

Order 11 April 2021

## Call to Worship

Psalm 133 A song of ascents. Of David.

<sup>1</sup> How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup> It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

<sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

We pause for a minutes silence before I offer a prayer written to share with the Church by the Right Rev Davd Ferguson to mark the death of the Duke of Edinburgh and offer our prayers to all who mourn.

“Blessed are they who mourn they shall be comforted”

## Intercession/Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Whose presence comforts and inspires,  
Whose people of faith set us a shining example to follow  
Whose love and mercy surround us to the end of our days  
We offer now our gratitude for your servant

Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

For gifts of courage, duty and selfless service, Receive our thanks.

For concise speech and thought, Receive our thanks.

For his passion for this diverse world, And all its creatures,

We give you thanks.

For his unswerving commitment to country and Commonwealth,

We give you thanks.

We thank you also for the role he played

As husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

For the way in which he took the lead,

And challenged and set goals,

And encouraged all life to be lived to the full.

We bless you for his many years of marriage to our Queen,

For his steadfast support through her long reign,

And for the bonds of affection that sustained them through each stage of life.

We praise you for his enduring faith, unafraid to ask questions,

But loyal in devotion to the church.

For his work with the young especially through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme which still enriches the lives of many in this country and across the world, We give you thanks.

For his many links with the land and people of Scotland,

At Deeside, in Edinburgh and across the many charitable causes to which he lent support,

We give you our heartfelt thanks.

We remember at this time all who will mourn his loss,  
Especially those who knew him best and love him most.  
We hold before you in our prayers Her Majesty the Queen.  
The passing of a stalwart support, wise counselor and loyal friend  
Will be hard to bear;  
The passing of an understanding mind and compassionate heart  
Will be hard to bear.  
Give her strength and comfort, Give her peace and acceptance,  
That through the passage of time, bright memories and laughter  
Will sustain her and remain as testament to a long life of duty and love,  
Dedicated to care of family, and service to country.

To you we offer our thanks and praise today, as we seek strength and direction  
For the way ahead in our own lives.

These prayers we offer in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray,

‘Our Father...’

Praise my soul the King of Heaven <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

Our attention now turns to Thomas as we look at how his life was changed/transformed by his encounter with the risen Christ.

Thomas is only mentioned 8 times in the New Testament, and on 4 of those are a list of the 12 disciples. So what do we know about him?

- One of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus
- The word we translate as “Thomas” actually means TWIN. He is also called “Didymus” which also means TWIN – though we have no idea as to who his twin was.
- Early Christian tradition says he went to Iran or India, and that he was martyred in India in 72AD

It is very easy to stereotype people and that makes it easier to deal with them – we know how they will react. So with Thomas – doubting Thomas – and as a result before we even encounter him we know what we think of him, how to react to him and what he will be like. Is this a fair picture of Thomas? When else does he appear in John’s Gospel?

In John 11 Jesus is on his way to raise Lazarus from the dead. The disciples urge Jesus not to go because an attempt has already been made to stone him (8). It is Thomas who declares ...that they should go also.

In John 14 Jesus is talking about “his Father’s house” in which there are many mansions/rooms. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them and that they know the way. It is Thomas who bursts out ... Lord we don’t know where you are going, how can we know the way.

And now in John 20, we will hear that Thomas refuses to believe until he has seen the risen Christ with his own eyes. Paula Gooder says in her excellent new book, *His Risen Existence* "If we remove the stereotype from Thomas and encounter him as he truly is, then we discover not someone who believes too little (as the epithet 'doubting Thomas' suggests) but someone who believes passionately, deeply and with the whole of their being." (Paula Gooder)

Based on these three passages, would you agree with this statement?

In chapter 11 whereas the other disciples are wanting Jesus to return to Judea, Thomas is prepared to go with Jesus to Jerusalem, even if it means death. He is the courageous one.

In chapter 14 he is so concerned about being with Jesus that he is frustrated when he does not know where Jesus is going. He simply wanted more information.

In chapter 20 he wants to see Jesus for himself and when he does he is the first to acknowledge who Jesus is: MY LORD AND MY GOD.

"Thomas only appears doubting because it matters so much to him; once he has worked out what it means, he is the clearest, most fervent believer of all. It is high time for Thomas to be allowed to throw off his stereotype and become the passionate, believing Thomas he really was." (Gooder)

Is it always wrong to have doubts about our faith?

Jesus welcomed Thomas' skepticism and challenged his doubts with direct evidence of his resurrection. Doubts can lead to a deeper, richer faith (29). This is not the same thing as asking for "blind faith".

SONG How often we like Thomas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKn9WZXm8zU>

Reading John 20: 19-31

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with

you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Purpose of John's Gospel

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[9]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Prayer before Sermon

As the risen One appears in the midst of fearful disciples

gathered together on the evening of the empty tomb,

we know that Mary Magdalene has shared with them

the news that she has seen the Lord.

