

## The Vine at Home

11<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – Second Sunday of Easter

### Call to worship

Heavenly Creator, Lord of all, we come to worship you.

Jesus the Christ, risen from the dead, we come to encounter you.

God who is Spirit, moving amongst us, we come to take inspiration from you.

Come amongst us, O God. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

### Hymn: 503 STF – Love Divine

### Opening Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, you are not only risen and alive you are with us, whenever we may be. You stand above all that is best in life as its source.

We praise you for the beauty of the natural world as spring unfolds around us.

You stand above all that is worst as the ultimate victor. Thank you for fighting our battles and dying in love for us.

You stand above all failure and weakness, all doubt and despair as forgiveness and unconditional love.

Thank you for the hope you bring us and for your presence with us whatever we may be facing.

You are our Lord and our Friend.

O Lord, our God we worship and adore you.

Parent God, you show constant love to all your children.

As we think today of those early Christians who generously shared all they had, we want to say sorry for all the things we fail to do.

*[Pause]*

We admit that we do not always listen to you, and we allow the noise and business of our daily activity to shut you out.

*[Pause]*

Lord, please forgive us and help us to do better.

In Christ we are set free. Through Christ we are forgiven.

In Christ all things are held together. Thanks be to God.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

### Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Diane Robinson

## **Readings: Acts 4:32-35 - The Believers Share Their Possessions**

**32** 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. **33** With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **34** 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. **35** They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

## **1 John 1:1 – 2:2 - The Word of Life**

**1** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— **3** we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** We are writing these things so that our<sup>[a]</sup> joy may be complete.

## **God Is Light**

**5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; **7** but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

## **Christ Our Advocate**

**2** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; **2** and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

## **John 20:19-31 - Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

**19** 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." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

## **Jesus and Thomas**

**24** But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** 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."

**26** 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.” **27** 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.” **28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” **29** 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.”

### **The Purpose of This Book**

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. **31** But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[c]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### **Reflections on the readings**

And so, today, we find ourselves one week on from Easter Sunday. One week on from remembering the great Good News of Easter Sunday: that we live now in the light of the risen Christ. Life to the full has come through Jesus Christ – not only life everlasting, but full life for us today.

I hope you have felt this Good News in your life this week. Take a moment now, to reflect on the week just passed. How have you seen, or been part of, the Good News of full life?

Perhaps you relished the taste of the last hot cross bun left over from Easter weekend. Perhaps you enjoyed a Bank Holiday doing something you love. Perhaps you saw a neighbour on the street, and shared a moment together. However simple, small or significant, the Good News of Easter is that each moment of our lives has been brought into the light of life by Jesus Christ.

Whilst this is certainly good, it can often sound like a challenging thing to sustain.

Whilst the joy of Easter Sunday may be celebrated in the moment, what does it actually mean to live a whole life reflecting on this joy? Mixed in with moments of Good News this week might have been more challenging moments for you. Perhaps you felt disappointed at not being able to be with loved ones. Perhaps you are grieving someone lost. Perhaps you have struggled with your mental health.

What does it mean to live life as people who know and believe that the Good News of Easter lasts longer than just one risen morning? This week’s passages have something to share on this.

They begin by saying that we do not live in this Good News of Easter alone, but together.

“How very good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” declares the psalmist. For the psalmist, togetherness is holy. Knowing that others too share in the light of God’s good news is the foundation from which we live. And when we are united, the space amongst us becomes holy – set apart or distinctive. For the psalmist, this is pictured as the precious oil of the prophets, or the distinctive holy place of Mount Zion. Our unity in God’s Good News is essential.

Another picture of this is in our reading from John's Gospel. The disciples find themselves quite literally living after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has died and risen again, and has been seen by those first few at the temple on Easter morning. The disciples stand, gathered together. Suddenly, Jesus "came and stood among them and said "Peace be with you". Where they are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of them. Suddenly their being together is God-filled. In their togetherness they are met by the presence of God.

But this isn't quite the whole picture. The disciples aren't all gathered together because of their shared belief of the Good News that Jesus is risen. In fact, they are gathered together in fear. Behind locked doors, they are huddled together. They have shut themselves off for fear of what the outside world might bring to a group of people who believe in the Good News.

