

St Peter's Scottish Episcopal Church, Kirkcaldy



Sunday 11th April 2021, Easter 2

- Introit Hymn:* Alleluia, alleluia give thanks to the risen Lord
- Welcome:* Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**
- Collect for Purity:* **Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**
- Gloria:* **Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**
- Collect:* 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. **Amen**
- Collect SPB:* Almighty Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification: grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen.**
- First reading:* Acts 4. 32-35 (SPB 1 John 5.4)
- Second reading:* 1 John 3. 1-7
- Gradual hymn:* To God be the glory

Gospel acclamation: **Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus said: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.' Alleluia!**

Gospel: Luke 24. 36-48 (SPB St John 20.19)

When gospel is announced:
Glory to Christ our Saviour.

At end:
Give thanks to the Lord for his glorious Gospel. **Praise to Christ our Lord.**

Homily:

Last Sunday, the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we proclaimed with joy and wonder: "He is risen!"

That was the theme for the day, that was the truth renewed and declared. The stone is rolled away! The Lord is alive!

And what we have is an empty tomb.

The women came to the tomb with the spices they had prepared for the body. Seeing heavenly messengers, they believed and ran to tell the men.

But when the women told their news to the disciples – what they had seen and learned at the tomb, that empty tomb – the men didn't believe them! "These words seemed to them an idle tale," says one gospel.

And so when we read the story of what happened next, when Jesus came into the house and stood among his disciples, we have to wonder what was going through their minds. After all, these were the same disciples who had refused to believe the women until they could see with their own eyes. And even running to the tomb to see what he could find, Peter did not go in: He stayed outside, seeing only the emptiness.

And then, as we read in the Gospel of John today:

"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. ... Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

They got it! They finally believed!

But not all. No, just as there were disbelievers at the tomb, there is a disbeliever in their midst in today's story: Thomas. No sooner does one believe than another does not, and these back-and-forth tales persist throughout the Christian story.

"But Thomas ... one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.'"

Thomas was the holdout. There is no record of the other disciples' response to this, but they could hardly claim the moral high ground. Looking back in John's story only a few sentences, we read that Jesus showed them his hands and his side. It was only then that the disciples "rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

What is it about proof? Why do these disciples – the ones who were closest to Jesus, who walked with him, ate at table with him, listened to the wisdom of his preaching – require something more in order to believe? And how much is enough to tip the scale?

"Tip the scale": That's the image to hold in mind as we think about this.

Have you ever watched one of the many dog shows on television, a dog show that has tricks and trials? Sometimes dogs will have to run an obstacle course, and one of the obstacles will be a teeter totter sort of thing,

where the dog will run up one side, and carefully balancing, carefully stepping past the middle point, will tip the board down on the other side. At this point, the dogs often seem not to walk, not even to run off the board, but to jump off, in their excitement.

Faith is much like that teeter totter. It's a balancing act of running up one side of consideration to the tipping point, and having reached that dangerous ground, that area where you can stay safely balanced on your comfortable side, or you can even stand in the middle if you're very, very careful – and then jumping, with all you've got, to the other side, where you might find the downside of the plank, or you might find only thin air.

This is a useful application of the expression “leap of faith,” because that's exactly what it is. Most often, what we find when we get to that fulcrum, that tipping point, of faith, is only spiritual “thin air” on the other side. It's much safer, we think, to stay on the uphill side where we have solid wood under our feet. It's more uncertain, scarier even, to have to scramble to keep our footing and balance just like those dogs on the obstacle course, before deciding to jump!

The threshold of the empty tomb of Easter morning is a fulcrum, a tipping point, a place of decision. Imagine two people on a teeter totter, facing each other. What is in between them, in the middle, is the threshold of that tomb. The door. The entry or exit. What does each one see? A way in? A way out?

In his collection of essays “A Grief Observed,” C.S. Lewis wrote:

“You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose that you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?”

Such is faith.

What is necessary for us to believe? We can all practice religion: That's what we're doing now, in acting out worship and remembering Christ in the Eucharist. That is the stuff of identifying ourselves as Episcopalian or Methodist or Baptist or any of a myriad of Christian labels and distinctions.

All of us who call ourselves Christian are not necessarily converted to faith. Tongue in cheek, we might claim that there is complete agreement in this church and every other church about whether to have wine or grape juice for communion, whether to have candles on the altar, or whether to have an altar at all. But those are the things of religion. And yet, so often those are the things that divide us, that get in the way of Christian believing and Christian community. But Jesus was not concerned so much with matters of religion as he was with matters of faith.

Let's think back on the stories of Jesus, his ministry, his interactions with people. Do we remember the stories of the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for eating food that was unwashed, for healing on the Sabbath, for sharing a meal and associating with those who were considered the less desirable people of society? And what was his response in every single case? Those are trappings, those are not the things that are important. Those are not the things of the Kingdom of God.

In the season of Easter, we tell stories not of religion, but of faith and believing. Of standing at the entrance to the tomb, and deciding whether to go in. Of being closed in the house with the disciples and greeting our Lord. Of the women, the only ones who believed without question or denial. Of Peter and the other disciples. Of Thomas, called “Doubting Thomas,” because he demanded to see and touch. Of Paul and Ananias.