The disciples are behind locked doors and feeling fearful,

and he speaks these simple words: "Peace be with you."

Not once, but twice: "Peace be with you."

He shows them his hands and his side,

revealing the wounds that demonstrate that it is indeed

Jesus himself who is with them.

The risen One meets the disciples' fear with reassurance.

When Jesus returns the following Sunday

to the same group of disciples,

including now the previously absent Thomas,

he offers that same greeting: "Peace be with you."

The risen One responds to his doubt

by once more extending compassionate reassurance.

He shows Thomas his hands and side.

And, although (often unfairly) known as 'Doubting Thomas'

he becomes the first of them to say aloud,

"My Lord and my God!"

On Easter evening the appearance of Jesus brings

those gathered a sense of emotional overload,

perhaps presenting as shock and awe,

but by the following week with a further assurance of peace,

Thomas goes beyond emotion and demonstrates

faith rather than doubt.

In John's gospel account,

Jesus commissions them then and there and breathes on them saying,

"Receive the Holy Spirit" (quite unlike Acts 2:1-21

and the arrival of the Holy Spirit there,

with people from every land all speaking at once,

which is read on Pentecost Sunday each year).

Jesus then introduces the possibility of His disciples forgiving sins.

That first phrase of the Risen Christ,

Peace be with you is repeated three times.

And here in lies another moment where I have realised that the pandemic has

presented an angle to this passage I'd not thought about in this ways before,

identifying that the first words Jesus shares with his disciples

are not a celebratory joyful Alleluia, but Peace be with you.

For, even with all that had happened since

they were all last together around the table,

sharing the meal and the peace, here he was

sharing these words once more, speaking this kind word of peace,

into their guilt, their despair and their doubt.

The peace of the one who knew he was to be betrayed and crucified,

The peace of the one who experienced isolation in the garden,

and rejection in the courtyard, and sacrificed his all on the cross

The peace of the one who has risen,

and made himself known to Mary by calling her name,

and to those on the road to Emmaus in the breaking of bread,

The peace which surpasses all our human understanding.

Consider for a moment what that peace might have meant

for the disciples on those two evenings.

Why does Jesus have to repeat the phrase?

What does peace mean for you or I and

what allows us to sense peace today?

Is it different things for different people at different times,

or are there common threads?

The peace which is ours through and in Christ alone,  
May be different to the peace someone else feels in themselves.

As the most popular hymn of our time says,

What heights of love, what depths of peace

When fears are stilled, and strivings cease,

Here in the love of Christ we stand.

And yet, if you look at it from this side of the resurrection,

it is utterly amazing that we Christians are here at all,

for when we look back, the signs were far from encouraging!

It was hardly a hotbed of faith that Jesus walked

in to when he bypassed the locked doors

that expressed so much about the disciples' fear.

This group of frightened, uncertain people,

utterly exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually,

had shut themselves away, afraid perhaps of what they may

have to confront if they stepped out into the wider world.

Sound familiar to anyone here and now? But then, Jesus is there!

The wounds reveal that it is unmistakably Jesus.

Yet, he is somehow also different, no longer subject to time and space.

Into their fear and confusion, and ours, and the nation's as we mourn,

Jesus speaks words of peace, and the disciples rejoice

as they glimpse the glory of God in their midst.

Yet before they even have time to absorb what is happening,  
Jesus commissions them to continue the work  
that He had begun and sends them out –  
beyond the safety they feel locked doors have given them,  
out into the world beyond.

In many ways, this is what the closing of church buildings  
during the pandemic has done to or should I say for the Church today.

For, it is in many ways a return to the ways of the early Church,  
when the people held everything in common.

And it's been interesting to watch this play out  
in our community as well, where some have taken time to  
help anyone and everyone they can to cope with new challenges,  
while others have become more and more challenging to deal with  
as they've looked for ways to occupy their idle time,  
often taking from others rather than giving,  
a continuum from boredom to burnout, isolation to insurrection.

In his Acts of the Apostles,  
Luke gives us an insight into the reality of this life in community,  
with all its joys and tribulations.

There is a new-found energy and vision born in them  
following the blessing of peace –  
a peace that does not bring the quiet life.

Quite the opposite – it is a peace which gives this group  
of once fearful and uncertain people,

a new dynamic energy and the courage to head out of those four walls  
to cope with whatever comes their way.

And so they begin the work that would take the Good News  
far beyond Jerusalem, out to the gentile world.

And that, my friends, is in large part why we are here this morning!

As we begin to move into the next chapter of the Church's life,  
Post-Covid, I wonder what new understanding this may lead to in  
our individual and church life,  
as we seek to share the peace of Christ with the world afresh.