But when Jesus comes, he doesn't just inhabit this space of fear with them. Instead, he transforms it. "Peace be with you" he says, and then "As the father has sent me, so I have sent you". Suddenly, their togetherness becomes missional. Jesus calls them not to be gathered behind locked doors but to go in unity of faith out into the world.

And, as we know from the rest of the New Testament, they do just that. The disciples go out into the world and share with others the Good News of the risen Christ which brings them together. Our later reading from the book of Acts paints a picture of what this looked like in practice.

Here, we find the disciples once again gathered together as people "of one heart and soul". Their unity in belief of the Good News holds them together. But, perhaps surprisingly, their unity goes beyond belief. Not only are they concerned with sharing their belief in testimony, but in sharing their physical lives together too. The passage tells of how, among the gathered believers, "there was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned land 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." Living together means sharing not only a concern for one another's faith, but for one another's quality of life. In fact, in this example the two are closely bound together. Caring for one another's spiritual flourishing and physical flourishing together become a response to the good news.

When we talk about evangelism, sharing the good news, how often do we think of evangelism which seeks to meet both spiritual and physical wellbeing? During the pandemic, many churches across the country have become deeply involved with mutual aid groups, and offering emergency provision. Perhaps you have been involved in the distribution of food parcels to families in your local community.

Is this evangelism? Perhaps, by the example set in this passage from Acts, this is one way in which we live together in and share the Good News. What of faith? Perhaps the foodbank is not somewhere where belief is even mentioned. Does this stop the handing over of a food parcel being Good News?

If the Good News of Christ's resurrection really means full life for all – now and everlasting - then this passage from Acts reminds us that God is concerned with our physical flourishing too. That working to meet one another's physical needs – of hunger, of shelter – is working to bring the good news of full life.

Our calling to live out the Good News of Easter today is one therefore which cannot happen in isolation, only gathered together behind locked doors. It is one which happens amongst community, seeking to listen and respond to need – both spiritual and physical. The gospel is shared in the sanctuary and the foodbank, the housing association and the prayer gathering.

Perhaps an extension of this calling is one not only to identify and meet need, but to ask why these needs are present in the first place. Why is it that our shared resources are so unevenly distributed? Why is it that some in our community are struggling to gather the basic essentials for living? Addressing inequality and injustice at a systemic level is one way in which we seek to be part of enabling full and flourishing life for all of God's people.

So, we live together in the Good News of the risen Christ. In togetherness, we seek not only one another's spiritual flourishing, but our physical flourishing too. To do so we must stand in the midst of community, and from there search for the holy place where God dwells.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **What are you being called to?**

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not found but made." John Schaar

Let us consider these questions:

- Imagine doing something to change the future of the church. What do you learn about your calling from this?
- How does the church recognise and value the prophetic voice of children and young people? How could you contribute to that?
- What change do you think God wants in the church and the world?

*[Pause]*

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you that you are in our past, present and future. We confess that at times we become agitated about the past, the present and the future – help us see that you walk along us and together the path to the future is formed. Amen.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Gracious God

We thank you that your Good News means fullness of life.  
We thank you that each moment of our lives is transformed by you.  
From our daily bread to our time spent in prayer with one another.  
In our togetherness, you dwell among us.

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<sup>3</sup> Reflection by Emma Dobson

Merciful God

We are sorry for the times when we have hidden behind closed doors,  
more concerned with protecting our faith than sharing it.  
And yet when you come amongst us you fill us with peace  
and courage to respond to your calling to go into the world.

Helps us to be courageous today,  
to hear and respond to you.

Loving God

We thank you that we can meet you in foodbank and sanctuary,  
That you are transforming each aspect of our lives.  
Helps us to recognise the role we each play in sharing your Good News  
That all of your beloved children may be brought into fullness of life.

We pray for your world, and for all who need to know something of the Easter hope this day,  
O Lord.

Come, by your Spirit.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

**Hymn: 404 STF – God’s spirit is in my heart**

**Blessing**

Go out in peace, and come to know something of the risen God.  
Go out with joy, and share something of the love you have received.  
Go out with grace, and show grace to those who need it this day.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Prayers of intercession written by the Joint Public Issues Team

<sup>5</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker