

Second Sunday in Easter
A Liturgy for use at Home

Notes:

*This liturgy may be used at home or in small groups. Feel free to adapt it as you see fit. Children present might enjoy lighting candles, reading scriptures and leading some of the prayers. Words in italics are instructions. Words in **bold** are said by all.*

Call to Worship

Light a candle

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ.

He has given us new life and hope.
He has raised Jesus from the dead.
God has claimed us as his own.

He has brought us out of darkness.
He has made us light to the world.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia
(based on 1 Peter 1:3-5)

Sing or listen to a recorded song

Opening Prayer¹

Glory to you, O God:
You raised Jesus from the grave,
Bringing victory over death
And giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ:
For us and our salvation
You overcame death
And opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:
You lead us into the truth
And breathe new life into us.

Glory to you, Father Son and Holy Spirit,
Now and forever. **Amen**

Confession

If we've doubted your power
Lord forgive us

If we've fallen into despair
Lord forgive us

If we've failed to hope in you
Lord forgive us

If we've been fearful of death
Lord forgive us

If we've forgotten the victory of Christ
Lord forgive us

Silence

May the living God
Raise us from despair,
Give us victory over sin
And set us free in Christ.
Amen.

Scripture

Psalms 16
John 20:19–31

Collect

Faithful God,
The strength of all who believe
and the hope of those who doubt;
may we, who have not seen, have faith
and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing;
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Reflection

- *A written reflection is appended to these notes.*
- *The Sunday Sermon is online²*

Response

- Set aside time this week to intentionally direct your thoughts to Jesus. Enjoy him for who he is, what he has done and what he continues to do. It might help to imagine yourself in

¹ Opening prayer, confession and Collect adapted from *The Methodist Worship Book*

² <https://durbanvillemethodist.co.za/category/sermons/>

Thomas's position. What would you say? What do you ask of Jesus now? What does he say to you?

- Be open to the Spirit encouraging you to respond in one or other practical way: e.g. contributing/praying for NGO's, churches etc. who are serving the hungry.
- Continue the discipline of tithing as you are able. For some of us the Rand value of our giving will inevitably decline. This does not diminish the value of the discipline of giving³.

Prayers of Supplication and Intercession

These prayers may help as you hold before God the needs of the hungry, and the challenges faced by businesses and employers at this time⁴. Pray them as written or use them to lead you into your own prayers of intercession.

For the Poor and Hungry

Loving Father, look graciously on the millions in the world who are hungry, starving and at the mercy of poverty and disease: as you have giving us the knowledge which can produce plenty, so give us wisdom which can bring it within reach of all. Grant that we who have lived so comfortably all our lives may have the gift of compassion, and do all in our power, as individuals and as a nation, to help others find abundant life which is your will for them; for Jesus Christ's sake (George Appleton)⁵.

Industry, Agriculture and Commerce

Come Holy Spirit and guide the minds and hearts of all who are involved in industry, agriculture and commerce, whether in office, or shop, field or factory. Give them diligence and honesty in all their dealings, and a spirit of service which surpasses the desire for material gain; for the sake of him who worked as a carpenter at Nazareth, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Freedom from Anxiety

Most loving Father help me dread nothing but the loss of you and to cast all my cares upon you because you care for me. Preserve me from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and enable me to hold fast to the faith, even when circumstances threaten to overwhelm me. Help me to discover that you are indeed a very present help in trouble and that I am more than conqueror through him that loves me, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Father...

Sing or listen to a song/hymn

Benediction

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever more. Amen

³ ACCOUNT NAME: MCSA DURBANVILLE SOCIETY, BANK: STANDARD BANK. BRANCH: TYGER MANOR, BRANCH CODE: 050410. ACCOUNT NUMBER: 275125750.

⁴ These prayers are from "My Personal Prayer Book" by Bishop Geoff Quinlan. Copies are available at the church office for R40 (obtainable when we return to normal activity).

Reflection

“Breath on me breath of God”

Blessed!

We wonder what it must have been like to see Jesus appear in the upper room on the evening of the first day of the week. Oh, what wonder and joy to hear Jesus say, *“Peace be with you”* and to see the transformed wounds of his resurrected body. How blessed *those* disciples were, we think, to see Jesus. It is easy to forget that Jesus pronounced His blessing upon *us* who have not seen yet believe (20:20)!

And indeed, we are blessed! We are not simply blessed with the faith of believing that Jesus rose and conquered the grave. We are also blessed with the most important gift the disciples received that day.

We don’t not see Jesus. We don’t hear him say, audibly, *“Peace be with you”*. We cannot see the holes in his hands or place our hands in his side. But we do receive the blessing the first disciples experienced; and with no less power: Jesus breathed on them and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit”* (Jn 20:22).

The Breath of God

Let’s ponder, for a moment, the life-giving breath of the Lord. We know that in the beginning *“the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being”* (Ge. 2:7).

Jesus’ breath is the breath of God. The breath that gave life to Adam so he could live in wonderful communion with God. That communion was lost through sin. But, through the prophet, God promised: *“I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live ... and you shall know that I am the LORD”* (Ez. 37:5, 6b). Relationship restored!

Life in His Name

Jesus has breathed that life into us! In fact, the Gospel of John was written so that *“by believing you may have life in his name”* (Jn. 20:31).

We can easily miss the wonder in those little words *“life in his name”*. If you know John’s Gospel you might think of Jesus’ frequent promises of *eternal life*. Yes, life in Jesus name is life that the grave cannot steal from us – an eternal life! It gives us comfort and peace, especially in a time of pandemic, to know the assurance of life beyond the grave.

