

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday 7th April 2024. Low, ugly and incomplete.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship : 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.

STF 314

This joyful Eastertide,
what need is there for grieving?
Cast all your cares aside
and be not unbelieving:

Come, share our Easter joy
that death could not imprison,
nor any power destroy,
our Christ, who is arisen!

No work for him is vain,
no faith in him mistaken,
for Easter makes it plain
his kingdom is not shaken:

Then put your trust in Christ,
in waking and in sleeping.
His grace on earth sufficed;
he'll never quit his keeping:

Prayers of adoration and confession.

God of Promise and God of Hope, who through your great mercy has granted us new birth through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we praise your wonderful name!

God of Glory and God of Might who through your great power has granted us new strength to endure all things through faith in Christ our risen King, we praise your wonderful name! **Amen**

Easter reminds us that each time we deny you, Lord, another nail is sharpened; and each time we defy you, Lord, into your hand it's hammered.

When faith is weak, temptation strong and courage fails, forgive us, Lord
and once again become that risen presence within our hearts. **Amen**

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31 Jesus Appears to His Disciples.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

This Sunday is often described as Low Sunday, the Sunday after Easter. Traditionally it is thought that people have exhausted themselves in Holy week and so attendance at church on the Sunday after Easter might be a bit low! However the real reason it's known as low Sunday could be quite logical because it is the Sunday that follows all the high celebrations of Easter Sunday. So of course it will feel a little different to last weeks jubilation.

It's known as the eighth day of the Easter octave and as we follow the gospel readings we see time has slowed down. A week in our life time has gone into a kind of time warp and seven days after we have celebrated Jesus' emergence from the tomb. He has risen from the dead. Now we see what happened in the evening of that momentous day.

This day also has another interesting name. Quasimodo Sunday! Now I guess that has many of us thinking about the poor unfortunate soul of Notre Dame cathedral. However, get ready for a little Latin lesson from professor google!

'Quasimodogeniti is the historic name for the second Sunday of Easter. The name comes from the Latin text of the day's historic introit, which begins with the phrase quasi modo geniti infantes (English: as newborn babes).'

I think that quite rightly explains what Easter is for us, after the resurrection of Christ we are newborn, our sins are forgiven and believing in Him makes us anew! The introit in turn is based on 1 Peter 2:2-3, which reads: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."

The name "Quasimodo" is most frequently associated with an ugly but lovable character from a fictional story written by Victor Hugo. 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame'. In Hugo's novel, Quasimodo, rejected by his parents for his deformities, is abandoned inside Notre Dame Cathedral, at a place where orphans and unwanted children were dropped off. Hugo wrote.

Monseigneur Claude Frollo finds the child on "Quasimodo Sunday" and "called him Quasimodo; whether it was that he chose thereby to commemorate the day when he had found him, or that he meant to mark by that name how incomplete and imperfectly moulded the poor little creature was,"

Three words spring to mind from all of this, Low, ugly and incomplete.

How do those words fit into the picture we have from the gospel reading? Our focus seems to historically be upon Thomas. He with the others certainly felt low. The one that they had put their faith in and believed that he would save mankind had been taken from them. Indeed they had witnessed what must have been an horrific sight at His crucifixion. Ugliness doesn't even come near. How would they appear now locked in the upper room. Ugly no doubt, harrowed with doubts and fears. Afraid for their own safety and future. A world shattered and the ground beneath their feet torn from beneath them. But they were incomplete, they had yet to meet with the risen Lord Jesus.

Going back to this tragic fictional tale of Quasimodo, it is his guardian who locks him away from the world telling him that the world is a cruel place and he is safer hidden away. There are some strong allusions to how the disciples must have been feeling. Someone in the group would have suggested that they go and lock themselves away in safety away from the Jewish leaders. We too face fears and troubles that at times drive us to hide away in the safety of our own homes. But for Quasimodo the one who sought to hide him away from the world's troubles, from a world that might treat him as a monster. We see that it is his protector who turns out to be a monster and tormentor. How true in a symbolic sense is that for us and could have been for the disciples. When we lock ourselves away and try to put our faith in anything other than the love of the risen Christ, then we find ourselves in such tough and tormented situations. Left alone with our fears and worries they become bigger and stronger. When we allow Jesus into the room and beside us he offers true peace. We are incomplete without Christ.

There is a sense that we can see a real need for the disciples to seek sanctuary from the Jewish authorities. Also for the poor fictitious hunchback, sanctuary from a cruel world that doesn't accept people who are different and for us sanctuary in tough times can seem to be the answer. However you cannot just close the door and expect that problems will disappear. What happens when the sanctuary we seek robs us of the freedom that could be ours? The disciples could not stay in hiding forever and if they did seek to hide for however long, what would that say about all they had witnessed and discovered about God's love and mercy whilst they had been with Jesus? What of their witness? Was hope to die with their doubts?

When we face those crucifying moments, the death of a loved one, the feeling of being let down or so many more terrible things that life throws at us. What should we do? We feel low to say the least and that is right and proper for a period of time. Yes life is ugly at times and we will be incomplete if we go on struggling to hide within ourselves. We need to turn to the risen Christ, feel His presence, His sadness for our suffering and accept the Peace that he alone offers.

