came to reveal God to us, we don't have to guess who God is. We see him in the Bible, in creation and in one another.

Perhaps, you could turn the questions of Jesus around and use this as a short time for prayer and reflection. As Jesus asks the disciples, 'Who is it that you say I am', try asking Jesus in prayer, 'Lord, who is it that You say I am?'. Follow this by a moment or two of quiet creating an opportunity for the children to reflect.



Prayers

Collect for the Day

Almighty and eternal God,
 the strength of those who believe
 and the hope of those who doubt,
 may we, who have not seen, have faith
 and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing, who is alive and reigns
 with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

Approach

Gracious heavenly father. we praise you that out of chaos and confusion
 you have created beauty and order.

In our cautious world, how often are we warned to expect "No rash promises":
 words meant kindly to prevent our disappointment,
 yet so often cause to curb our enthusiasm.

*Not that we ever learn to measure our own words or guard our lips from promises too easily made
 but seldom fulfilled.*

We set out full of good intentions: intend to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile,
 but there are so many distractions, temptations,
 things we'd rather do, places we'd prefer to be.

We resolve to be better promise keepers,
 but it seems we are born to trouble
 and the vows do not last long before our fickleness and unreliability
 rise to the surface once more and so we stand on the verge of the promised land,
 hesitant and vulnerable, victims of our own frailty and powerless through our lack of trust, facing a
 future devoid of hope.

Then we remember that we are not anonymous –



we have a name and it is *indeed* written on the palm of your hands
and the promises you have given to us in Christ are no rash promises,
no empty words.

For us he turned from earth's distractions, refused to yield to temptations.
There was nothing he would rather do than accomplish our *saving*;
no place he'd rather be than taking our place in judgement before you.

And now enthroned alongside you,
he promises that we can be with him in paradise:
a promise which will not be thwarted or lead to disappointment,
but lift us to a place where we'd prefer to be:
in your nearer presence.

And even before that comes to pass; even when the night is darkest,
you call us by name into your marvellous light
and you promise never to leave us or forsake us. For ever and ever, Amen

Thanksgiving/Intercession/Commemoration

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of a mind which can put doubts aside and fears behind us,
trusting in your presence with us and your promise that we have life in your name.

Almighty Father,
whose authoritative word of love called to being
the cosmic order of this universe —
so vast and immense in distances of time and space, with myriad clusters of galaxies
spanning countless millions of light years;
intricate in detail and design
to the tiniest particle of matter —
we rejoice that, by your Holy Spirit,
you have established a world of organic life
in manifold profusion, bestowing upon human being that favour unmerited
that was focused in Israel



and supremely revealed in the mystery of
God's personal presence with us
as Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bless your Church, here and everywhere.
Confirm your people in the faith of the Gospel,
inspire them with love for your house,
zeal in your service,
and joy in the well-being of your kingdom.
Bless your servant, Elizabeth our Queen.
Govern the hearts and minds
of the Queen's ministers and counsellors,
that they may fulfil their service for
the welfare of the people
and the glory of your name.

Bless the whole world with peace.
Kindle in the hearts of all people the true love of peace
and guide with your wisdom the leaders of the nations,
that your kingdom may advance
until the earth be filled with the knowledge of your love.

God, three in one, the church's one foundation,
whose nature we acknowledge as mystery,
we praise you for every sign of your care, for your variety of gifts,
and for every way
in which you help, heal, and uphold us.

Bless with your comfort all who are in trouble or pain.
Heal those who are sick;
support those who are dying;
console those who mourn;



supply the wants of those who are in need.

Be near to those

whom now we name in *silence*...

We give thanks for those who have died in the faith,

especially those known to us,

who have entered into the joy and peace

of your nearer presence.

Grant that we may follow their example, and come to share with them

the glory of everlasting life,

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who with the Father and the Holy Spirit

is worshipped and glorified for ever. Amen.

Musical suggestions

| | |
|---------|---|
| CH4 132 | Immortal invisible |
| CH4 427 | Alleluia, alleluia. Give thanks to the risen Lord |
| CH4 645 | I'm not ashamed to own my Lord |
| CH4 438 | The head that once was crowned with thorns |
| CH4 286 | Tell out my soul |
| CH4 237 | Look forward in faith |
| CH4 425 | The Saviour died but rose again |



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

Quick Guide...

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Ada Macleod and Rev George Vidits for providing us with this material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

