

# Springwood UCA, 19 April 2020

## Easter 2A

### Welcome

Welcome to this time in which we join together in worship of our loving God. We may be physically separated but are joined by God's Spirit.

Welcome whether you are reading through this liturgy, watching on Facebook either live, or later.

We hope to have members from St Andrew's Glenbrook with us this morning as Ellie has a well-earned rest. Welcome to each of you.

Friends, sisters and brothers - wherever you are located - it is wonderful to have you with us.

Most importantly we are all welcomed by God. God invites us simply to come as we are.

Let us take a moment to be still.

This congregation recognises that we live on God's land and that the Darug and Gundungurra people of our region were given the task of being custodians of the land in this area. Wherever you are in Australia, we pause and give thanks for the First Peoples. We acknowledge their care, their deep and ancient wisdom, the pain of dislocation and we pay them our respects and pray for their welfare.

### Setting the Scene

For those who joined us live last Sunday morning, Easter Sunday, we apologise for the technological issues which were beyond our control. We hope, and pray, that all will go smoothly today.

Here at Springwood we generally follow the pattern of Scripture readings followed by many churches all around the world known as the Lectionary. Over the next couple of weeks we will read of some of Jesus' encounters after the Resurrection. Today we will read/hear of Jesus meeting with his grieving, bewildered disciples including Thomas, whom we commonly call 'Doubting Thomas' due to this particular encounter. We will get to that in a few moments.

During the past few weeks it has been wonderful to see the interest and attention given to home veggie gardens. We have re-started ours and it is so encouraging to see little green shoots come up from seed. Similarly after the fires we found hope in the new shoots from blackened trees. We're invited to join in singing a hymn which reminds us of Jesus' resurrection using the image of new shoots.

### *Hymn: Now the green blade rises (TiS 382)*

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love whom hate had slain,  
Thinking that He never would wake again,  
Laid in the earth, like grain that sleeps unseen:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Up He sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,  
He who for the three days in the grave had lain;  
Raised from the dead my living Lord is seen:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,  
Then Your touch can call us back to life again;  
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

John Macleod Campbell Crum 1872-1958

## **Prayer**

We gather as people on a journey.

**We believe & we have doubts,**

**we do good & we sin.**

**We are imperfect humans,**

**and still beloved by God.**

Love and grace. Hope and faith.

These are the essence of the one we call God.

**We seek forgiveness & grace from**

**the One and from those we've harmed.**

Assured of that grace,  
we are ready to grow again.

**We yearn for a new way,**

**a new perspective,**

**and a clear path.**

Though we are full of trust  
and full of doubt, we are here.

Speak to us, God!

Continue creating us!

**Inspire our hearts.**

**Enlighten our minds.**

**Guide our actions. Amen.**

~ written by Tim Graves and posted on **LiturgyBits**. <https://liturgybits.wordpress.com>

## **Bible Reading:** John 20.19-22

*(if you're not joining us for the online service, please read from your own Bible)*

## **Song:** *Listen to the words (Peace be with you) -*

*You can listen to it here:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhMI4UVjV4E&feature=youtu.be&t=5>

Listen to the words  
of the risen Christ:  
*peace be with you.*  
Come and see his hands  
and the wound in his side:  
*peace be with you.*  
With the eyes of faith  
are you ready to see?  
*Peace be with you.*  
Come with all your doubts  
for it's time to believe:  
*peace be with you,*  
*peace be with you.*  
Let the breath of God now fill me;  
wholeness, fullness, life within me.  
Full forgiveness given freely,  
I receive as Jesus sends me.

CCL# 7066092

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## **All Age talk** (Mary-Ellen)

### **Bible Reading:** John 20.22-31

*(if you're not joining us for the online service, please read from your own Bible)*

## **Homily**

The Lord be with you  
(And also with you)

Ah Thomas, how we, or at least some of us, love you!

