

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 27th April 2025
The Second Sunday of Easter
The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins

Call to Worship

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

We come to worship the risen Christ:
who brings peace into our fear;
who bring hope into our despair;
who brings love into our world;

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

Let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

Risen Christ, you are conqueror of death,
we praise you for life, love and fellowship;
for friendships mended and relationships restored.

We praise you for the possibility of change,
for ways out of fear, darkness, and guilt.

We praise you for the gift of the Holy Spirit,
who works change, who gives confidence, who brings peace.

As we praise you, God,
we are aware of our own frailty and brokenness,
and the frailty and brokenness of the Church
and the world in which we share.

If we have locked ourselves away within walls of our own making, we are sorry.
If we are afraid of what people will think if we say we believe, we are sorry.
If we doubt your promises, or ignore the signs that you give in our own lives, we are sorry.

Breathe your freedom into us, Risen Christ.
Let your love unlock the door of our doubts, as your grace, mercy, and love flow into us.

Silence

Wherever regret is real, God pronounces pardon,
and offers us freedom and a new start.

Thank you, God, for forgiving us.

We accept your love, as we pray together as Jesus taught us:

Our Father

All Age Introduction

If the reality is only adults present:

Consider fake news and alternative facts, with examples, and discuss how these might have been relevant to the thoughts of Thomas and the other disciples – they certainly saw the facts very differently.

If there are children present among the range of ages:

Give examples of things which are difficult to understand, such as how electricity works, a difficult maths puzzle, or how a bee can fly when its body is too heavy for its wing. Explore suggestions from the congregation.

Point out that people have questions about God, and how they can make sense of things. When Jesus met the disciples, they were scared and frightened, but he brought peace and joy. Their difficulties didn't go away but they found confidence and a fresh sense of purpose.

Prayer of Illumination

Living God,
open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit,
that as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed,
we may hear with joy what you say to us today, in Jesus's name. Amen.

Reading

St John 20:19-31

Sermon Notes

One approach:

Faith and doubt are obvious themes to consider, bearing in my mind that doubt by definition is an intrinsic part of faith, and that certainty is the opposite of faith. You could consider questions such as:

- What does it mean to have faith?
- What does it mean to have doubts?
- How can we introduce people to the risen Jesus?
- What do you think Thomas felt when the others told them about Jesus' visit?
- What do you think Thomas felt before/after he touched the wounds?

Thomas is remembered as 'doubting Thomas', but he asked sensible questions, which got answers eventually. Questions should never be a problem in any church, even when they challenge the status quo. Quick or glib answers can do a lot of harm, because some questions need a lot of wrestling with to find an answer. Sometimes there may be no answer, but that doesn't mean we should avoid the questions.

Another approach:

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund doesn't believe his brother and sisters when they encounter Aslan after they had all seen him killed, and he needs convincing for himself, rather like Thomas in the gospel reading. Because Edmund misses out on the first encounter with Aslan, his whole experience is different from theirs, and it makes his life much harder. Thomas similarly misses that first encounter with Jesus but makes up for it when he meets Jesus a week later. What would that week have been like for Thomas, and for the disciples? How do we feel when we seem to be missing out on the experiences that others are having? Does FOMO (fear of missing out) trouble us? Can we find encouragement in Thomas' story?

Another approach:

At times it can seem as if many churches in the UK are made up of a small number of people, fighting against a huge cultural tide. This passage is surely an encouragement for small churches. We encounter just a small number of disciples still meeting, trapped in the room by their fears of what might happen. They needed Jesus to break open the locked room they were in, and their encounter with the risen Christ transforms them, and the young Church. Change can come when we allow Jesus to unlock our fears.

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Living God, we live in a world where many doubt. We bring to you those who doubt because no one has ever shown them the love of Jesus. Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

We bring to you those who doubt because the circumstances of their lives just don't hold any sign of a God of love. Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

We bring to you those who doubt because they have been hurt or let down by others, or have never learned to trust. Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

We bring to you those who doubt because war or natural disaster has destroyed them or those they love, especially...

Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

We bring to you those who doubt because they are in pain of body, mind, or spirit.

Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

We bring to you all who doubt your love for whatever reason: shine your resurrection light in their lives. Risen Christ, ***breathe your Spirit of peace.***

Living God, we bring you all our prayers, spoken and silent, through the power of Christ's new life. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Risen Christ,

every week we give you our money, our time, our skills, and our energy.

As we try to serve you, walk with us through this week,

support us when we try to see the truth in things that puzzle us,

give us courage to search for answers,

and hold us in your unfailing and all-encompassing love,

each and every day. Amen.

Blessing

The service has ended.

Go in peace and joy,

and the blessing of God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

is upon you, and all God's people,

now and forever. Amen.

| Hymn Suggestions | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| | RS | StF | CH4 | MP |
| After darkness, light | | 292 | | |
| Christ has risen, while earth slumbers | | 296 | 430 | |
| Christ is alive! Let Christians sing | 260 | 297 | 416 | |
| Christ is alive, and the universe must celebrate | | | 422 | |
| Come, let us with our Lord arise | | 148 | | |
| God came in Jesus | 237 | | | |
| Good Christians all, rejoice and sing! | 238 | | | |
| How often we like Thomas | | | 432 | |
| I know that my Redeemer lives | | 303 | | 278 |
| Jesus lives! Thy terrors now | 239 | | | 373 |
| Now the green blade rises | 243 | 306 | 417 | |
| See, what a morning | | 309 | | 1105 |
| The head that once was crowned with thorns | 257 | 312 | 438 | 647 |
| The strife is o'er | 250 | | 412 | 670 |
| Thine be the glory | 247 | 313 | 419 | 689 |
| This joyful Eastertide, what need is there | | 314 | | |
| We know that Christ is raised | | | 635 | |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*