When you think about the appearance in the upper room. Jesus was in a way, incomplete. Still a little ugly to say the least. Unless you are not squeamish, few of us can touch or look at deep wounds in the body. I shudder as I write this to think Thomas could actually say, 'unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were...' I remember as a very young child in Sunday school being taught the chorus, 'wounded for me, there on the cross he was wounded for me'. I became inconsolable before the end

of the song. Tears rolled down my face and I remember the teacher hugging me as the others sang about the nails and did the actions pointing to where the nail marks would have been in Jesus' hands. I can't even begin to comprehend the kind of reaction that Thomas would have had to Jesus' invitation to "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." Repulsed, unbelievable that he could have made such a dreadful request. What kind of monster had he become to suggest such a thing. Can you imagine saying such a thing to a friend. "Oh so you're really ill, wounded to the point of death, I won't believe it till I can put my hand in your wounds!"

Despite the reality of what Jesus had so recently endured, the brutality and the ugliness and pain. He still could come to his broken disciples and offer Peace.

The world can seem a cruel and ugly place. Just because some will have had their fill of chocolate Easter eggs and bunnies. Some will have had joyful family gatherings, yet our newspapers and television remind us that tragedy and warfare, sickness and disaster has not taken a public holiday. However we must hold onto the fact that Good Friday is past Jesus has risen from the dead. He has conquered all the evil that this world can bring. Yet we are incomplete. We are called to stop doubting and to believe.

Doubt is an interesting concept. It comes in many shades of negativity. From the slightly dismissive to the embittered and resentful. It's not an emotional experience that will build us up, rather it will drag us down and destroy our peace. We need to do as Jesus commands, stop doubting and to believe.

Remember Quasimodo means like newborn babes. We wouldn't expect a new born baby to be able to handle everything but to grow into new strengths and talents. We don't look at a baby and doubt that they will ever amount to anything. Not even those sadly, who are born with some difficulties. We have hope for every new life, that they will grow and thrive. So from our Easter regeneration let us dwell on the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. Give thanks to God in Christ Jesus for all He has done for us and all that he has in store for us as we grow in His love and power.

1 Peter 2:2-3, reads: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." Amen.

Our next hymn is from The Singing the faith website.

Suggested tunes: Scarlet Ribbons (StF 131); Jesus calls us (StF 28); Calon Lân (StF 323i) Metre: 87.87.D

1. When our futures are uncertain,
when our Christian life is tough,
when our worries fill our thinking,
when our hope is not enough –
then the rallying cry of Thomas
rises high above the crowd:
'Give your lives, your all, for Jesus.
Join him on this narrow road.'

2. When the many signs confuse me -
aimless wanderings fill my day -
then I pray the prayer with Thomas:
'Gracious Lord, show us the way.'
Suddenly the spell is broken!
Truth and Life in Christ, I see:
'I'm the way that you are seeking,
Come, disciple, follow me.'

3. When I miss the great adventure,
When belief is too absurd -
deep inside, I need, with Thomas
simple faith to be assured.
Then, the resurrected Jesus
brings to me his hands and side.
Overwhelming love engulfs me!
Death is dead and Christ's alive!

4. Come, inspire this feeble vision,
put your daring in our minds:
words to motivate disciples,
lives that challenge humankind.
Like Saint Thomas, full of passion,
clear our gloom that we may see -
Christ, our Lord, alive forever!
Christ, my God, alive in me!

Words: © Adrian Low

Prayers of Intercession.

Low

Lord Jesus as we celebrate the victory of your death and resurrection we bring to you our prayers for all those who are brought low by the things that they are having to endure. We take a moment to think of those we know who need our prayers...

We pray for all who struggle with depression and anxiety. For those who face insurmountable difficulties. In their striving may they find your peace and a way to be lifted above their distress.

Ugly

Lord Jesus you created a beautiful world. Yet the dealings of your people have made our world so much less than it should be. We have made it a cruel and inhumane place in so many different ways. Through prejudice's, greed, warfare and hatred. We pray for those places in the news today that are ugly and need your redeeming love. For the many war torn lands. For places despoiled by the effects of climate change and the way we have not cared for our planet. For those areas where drought or the ravages of natural disasters still remain.

Thank you for so many aid agencies working worldwide to bring some relief to those in need.

Help us to what we can to bring order and beauty to your world.

Incomplete

Lord Jesus you gave yourself completely for the sins of all people. We are incomplete without you. We pray for our churches and congregations. That we might be bright beacons of your love to the communities we are a part of. We pray for all in positions of leadership in our Circuit, guide and empower them so that we may all be encouraged to be a more effective and active witness to your saving grace. **Amen**

We offer our prayers in the words of **The Lords Prayer.**

STF 348

He is Lord, he is Lord;
he is risen from the dead, and he is Lord;
every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is King, he is King;
he will draw all nations to him, he is King;
and the time shall be when the world shall sing
that Jesus Christ is King.

The Blessing

The peace of God be in your heart
The grace of God be in your words
The love of God be in your hands
The joy of God be in your soul
and in the song that your life sings. **Amen**

He is love, he is love;
he has shown us by his life that he is love;
all his people sing with one voice of joy
that Jesus Christ is love.

He is life, he is life;
he has died to set us free and he is life;
and he calls us all to live evermore,
for Jesus Christ is life.

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