Humans crave evidence. The number of police and legal dramas on television, and the popularity of reality shows such as Border Security, or documentaries, demonstrates how we love evidence. Children are inherently curious and want to find out how things work. Scientists test hypotheses to produce evidence. And in a time of 'fake' news we actually have an even greater need for empirical evidence. It is important to question, it

is important to ask for evidence. It is no different for Thomas. So let's not look down our noses at Thomas!

We often call this passage the story of Doubting Thomas but in reality, weren't all the disciples doubters until they saw Jesus for themselves, in the flesh? According to John, the other disciples had gathered together and locked the door, out of fear. They weren't in a good place emotionally, but then Jesus appeared and spoke with them. They met the risen Jesus, in the flesh. For reasons unknown, Thomas wasn't there that on that first occasion in the locked room and had to hear the stories of seeing the risen Jesus from the others. Wouldn't you rather see something for yourself than rely on someone else's story?

Perhaps you're finding it particularly difficult at the moment only 'hearing' about things, people, family and friends, children, and not seeing them in the flesh. Perhaps you have already missed or will soon miss planned birthday celebrations, weddings, Grandparent day at the school/pre-school, and would ordinarily attend the funeral of a friend but currently unable to do so. It's hard hearing about things second hand. Perhaps you have family who have lost jobs and are doing it tough and you can't see them to support them. During this time of social isolation we grieve those losses, those missed events.

Thomas had invested a substantial amount of time in following Jesus. Jesus' death was scandalous. To be crucified was the worst type of death in those times and here the one Thomas had hoped and dared to believe was the long-awaited Messiah, was put to death on a Roman cross. This was not how the story was meant to go. And, to make matters worse, he has been 'left out'.

It is understandable that Thomas wanted to see the risen Christ for himself. Thomas says that he needs concrete evidence. He needs to physically touch the wounds. It must have been a very long week for Thomas. But did you notice what actually happened a week later? Let us read Vs 27 and 28 again.

Then he [Jesus] 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!"

From the way this story is told, it appears that Thomas only needed Jesus to say those words for Thomas to respond with "My Lord and my God!" He didn't need to touch the wounds. It was enough that Jesus knew what Thomas had wanted.

I'm so grateful for Thomas. Calling him 'Doubting Thomas' is a very disparaging term and I don't believe we are meant to think badly of him. He was real. Many of us can relate to him. So often many of us who are people of Christian faith also have doubts and questions but rarely dare to admit to them. So let's re-claim Thomas as an Enquirer, rather than a Doubter. Jesus welcomes Enquirers and understands that we have doubts and questions. Notice Jesus did not berate Thomas. His first words were 'Peace be with you' to all of those gathered, including Thomas.

So if you have questions, if you have doubts, not only are you in good company but Jesus offers His peace to you.

What does that word really mean? For us, and for the Greeks, we think of it as the absence of war, conflict, or overwhelming noise and stress. But for the Jews, it meant something different. It was a positive blessing, especially a right relationship with God.

It is not a peace that depends on outwards circumstances. Instead it is a Christ-given serenity.

For those disciples, for Jesus to say 'peace be with you', Jesus was also assuring them of his forgiveness. After all, how can you be at peace yourself when you are harbouring anger, bitterness, resentment etc in your heart?

After Jesus spoke those words of Peace, do you remember what he did next? He breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit." How extraordinary. Here is Jesus, having given everything He has, then given the gift of Peace, and now, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You may be doing perfectly well in this time of physical isolation and if you are, then that is terrific. Pray for those who are struggling. Remember those times when you've experienced yourself or seen others who are completely exhausted and/or overwhelmed, or suffer panic attacks, or in the depths of grief that they can scarcely breathe.

Or maybe you're one of those struggling...

If you're struggling at this time, whether it be with grief for loved ones, or the losses associated with physical isolation, fear or anxiety, or instances of domestic violence, whatever it may be, then you may also have questions alongside those feelings.

