

SUNDAY 12TH APRIL 2026

Acts 2:14a, 22-32 and John 20: 19-31

A prayer to start: Heavenly Father, I pray that you will give me your words to say today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Welcome to St. Paul's on Low Sunday! I checked why it's called Low Sunday:

The consensus is that it's the Sunday after the extraordinary high point and exuberance of Easter, and is the start of 'low week'. It has also been linked to low attendance compared to Easter Sunday – and yes, even the Vicar's away!

But you are all here, which is great!

And the Lectionary has presented us with two deeply significant readings as the journey onwards and outwards from the Cross and Christ's resurrection begins. John describes the gathered, scared disciples behind locked doors and Jesus coming and standing among them, and the Acts reading jumps forward to the day of Pentecost, and part of Peter's speech to the people of Jerusalem after the Holy Spirit had descended with tongues of fire and the disciples had started speaking in tongues which each person could understand in their own language. These passages give us, 2000 years on, extraordinary insight into the days after the world-changing events of the death and Resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's coming to dwell with us. It's hard for us, in our messed up world, to look back but these two passages help us to do that.

So let's spend some time, starting first with John's narrative in Chapter 20 of his Gospel.

I've just completed a really interesting preaching module organised by the Diocese, and we spent quite a bit of time on narrative preaching. It's

a way of exploring a passage by being a character in the passage and speaking as that character. For practice, we had to speak for three minutes as an unobvious character in a Bible story. Adventurously, I chose to tell the story of the feeding of the five thousand from the character of the boy with the fish; that was all fine, but it was pointed out to me that it was a bit of a challenge for my audience to see me as a young boy... Schoolboy error! But here goes with our passage from John's Gospel, from the perspective of one of the disciples

Behind locked doors with my friends, I am scared. We are all scared. And bewildered. Mary came to us earlier and said excitedly and breathlessly that she had seen the Lord, and what he had told her. She said Jesus had told her:

'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet gone back to the Father. Go and tell my brothers that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God'. But all her words came out in a rush and none of us could really understand what she was saying.

So here we are, hidden away behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish authorities.

But from nowhere, Jesus is here, in the room with us. And he is talking to us as we gather round him. **'Peace be with you'** he says. And we become calm, as we look at each other in the candlelight and as we look at Jesus. I can see his wounded hands and side. I am in no doubt that it's Jesus.

'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you'. And Jesus breathed on us and said **'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive people's sins, they are not forgiven'**.

And then Jesus is gone. Simply not here.

Thomas isn't with us, though, so we'll have to try and explain all this when he gets back.

Moving on a week...

Now we're still in the house, and Thomas is with us, all of us still behind locked doors. When Thomas returned, we told him that we had seen the Lord. But he didn't believe us. 'Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my fingers on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe', he said.

From nowhere, Jesus has just come into the room again. He says 'Peace be with you' just like he did a week ago. And he says to Thomas: 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting and believe!'

Thomas pauses but then says simply 'My Lord and my God'.

And Jesus says 'Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!'

That's the end of the scene – and Jesus, our Lord, is talking about us. Thomas and the other disciples saw the risen Jesus in the flesh. We haven't, and Jesus recognises the difference for those who haven't. What we have had, though, is 2000 years to read, consider and reflect on the extraordinary events surrounding the ministry, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

I can do no better than quote John's words at the end of the passage we read:

'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name'. It's our choice. Christ knocks at the door of our life; it is our choice whether we open it.

And fast forward to the passage we read from Acts Chapter 2. Beyond Christ's Ascension to the day of Pentecost. The passage is rather artificially divided, starting in verse 14 for half a verse to make it clear that Peter's speech to the crowd is what is being reported, then leaving out Peter's explanation that speaking in tongues is not, as some thought, because the disciples are drunk, before our passage in which Peter explains in simple language that Jesus of Nazareth is accredited (or in other words, marked out) by God through miracles, wonders and signs which God performed through Jesus.

Then Jesus was handed over by God's deliberate plan and put to death on the Cross. But God raised him from the dead because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

And then Peter recites in his speech words from Psalm 16 vv 8 to 11, where David speaks about the coming of the Messiah from David's household. Peter quotes David as saying about the Messiah that He will not be abandoned to the realm of the dead and that God will not let his holy one see decay.

This is hard to grapple with, but not to be ignored or sidestepped. I found Tom Wright's commentary on Acts helpful in relation to this passage. Tom Wright says, and I quote:

'Note how Luke (the author of Acts) insists that, for him as for all the early Christians, 'resurrection' wasn't about a disembodied spirit going off to heaven, leaving a body behind in a tomb. This is precisely what resurrection **did not mean**. Resurrection was and is about a physical body being very thoroughly dead, but then being very thoroughly alive again' - end of quote.

Which is what Thomas found so hard to believe until he could put his fingers in nail holes in Christ's hands and his hand in Christ's side.

It's a pity that we stopped at verse 32 of the chapter, because verse 33 gives some helpful Trinitarian connection. Verse 33 reads:

‘Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear’.

This pouring out of the Holy Spirit enables our Lord to walk with us through life as our divine companion and comforter. Our encourager on our journeys of faith. He waits at the door to our life and he will eat with us if we open it.

The book of Acts does not at this point develop a ‘theology of the cross’ such as we find in Paul and other writers. Coincidentally (if there is such a thing, and I wonder increasingly about God’s hand in such things) Morning Prayer in the chapel on Friday had as the New Testament reading part of chapter 15 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul grapples with the Resurrection of Christ and our resurrection. Verses 42 to 44 of chapter 15 are worth quoting:

‘So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body’. **I encourage you to have a read of Corinthians Chapter 15.** By the time you’ve done that, Rachel will be back, suitably refreshed, and you can ask her what it all means! Or rather, what it might mean, as this is at the heart of the mystery of faith.

So to recap:

1. John reports the resurrected Jesus alive and appearing to his disciples, first without Thomas, who will not believe what has happened without physical proof. Jesus reappears and Thomas has his doubts removed. Not so easy for us, who do not have Thomas’s opportunity.
2. Jesus’ resurrection is not about a disembodied spirit going off to heaven; resurrection is about a physical body being thoroughly

dead, but then being fully alive. And we all have homework to do by reading 1 Corinthians Chapter 15.

3. That after the risen Christ ascended to his father, Christ received the promised Holy Spirit, now poured on us, to be with us and to walk with us through life as our companion and comforter.
4. And it's worth noting that there are well over two Billion Christians on this planet; the passages we have been looking at mark the start of the growth of **our** extraordinary worldwide fellowship. And that gives us such hope!

Amen