



## **Sunday, 19 April, 2020**

### ***Second Sunday of Easter***

Nearly a month of lockdown has now elapsed, with no end yet in sight. For all of us, this is a difficult time, especially as spring is now very evident around us and we continue to face confinement and isolation. I hope that people are continuing to stay safe and well and find ways of dealing with the boredom, the frustration, the loneliness and the uncertainty; there seems little point trying to gloss over this reality. You will be pleased to hear that it has not yet reached so bad a stage that I have taken an interest in my garden, although it is getting perilously close. For now, I have taken refuge back in the fourteenth century, a rather unfortunate specialism to have at this time given that it saw the advent of Black Death.

Since it looks like this will continue for some time yet, we will continue to provide these weekly pew sheets. We hope that they are proving helpful to you during the period where we cannot be together in church. Two major saints days fall this week, St George and St Mark, so in addition to the material for Sunday I have included some material relating to those, along with a set of the topical intercessions from the Church of England website and some information about finance and assistance. If you have any suggestions or would like anything included that you feel we are omitting, please do let us know (although we make no promises!). Do particularly continue to let us know about anything or anyone you would like remembered in prayer, and continue to pray for all those particularly affected by the current crisis.

*Phil*

## Collect and Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter

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 in truth;  
through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.  
Amen.

### ***First Reading (Acts 2:14a, 22-32)***

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

‘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.

### ***Second Reading (1 Peter 1:3-9)***

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## ***Gospel Reading (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.

# Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter

*Phil Bradford*

Lockdown has been something of a revelation or a voyage of discovery for many of us. Millennials like me, who dislike actual phone calls to the verge of fear and much prefer to do everything we can online, have discovered that those things we carry around in our pockets to send texts, WhatsApp messages, e-mails, to browse the internet and watch videos, and to do all manner of things with just the touch of a thumb, can also be used as phones to call people and speak to them. It is a truly terrifying realisation. Others have discovered the opposite and have been plunged into the world of Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Signal, Starleaf, Jitsi Meet, Houseparty, Google Hangouts and BlueJeans (and if you don't know what half of those are, don't worry, because neither do I; I copied the list from a news article and have only ever used four of them personally). The internet and social media have been an enormous help during this time of crisis, to allow us to stay in touch with one another. However, they have also been enormously damaging, allowing the rapid spread of rumours, conspiracy theories and lies. The years in which the big technology companies have refused to address these issues have led to them having a devastating impact in the midst of a pandemic. Perhaps the most obvious example is the fact that communications masts are being set alight because of an ludicrous conspiracy theory which equates 5G to the spread of Coronavirus (I am afraid I feel no need to give this patent idiocy any consideration or fair discussion), not helped by stupidity from certain morning TV presenters. Yet there are plenty of other conspiracy theories and deceptions circulating, some of which are damaging health and lives. The years the Trump administration in the United States and the Conservative governments in the United Kingdom have spent decrying and demeaning experts have resulted in a situation in which we need

experts more than anything, but everyone either sets themselves up as an instant virologist on social media, or would rather believe 'my sister's friend who is a doctor' on a forwarded WhatsApp message than listen to the Chief Medical Officer.

In one sense, of course, fake news is merely the modern incarnation of propaganda and rumour, which have had damaging effects throughout history. Countless massacres, chaotically spontaneous and clinically organised alike, have resulted from the spread of half-truths and deliberate lies, from the mob-led destruction of the Jewish community in York in 1190 to the cold-blooded slaughter of the Holocaust. The dissemination of rumours and falsehoods has had tragic consequences. The core difference is that this is the age of the internet, and misleading stories and downright deceptions can spread across the world in seconds, especially when they originate with the man in the Oval Office. This is the very negative aspect of social media. It is exposed in an institutional sense in the way social media companies have been willingly used as a tool of manipulation to subvert the democratic process, purely because it generates profit. However, it is also exposed in a more personal way, since the majority of those most people associate with on social media are by definition friends, people who often think in a similar way. Thus tweets and Facebook posts, and retweets and Facebook shares, become an echo chamber of things which confirm our beliefs or which we would like to be true. Rather than pause to question something which on a more rational examination might seem distinctly implausible or at least heavily- skewed, people treat lies and opinions as fact and passions are rapidly inflamed, sometimes with tragic consequences. Such manipulation seems to be a particular tactic of the far right, but the whole of the political spectrum is implicated in some degree. What are facts when millions will believe and act on something simply because it is on the internet and supports