But *“life in his name”* is even greater than that. You might remember Jesus promised *“abundant life”* (Jn. 10:10). In Jesus life is full, complete, in every sense – it is even full of joy (15:11).

And whatever other wonderful things *“life in his name”* implies it surely means a “double portion” of peace! Jesus said, twice, *“peace be with you”*! At the last supper Jesus had promised *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid”*. Life in His name is lived with that peace.

Did we miss out like Thomas?

Perhaps that makes us feel a little like Thomas who was absent when Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit. We might wonder if we missed out on something. We don’t always feel at peace – especially in today’s world! We don’t always feel like there is nothing lacking in our joy.

Did you know that there are two variations for verse 31? Some manuscripts have:

"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."

Other manuscripts have:

*"But these are written so that you may **continue believing** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name"* (Jn 20:31).

I think the Holy Spirit makes us aware of those variations because God knows that our faith needs constant nourishment in this world of trouble. Today, as we read John Gospel, God will nourish, strengthen, grow and deepen the life we have *"in his name"*.

Thomas a Disciple to Emulate

Friends, the story of Thomas tells us that if we feel we missed out, Jesus is more than willing to meet with us, to give us what is lacking in our faith. So, let's listen more carefully to his story.

Sometimes Thomas is called "doubting Thomas". But I think Thomas is not a doubter to dismiss but to a disciple to emulate. Thomas offers us a life-giving lesson in those times when we feel we "missed out". When we feel we are not really living the fullness of life in His name (And right now who doesn't feel they have missed out on worship together and sharing the Lord's Supper, not to mention all our other worries and fears).

The love of power vs the power of love.

Thomas's wanted to see Jesus hands and put his own hand in Jesus side. I don't know if that would have been my request, had I been Thomas. I might have wanted to see Jesus' radiant crown. Or the glory he received from the Father. Or some sign that He is now truly, coronated as King of the universe. Maybe I would have said: *"I won't believe until you take me to Pilate so I can see you say to him, 'Pontius let's continue that a little chat about Truth'. I want to see the look of Pilate's face"*.

Or maybe I'd have said, *"I won't believe until you enter the city again as you did on Palm Sunday. This time as the risen king – so that everyone can know you are the winner"*.

Or *"I won't believe until you sort out our corrupt government"*.

Do you see the heart of those desires? The desire for a triumphant victory march. The desire to be right, to win, to be powerful. The desire to for God to fix things according to my plan.

But Thomas doesn't seek signs of Jesus' power. Thomas seeks the signs God's love. Signs of the crucified Lord. The signs of Christ's "weakness and vulnerability" are in fact God's power to save the world.

That's deep. Let's surface for a breath. Because we know intuitively this is what we long for:

The spoiled teenager doesn't want another expensive gift. She doesn't need signs of how rich and powerful her father is. She longs for her busy father to suffer the pain of slowing down, to put his arm around her and to listen to her.

The homeless man needs a meal for sure. And maybe he is an addict who would also benefit from a scrub in the shower and a treatment program. But he longs for someone to suffer his stench, look him in the eye and see not a problem to fix or a mouth to feed but a precious, priceless person made in God's image.

The visitor to church will be impressed by full pews, a polished performance by the worship team and a preacher with the power to entertain. That goal is often the hidden transcript of church meetings. But

that's not what the visitor needs. She needs to find a people made vulnerable by the wounds of Jesus. A people willing to suffer the inconvenience of true hospitality.

Friends, we follow the way of Thomas when we allow Jesus suffering to give us courage to be vulnerable about our own wounds and compassion for the wounds of our brothers and sisters.

When we think like this, we make more sense of Jesus' challenging words *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (Jn 20:23)."*

We follow Thomas and place our hand in Jesus side as we pray *"Lord, I've sinned. I've failed to love you. I have failed to love my neighbour. Sin exiles me from the community of love with you and your people. But with my hand in your side I know you love me. You suffered for me. I know I'm forgiven. You bring me home from exile. It makes we want to follow you always. It teaches me that love will hurt; forgiving others will hurt. But I don't do it alone. You live in me and I in you, you love and forgive through me".*

I admit that the power to retain sins seems like too much responsibility. But what if it looked like this: *"City of Cape Town, the Church retains your sin of destroying the dwellings and possessions of the city's poorest people in Khayelitsha, during Lockdown in the Easter weekend⁶. It was an unwise, inhumane way to wield power. You know you must answer in court. But it is our duty to warn you that you must also answer to God who expects you to govern with compassion and wisdom."*

Some powerful people might be upset. But for a mother nursing a teargassed infant it might be sign God has not rejected her. And who knows, the City might say – *"We sinned. Forgive us. Help us find a new way"*.

Jesus lifted up today.

Do you remember how Jesus said *"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"* (Jn 12:32)? We are drawn to the cross; to Jesus wounded hands. Suffering awakens compassion. We see it today.

I see it in employers who share with me how they are agonising over how to care for employees who they can no longer afford to pay. I see it in people in communities all around the city looking for ways to feed the hungry. Some know they are seeing Jesus and his suffering in others. They are crying out for wisdom, grace and love. Jesus will lead them in the way of love and life. Others don't yet know that is Jesus who has awakened their compassion. But He is at work, as He promised, bringing home the sheep that do not yet belong to His fold (Jn. 10:16). Not by doing a victory lap around the city. But by working, usually quietly behind the scenes, in those who are drawn by the power of his suffering love. Amen.

⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-17-heart-what-heart-city-of-cape-town-must-answer-in-court-after-residents-are-violently-turfed-out-of-their-homes/>