May each of us this Easter season come to know the Risen Christ in a new way. May the event of Easter be a unifying experience, to bring together the Body of Christ, instead of breaking it again on the cross. May we celebrate our differences that will be honored in the gathering of Pentecost and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit at the end of this season. May we remember that it is Jesus Christ who unites us as Lord and Savior, so that we cling to our faith more firmly than we do to our religion.

And may we think about something in this Easter season: How will we put ourselves into the story?

What does it take for us to believe?

we stand at the entrance to the tomb. We have heard the testimony of the women. We know what the disciples know.

What is our story of faith? What is our response to the Easter news? Amen

Nicene Creed: **We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father.
With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.
Amen.**

Intercessions: *Composed and prayed on behalf of the congregation by a member of the Intercessors
Group*

Heavenly Father, we ask that you will accept the prayers, hopes and fears that we offer up to you from within our own homes,
As always, we offer them in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus.
Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

We have read today of the doubts that were felt by your disciple, Thomas, when he was asked to believe in the resurrection of your Son following his cruel death on the cross.
We too are sometimes troubled by doubts, but we ask that you will help us to believe that you have indeed left us with the gift of your Holy Spirit, and that you will enable us to continue the mission you gave to your apostles to go out in the world to spread your message, in any way that we are able.
Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Within our part of your earthly Church, we pray for the leader of our college of bishops, Mark, and for our diocesan bishop, Ian, as they seek to guide your Church.
And we place before you those who worship and minister in the charge of St Andrew's in St Andrews, where they draw additional inspiration from the knowledge that they are in the city that was for many centuries at the very heart of the Scottish Church.
We also pray for the work of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, asking that it is enabled to nurture those who believe they have heard your calling to be faithful leaders in your Church.
Here in our own parish of Kirkcaldy, we thank you for your support of Christine's ministry and we give thanks for the contributions of all who offer their gifts to our life as a spiritual community.
Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Father, we thank you for all the blessings you have given us, which we know to be more than we could ever deserve.
But across the wider world, we are painfully aware that there are so many who are less fortunate than ourselves.

We think particularly of those of our fellow Christians in places where simply being a Christian may entail the risk of persecution and death at the hands of those of other faiths or of no faith at all.

We ask that there can be a greater spirit of tolerance and understanding between those of all faiths, with the recognition that we are all aspiring to find our way to you.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Father, we pray that that the deadly spread of the Coronavirus can be brought under control, thinking not only of ourselves but of those in parts of the world where poverty means they have little hope of receiving adequate medical help if they fall ill.

We pray for those who are suffering the long-term effects of this terrible illness, and for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one as a result of the illness.

We thank you for the tireless work of those who have developed vaccines with such rapidity, praying that those vaccines can be as effective in the longer term as appears to be the case.

As we see nations already beginning to quarrel over access to the vaccines, we pray that the vaccines can be made freely available to everyone, and not only to those in nations that can afford to pay for them.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

We ask that you will take into your loving care all those we know to be suffering any form of illness or frailty, whether of the body, the mind or the spirit, and we pray that, if it is your will for them, they can be brought back to a state of good health.

We think particularly at this time of pandemic of those who are suffering from loneliness, depression or a sense of despair because of the requirement to isolate within our own homes, where some are unable to find peace of mind.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

We remember those who have passed into your presence in previous years, calling to mind: Ina Craig, Gerry Knight, Norman Wilkie, Catherine Wall and Janet Thoms.

We thank you for the promise of eternal life in your presence for those who have died in the faith, a promise that we believe has come to us through the death and resurrection of your Son.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Father, we offer up these prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus, who suffered such a terrible death on the cross for our sake, and who we believe conquered death by rising again. Amen.

Confession

and Absolution: God is love and we are his children. There is no room for fear in love.
We love because he loved us first. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Silence

**God our Father, we confess to you
and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and in what we have failed to do.**

We are truly sorry.

**Forgive us our sins,
and deliver us from the power of evil.**

**For the sake of your Son who died for us,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

(May)God, who is both power and love, forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Peace: We meet in Christ's Name let us share his peace.

Offertory hymn: I the Lord of sea and sky

Communion Prayer: **God of infinite mercy. We thank you for Jesus our Saviour who feeds his people and gives them eternal life. Though we cannot consume the gifts of**

bread and wine we thank you that we do receive Christ's saving presence, the forgiveness of sins and all other benefits of his passion. Grant that we may continue for ever in the risen and ascended life of our Saviour. Amen. (This prayer is said during the online Provincial service).

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.**

Communion hymn: Be still for the presence of the Lord

Concluding Prayer: **Father, we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands the bread of life. Strengthen our faith that we may grow in love for you and for each other; through Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Amen.**

Blessing: The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

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

Recessional hymn: Fill your hearts with joy and gladness

7pm Candle Prayer

**O God of the Last Supper
God of the Cross
And God of the Empty Tomb
We come before you now and we pause.**

**We inhale the scent of snow white Easter lilies.
We see the rain as it falls in veils and sheets of April showers.
And we listen.**

**Holy Week has passed.
But how we long to live by the marvelous story we have heard.
Let us remain ever beside you at the table of the Last Supper.
Show us who is hungry.**

**And give us the courage to offer them bread from your table.
Show us who is thirsty.
And give us the strength to lift up the cup of your love.**

**Most of all, show us how to linger at the table, serving others—
Doing ALL that we do
In remembrance of You,
And the way You were when You walked this earth.
We lift these simple, limited words
Up to you, O God.
Amen**