their prejudices? In a world which often seems marked by excessive scepticism, modern culture demonstrates a paradoxical tendency towards excessive credulity, often with fatal results. We need the questioners and the doubters more than ever, for questioning and doubt are crucial to challenging such a dangerous culture.

Bear that in mind as we contemplate the story of Thomas this morning. Christian tradition has treated no other disciple so unfairly as the man who has been forever branded doubting, a sobriquet intended to be wholly negative. He is criticised for not believing the word of his fellow disciples, for wanting to see evidence of their claims. In that, I think that far from being a figure of condemnation or ridicule, Thomas should be an example. Think about what he is being asked to accept. The others are telling him a man who was demonstrably dead a couple of days ago has come back to life. It defies all previous human history and every shred of knowledge about how the world operates. Why should Thomas automatically be expected to believe such an outrageous, impossible assertion? Confusion and despair has reigned for the past few days. Is it not more logical that his friends have been overcome by their grief, that they so want it to be the case that they have been somehow deluded into blurring the distinction between hope and reality? Be absolutely honest: who, in Thomas' situation, would react any differently? His doubt is not foolish, but sensible. It would be far more worrying had he just calmly accepted the incredible. The others have had the advantage of witnessing the resurrected Jesus, one denied at that point to Thomas. Note that he never questions that God could achieve the resurrection. He just needs to be absolutely sure about this, for nothing will ever be the same again if it is true. The very point is that this is an earth-shattering, unprecedented occurrence. According to tradition, Thomas would go on to be one of the most faithful and determined preachers of

the resurrection gospel, but he did so from verifying the truth for himself, not simply meekly accepting what he was told.

Controversially, then, I think that far from ridiculing and stigmatising Thomas, his 'doubting' epithet should be a source of commendation. Those words John gives to Jesus, 'blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe,' have become something of a lunatic's motto across the centuries. In some ways, this expresses itself relatively harmlessly, in those who believe the earth to be flat or that entire alien civilisations are living in secret camps in the Nevada desert. Elsewhere, however, uncritical credulity can be far more sinister and have devastating consequences. Look at the Holocaust. Hitler's murderous schemes would not have advanced nearly so far had he not tapped into a prejudicial antisemitism in European consciousness, with enough people willing to believe his deranged rhetoric about Jewish conspiracies and racial theories. Too often, bloodshed and terrible atrocities have resulted from the uncritical belief in dangerous ideologies, because not enough people paused to doubt whether what they were being told was plausible, never mind true. Why are people burning phone masts? Why are they hoarding chloroquine? Even within the church, think about how much persecution has taken place because people are willing to believe what they are told the Bible says rather than engage with its complexities themselves. Today, the internet makes all these problems worse, because it allows the spread of misinformation and 'fake news' to happen unchecked at great speed. People believe mendacious slander because it fits with their prejudices or makes them feel comfortable, not stopping to question motivations or accuracy. As a consequence, minorities and the truth itself are suffering horrendously, not least in the midst of a global pandemic and the crisis of lockdown. In this climate, Thomas is an example, someone who refuses to believe just because someone else says so, but honestly expresses his doubts. As



Christians, we are not asked to suspend our critical faculties or believe the impossible, but to have a genuine faith which involves constantly seeking God and avoiding the certainties which lead to intolerance and hatred. The resurrection must be a transformative point, one in which we encounter the scarred Christ which challenges us to ask what we really believe. If the God we believe in and experience is the God of love and compassion, then we should doubt everything that leads us away from that path. Today more than ever, we need to show a mature faith in a frightened world.

