

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 12th April 2026
Second Sunday of Easter

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.

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

‘You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

“I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover, my flesh will live in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.

You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

“He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.”

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

John 20:19-31

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.

Post Communion

Lord God our Father,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ
you have assured your children of eternal life
and in baptism have made us one with him:
deliver us from the death of sin
and raise us to new life in your love,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

One of the most exciting things about joining a new community is looking out at a sea of faces and realising how much I have to discover about each of your stories. I expect that some of you have lived alongside one another for quite some time, and lived through so much of that rich tapestry of life's events. The highs; the lows; and everything in the middle. Perhaps you know some people's stories really well; and others slightly less well.

As the newcomer, I would really love to hear something about your story. What is it that has brought you here? Here to Whitchurch. Here to St. Mary's. What is your journey of faith? Have you always come to church? Which churches have been especially significant along the way?

The gospels are not intended to be biographies. There is so much that they don't tell us, as well as the things that they do. And yet in this morning's gospel reading we are introduced to Thomas. Every year, on the Second Sunday of Easter when I hear this reading, I find myself wanting to know more about the story of Thomas.

Whether or not he deserves to be known as Doubting Thomas, I find myself realising that his story could be told in so many different ways. The information that we are given is really just the bare bones. There are so many possible interpretations. For example, did Thomas choose to be somewhere else when all the other disciples were locking into a room fearing the consequences of their discipleship? Or was it just circumstance?

And my favourite imaginative journey is considering the tone with which he utters those words: '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.' There are so many possibilities.

Sometimes I like to think that Thomas was being a bit petulant. Arms folded; gritty determination; almost stamping his foot like a toddler. I *won't* believe it; you can't make me believe it. This is what has to happen in order for me to believe it.

But perhaps that isn't the tone at all. Thomas may have been quite matter of fact. It's not that he didn't trust his friends, it's simply that what they were saying was almost unbelievable. In order to believe it he needed a bit more than just their word. He was simply setting out his requirements.

Of course we know next to nothing of Thomas's journey to this point. His words already suggest that he isn't the kind of person to believe something on a whim. But perhaps his journey has been quite tortured. Perhaps he has been wrestling as a disciple, sometimes doubting, sometimes believing. Maybe he's the kind of person who tends to be more on the edges than in the middle of things.

Whichever of these is Thomas's story – or indeed even if it is something entirely different – we do know how Jesus responds. He takes Thomas's observation and face value, and meets him where he is. There is no sense that Jesus doesn't appreciate or understand Thomas's stance. He accepts it, and responds.

First, he offers Thomas the same peace that he has declared to the other disciples. And then he invites him to do exactly as he requested.

Often in John's gospel there is a sense that Jesus asks people what it is that they are looking for. Since Thomas has already declared what he is looking for, Jesus responds. And Thomas knows immediately that he has been met by his Lord and his God.

I wonder how it is that you see Thomas. What kind of character is he for you? Do you feel connected with him; or do you find him difficult? It can be such a helpful practice as we read the scriptures to spend time with the different characters. To ask ourselves how we hear their voices. To consider where we identify more with some than others.

And I also want to invite you to spend some time thinking about your own story, too, and how you would tell it. Part of this is entirely selfish. I am so pleased to be here among you, and the more you are able to share with me, the better I will get to know you and what matters to you the most.

But it isn't all selfish. At the end of this morning's reading, we hear the purpose of John's gospel. "...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." These echo the words of John 10:10 – I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Part of my own story is the conviction that it is through our faith that we discover abundant life. That once we experience God's love for us, it transforms everything. And because we feel that we have found something so life-giving, we want to share it with other people.

In whatever ways – perhaps some more tentative than others – each of us has found something of value within God's story. Something sufficiently important to bring us here this Sunday morning.

It strikes me that there are quite a lot of people who need to hear that good news. And the best way for them to hear it is through your own story. In fact, that's really the only way for them to hear it. Because that's the only authentic way to share our faith.

So I wonder, might you practise on me. Sometime, when you feel able, let me know something of your story, so that I can get to know you better. And then maybe we will all get to enjoy sharing our stories more widely, in the hopes of bringing the life and love of Christ to those around us.

Amen