



Worship at Home – Second Sunday of Easter – 11th April

Father God help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory.

Amen

Hymn 8 Alleluia, alleluia

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

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

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen**

Collect

Almighty Father, you have given your 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 you in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

New Testament Reading: Acts 4:32 - 35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Hymn 67 Be still for the presence of the Lord

Gospel Reading:

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John
Glory to you, O Lord

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

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), 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.'

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.' 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.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' 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.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Petra

Perhaps, after a year of Covid restrictions, we have some understanding of what it feels like to be behind locked doors; locked down and with the very real fear of the enemy outside the door. Not for us the wrath of the Jewish authorities, but a pandemic, equally deadly, but less selective about who it kills.

And how, I wonder, might we respond if Jesus were to appear in our locked-down house and breathe on us? Would we scream at him to put on his mask, or rush out and get a Covid test?

Covid has raised breath and breathing into our consciousness in a new way. We are aware of the aerosol droplets on our breath that might carry sickness and death. We are aware of the shortness of breath, the lack of breath for those who are ill and the last breath of those who die, snatched away from loved ones too soon.

In the Hebrew Bible there is a wonderful word, *Ruach*. (*Roo – ahch*) It means breath, but like many Biblical words, it carries much more meaning and often needs translating in different ways. *Ruach* is breath.

Ruach is divine Spirit, the life force that animates the inanimate.

Nothing that lives can live without *Ruach*.

Ruach is the indicator of creative divine activity.

Ruach Elohim, God's Spirit, God's breath hovers over the waters of creation at the beginning of Genesis.

God's *Ruach* is breathed into Adam's nostrils,

carrying the life-spark into him and into every subsequent human being.

The wind of God, *Ruach*, is sent to recede the flood waters around Noah and his family.

Moses says,

God gives breath, [Ruach], to all living things.

Job says

*as long as I have life within me, the breath of the Almighty,
[the Ruach of the Almighty] gives me life.*

In Isaiah, God promises that his Messiah will be empowered by the Holy Spirit

The Spirit of the Lord [Ruach Yahweh] will rest upon him.

And so it is this same Spirit of God which descends upon Jesus as a dove as he emerges from the River Jordan after his baptism.

In the New Testament Greek though, the word becomes *Pneuma*

and, like *Ruach*, is translated as breath and spirit interchangeably.
It is the *Pneuma*, the Holy Spirit which overshadows Mary
and breathes life into the Word incarnate inside her womb.
As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit symbolises the new life promised in the Messiah;
Its presence testifies to who he is; the anointed one of the Prophecies of old.
And, at the end, on the cross, Jesus gives up his *Pneuma*, his Spirit
as he breathes his last breath and dies.

A week later, after Mary Magdalene reveals what she saw in the garden,
we find the disciples hiding behind locked doors.
The rumours are, no doubt, upsetting the Jewish authorities too,
and the disciples are afraid that, by association with Jesus, their lives are in danger.
Despite the locked doors, Jesus comes and stands among them and says, *Peace be with you*.
He shows them his hands and his side and they rejoice, as well they might.
The scars, his presence among them – start to fill the despairing void left by his death.
He has overcome - God in flesh is not limited by his flesh.
God cannot be pinned to a tree.
God cannot be sealed in a stone tomb.

He says again, *Peace be with you* and he breathes on them.
As Jews well-versed in scripture, they would be transported back to Adam;
to God's breath, God's Spirit, *Ruach Elohim*, giving life to Adam,
breathing life into humanity.
God in the risen Christ is the new creation and breathes *his* life into them.
They become a new creation.

Receive the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

It is the breath, the Spirit, that equips them, commissions them
in the continuation and fulfilment of his work.
As Jesus was in the world, so are they to be in the world,
breathing his new life, new creation, joy, love, peace, hope into the world.
This breath, *Pneuma, Ruach*,
renders the absent Jesus present among the worshipping community;
makes present the holiness of the Risen Lord.
This breath, this commission is, if you like,
John's equivalent to Luke's Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles.
It's a commission to go out from behind those locked doors,
to lay bare the sins of the world;
to shed light on the darkness of corruption
that others may turn away from their brokenness
and be healed by the power, the breath, the *Ruach* of this new creation.

But Thomas, Thomas misses it all.
Thomas wants to see for himself – and more.
Thomas wants to be able to touch the risen Lord;
to place his hands in the scars the others have seen;
to reach out as Mary reached out – *do not touch me – do not hold on to me*.
He can only shed his unbelief if Jesus meets *his* criteria,

And Jesus does appear to Thomas, though it is not recorded if he touched him.

Instead he declares, *My Lord and My God!*

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.

Blessed are those who have not seen.

Blessed are those into whom my breath, my *Ruach* has been breathed and yet have understood.

Blessed are we into whom God's Spirit has breathed new life.

Breath of God, Ruach, Pneuma, Spirit, Breathe into us all that life-force of your new creation;

animate, enliven, urge us out into your world,

break into our lives as you broke into the lives of the disciples,

break down the barriers, the doors the doubts that would keep you out;

fill us with your love, peace, hope and joy

and make us part of your new creation.

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 Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and 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 and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who 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.

Prayers

The Peace

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 305 Lord of the dance

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours.

Now and for ever.

Amen.

Remembering the Lord's Supper

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 754 Ye choirs of new Jerusalem

Closing Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ. Amen