# George, Patron of England

*Thursday, 23 April*

*We know nothing about St George because there is nothing to know. All sorts of stories have been created, but the accounts you will find in the books of saints are nothing more than fictions to hide the fact that George is an invented figure. His popularity derives from the fact that he was purported to be a soldier, which means that he is the patron of several countries in addition to England. In England, he replaced the far more logical Edward the Confessor as patron saint after the Crusades, as a more martial figure was sought, and his cult gained especial prominence in the reign of Edward III, who made him patron of his new Order of the Garter. Despite my extreme scepticism about his existence, never mind his suitability as the patron saint of England, his day is a festival in the Church of England calendar, so I feel duty bound to provide his collect and readings.*

God of hosts,  
who so kindled the flame of love  
in the heart of your servant George  
that he bore witness to the risen Lord  
by his life and by his death:  
give us the same faith and power of love  
that we who rejoice in his triumphs  
may come to share with him the fullness of the resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

***First Reading (1 Maccabees 2:59-64)***

Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions. ‘And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendour will turn into dung and worms. Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honour.

***Gospel Reading (John 15:18-21)***

Jesus said, ‘if the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “Servants are not greater than their master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.’

# Mark, Evangelist

*Saturday, 25 April*

*The Gospel according to Mark is widely regarded as the first of the canonical gospels to have been written and was extensively used by the later authors of Matthew and Luke. Despite being the shortest gospel, it is also the most verbose, composed by someone not especially comfortable writing in Greek, and is characterised by the urgent progression of events. Notably, the earliest manuscripts contain no resurrection appearances. Although it is attributed to Mark, this was a common name and there is no sure way of knowing who the author was (or if he was actually called Mark). Today, however, we remember the evangelist who has become known to posterity as Mark and the immense significance of his work in Christianity.*

Almighty God,  
who enlightened your holy Church  
through the inspired witness of your evangelist Saint Mark:  
grant that we, being firmly grounded in the truth of the gospel,  
may be faithful to its teaching both in word and deed;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.  
Amen.

## ***First Reading (Acts 15:35-end)***

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, and there, with many others, they taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had

not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

***Gospel Reading (Mark 13:5-13)***

Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

‘As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.’

## Intercessions

Let us pray to the Lord,  
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,  
that all who are fearful and anxious  
may be at peace and free from worry:  
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the isolated and housebound,  
that we may be alert to their needs,  
and care for them in their vulnerability:  
Lord, hear our prayer.

For our homes and families,  
our schools and young people,  
and all in any kind of need or distress:  
Lord, hear our prayer.

For a blessing on our local community,  
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,  
where all are known and cared for:  
Lord, hear our prayer.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,  
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,  
accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

## **Help and Finance**

As the lockdown continues and we face uncertainty about when and how it will end, this is a very difficult time for many people. For whatever reason, there will be those struggling to make ends meet, pay bills or buy necessities at this time. While we do not have huge resources, there are various funds the churches have to help people with small sums towards covering costs in times of need. We are also able to refer people to other agencies for additional assistance. If anyone needs help, please do contact the clergy. If you are aware of anyone else who might benefit from assistance at this time, please encourage them to contact the clergy too. We aim to help the community, irrespective of whether or not they are church members.

I would like to thank all those who have continued to support the churches financially during this difficult period, by standing order or direct debit. It is much appreciated; although the churches may be closed, many of the costs (utility bills, insurance, parish share, etc.) have to be paid as normal. We are also continuing to provide what financial support we can to the community and charities at this time. If you normally give by envelope or directly onto the collection plate, could I ask you to consider a standing order or perhaps sending a cheque? Not everyone is in a position to maintain their regular giving, but if those who are able to do so could help out, it obviously allows us to continue our work and be in a stronger position when this all ends.

Above all, continue to pray for all those in need at this time.