For instance, I wonder whether those things cause you to ask those age-old questions such as "What we do with our pain? Why is there evil? Why is there suffering?" Richard Rohr reflecting on Job and the questions that accompanied his suffering wrote:

"Job begs God for an answer to this mystery, and he can't get one. He only begins to trust when he no longer feels ignored, when he knows that God is taking him seriously and that he is "part of the conversation" (see Job 42). When Jesus later becomes the answer in his own passion, death, and resurrection, he discovers what Job finally experienced: in the midst of suffering, God can be trusted. (Richard Rohr, extract from email meditation 14/4/2020.)<sup>1</sup>

As I suggested earlier, I think Jesus takes Thomas seriously, and meets the questions of Thomas head on, and I believe He does that with ours also.

I invite you to take a moment to imagine that you are in the room with the disciples. What are your questions?

Jesus enters the room and makes eye contact with you and says 'Peace be with you'. And while all your questions may not be answered at this moment, you can live with that. There are many things that scientists cannot prove but they continue to ask questions. Asking questions of our faith helps us have a more authentic, grounded faith. But I do love Richard Rohr's statement that Jesus, as well as Job discovered that God can be trusted.

Picturing again being in that room...Jesus breathes on you and says 'Receive the Holy Spirit', the Spirit who animates life, the Spirit given as Comforter and Guide. What a beautiful moment. What a beautiful gift.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Richard Rohr with John Feister, *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety* (Franciscan Media: 2001), 81–82; and Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Just This* (CAC Publishing: 2017), 79.)

This doesn't fix everything. It doesn't make those difficulties go away, it doesn't stop instances of domestic violence, it doesn't mean we won't suffer from the Coronavirus or any other illness, but we can trust that God is with us in the journey. And just as I'm suggesting there is no shame in asking questions, and indeed that it's a good thing to do so, equally there is absolutely no shame in seeking support in your struggles and I would implore you to reach out for help. In the first instance telephone a helpline such as Lifeline or Beyond Blue or if you're not sure who to turn to for your particular situation, please contact us. It's been said a lot but we are all in this together.

Thomas has now seen Jesus for himself. He and the other disciples are all in it together. The dangers have not passed for them. The fears have not been removed. But perhaps they too have discovered that God can be trusted. And that is enough.

Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

*(the service online will use a variant of this including a sung response)*

Wed 22 is Earth Day and in our prayers this week we include our fragile earth and her vulnerable species.

*Pause, be still for a moment*

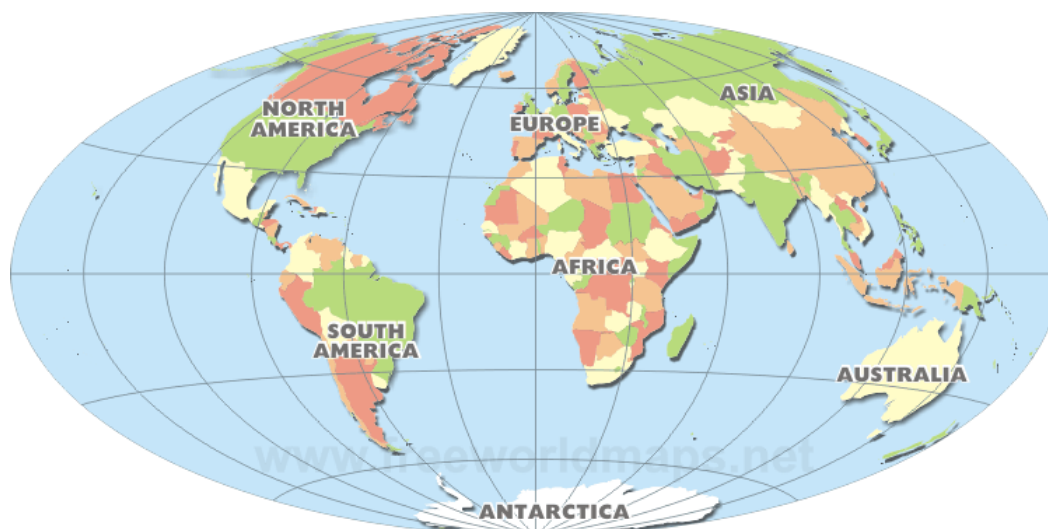
*What are you grateful for this day?*

*Give thanks to God*

*Where does your heart ache for today? Put a finger or hand over that place and pray for the breathing of God's peace upon all inhabitants*