When the prime focus in the Kirk today is Mission,  
where peace and the Holy Spirit are given and empower  
this new missionary community,  
author Colin Murchison's interpretation of these verses,  
is quite helpful, he says:

"The missionary people empowered by this peace and  
this inbreathed Holy Spirit bear the forgiving, transforming love  
of God into every sphere of human experience."

It is clear in Acts 2 that this relates to both  
personal matters (such as families)  
and public matters (such as economic injustice).

There is a lot of emotional overload in our world today, and  
We may not be able to change what is happening,  
But we can choose to faithfully trust God in the midst of it.  
And this means being people who bring peace into the chaos.

There's been a powerful metaphor going around during the past year

Based on a tweet by writer Damian Barr, which has been quoted by

Hundreds of news agents, talk shows, healthcare providers and others

Which says

We are not all in the same boat, we are all in the same storm.

Some have yachts, others have one oar.

It seems appropriate to share today as we remember the

Duke of Edinburgh's life from a child who knew struggles

and was rescued at sea, to a young man who served

his new home country in battle as a naval officer,

to a consort who was a steadfast and sure support and strength

to the Queen for more than 73 years,

as they have engaged with thousands of charities in

our country and the commonwealth, day in and day out.

The pandemic has demonstrated the power of communities;

neighbours have sprung into action and local groups

have delivered vital support.

It seems appropriate as we recognise the many people

In our world, affected by the impact of Covid.

Again, the example of The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh

spending more time together than they have for many years,

but isolated as so many are from the rest of their family.

And now, as so many thousands of other families have,

She and they are grieving a great loss in these strange times,

With “No fuss”, which is what Prince Philip wanted,  
but in other ways this muted commemoration  
allows for a levelling of grief with Her Majesty,  
who, regardless of your beliefs, will be deeply bereft  
as any of us would be after losing someone we been  
through so much with for so long.

And so we offer our prayers for the peace of Christ  
and the comfort which He alone can give at this difficult time.

As we trust in God, may we remember that our Lord call us  
to fix our eyes not on the size of this storm  
but on the One who can calm it with his perfect peace.

The size of the storm seems enormous for many just now,  
But the One who can calm our storm is greater still.

As the waves rock us we are to remember that Jesus  
came and joined those on the rough seas, and brought them peace,  
and that he is always in our boat,

be it the Royal Yacht or a cadet’s canoe in the Harbour.

Holy God, In time of peace and glory,  
We turn to you. In time of war and despair,  
We turn to you. Through brightness and darkness  
You continue to walk by our side.  
You fill our anxious days with steadiness;  
You complete our empty moments with fulfillment.  
Take our lives and shape them for your purpose,  
That our will may be your will.  
When we choose to drift from light and shadow,  
Call us back,  
Surround us with the power of your Word,  
That hearing, we may turn once more to  
Look upon your love, and know again  
The tenderness with which you hold us.

We bow before you,  
Knowing our weakness and fault;  
We acknowledge before you that our value is little  
Were it not for your immeasurable love placed upon us.  
Give us confidence to know that when you look upon us  
You do not see our hurtful actions,  
You do not hear our harsh words,  
You behold only your broken but mendable children,  
Whom you love, and cherish,  
And, when once more we turn again to you,

Forgive us Lord, show us your shining mercy,  
That we might lift our heads not only in hope,  
But surely in confidence,  
Such is the purpose of your saving grace for us.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Our closing scripture reading today is from the Final Exhortations of Paul to the Phillipaians 4: 4-9

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

In closing we ask for God's guidance once more in these strange times.

In closing, we ask for God's guidance once more in these strange times.

As we choose peace amidst the fear these verses remind us of the basics. And we need this centring and anchoring especially as we watch people around us experience chaos, fear and panic and grief.

When the weight of our worries is too much, when the spirit of fear or doubt loom or the burden of grief is too much, and they come in and begin to rob you and me of joy, peace and sleep; when all the what-ifs begin to awaken us in the dark of night, we want to move faithfully from panic to peace. We are called to trust in Jesus at all times in all our ways. One way we do this is through prayer. Prayer grounds us. More than ever we need to exhibit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is our calling as Christians.

Remember when Jesus said these words to his disciples?

“Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.” John 14:1

.Jesus spoke these words to His disciples to comfort them and they give each of us comfort when we are not sure how the story will end. But we know who holds the story and that it is moving towards him. And we know that we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus to bring healing and peace to the places we live and move and have our being.

And to remember always, that His peace is with us just as it was with the disciples behind locked doors, for his final promise just before going to be with His father in heaven, was this.

<sup>7</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Song : Sing with all the saints in Glory [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FML\\_usf8NR0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FML_usf8NR0)

### **Sending**

With our doubts alleviated, our fears subsided  
and our hopes revived,  
let us go in peace to love and to serve the risen Lord!

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
be with you, and all those you love, and care about  
and those you struggle to love, today and always.

**Blessing** Deep peace of the running wave to you  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_sZ93ofyI50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sZ93ofyI50)