*Breathe in....*

*As you breathe out, pray.... Peace be with you*



*For whom does your heart ache today? Health care workers, isolated elderly and lonely, families struggling to feed themselves and home-school, vulnerable communities, Pacific nations impacted by Cyclone Harold (Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji, Solomon Islands)...?*

*Hold an image in your mind for a few seconds*

*Breathe in....*

*As you breathe out, pray.... Peace be with you*

*What are your own needs this day? Do you have fears and anxieties?*

*Give yourself a hug*

*Breathe in ....*

*As you breathe out imagine Jesus saying to you*

*'My beloved, Peace be with you'*

*Stretch your arms as if you were reaching around the whole world*

Creator God, you make all things  
and weave them together in an intricate tapestry of life.  
Teach us to respect the fragile balance of life  
and to care for all the gifts of your creation.  
Guide by your wisdom those who have power and authority,  
that, by the decisions they make, life may be cherished  
and a good and fruitful Earth may continue to show your glory, and sing your praises.

Amidst all the difficulties humans are facing with COVID-19 we notice that there are  
benefits... benefits to ourselves in terms of air quality and benefits to our flora, fauna  
and sea life. There is a sense of rest and recovery for them.  
We pray that we as humans would make the most of this opportunity,  
that we will never return to the same level of raping and pillaging and polluting your  
creation,  
that we will find new ways of being  
    of sharing with  
        of tending and caring for all of creation

Loving God,  
As you first breathed life into creation, breathe new life afresh into all your world.  
In Christ's name, who taught us to pray:  
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.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

**Song:** *Yours be the Glory* TiS #380

*A wonderful Easter hymn. Sing this one out loud. ☺*

Yours be the glory,  
risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory over death you've won;  
Angels in bright raiment  
Rolled the stone away,  
Kept the folded grave-clothes,  
Where your body lay.

*Chorus:*

*Yours be the glory,  
risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory over death you've won.*

See, Jesus meets us,  
Risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly He greets us,  
Scatters fear and gloom:  
Let the church with gladness  
Hymns of triumph sing,  
For the Lord is living,  
Death has lost its sting.

*Chorus*

No more we doubt you,  
Glorious Prince of life;  
Life is naught without you:  
Aid us in our strife;  
Make us more than conquerors  
Through your deathless love;  
Bring us safe through Jordan  
To your home above.

*Chorus*

Edmond Louis Budry 1854-1932  
Tr. Richard Birch Hoyle 1875-1939 alt.  
Reprinted from Together in Song, Australian Hymn Book II



## **Benediction**

As the father sent Christ Jesus,  
so now you are sent.  
Go then, with your hearts rejoicing,  
as those who have touched the marks of truth.  
Endure suffering,  
forgive sins,  
and love the Lord.

And may God's power be your protection;  
May Christ Jesus reach out to you with words of peace;  
And may the Holy Spirit fill you with indescribable and glorious joy.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

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## **Notices**

- Thank you for your financial offerings that we continue to receive via online banking or envelope. If you need bank details they are on 'Grapevine'. If you need envelopes collected, please let us know.
- Do you know someone else who would like to receive either these weekly service-at-home resources, access details to online services or Family/children's resources? Again, please let us know.
- If you, or a friend or neighbour is in need of practical support, please get in touch.
- Do you have a mobile phone? Is it a 'smart' phone? (Most of the modern ones are.) Would you like to access services online but need some help to connect? Or assistance with using video calls to family and friends? Grandchildren are particularly good at this! But if we can assist to get you up and running we would love to help.
- Are you bored or have time to spare? This is a great opportunity to write letters to friends, notes of encouragement and, in particular, write letters of advocacy to politicians about a plethora of needs including habitat protection for our vulnerable species; seekers of asylum; casuals, artists, temporary visa holder etc who have thus far fallen through the cracks of support packages.