

**Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter (19th April, 2020),
followed by a brief reflection on the Gospel**

Psalm 16

- 1 Preserve me, O God, for in you have I taken refuge; ♦
I have said to the Lord, ‘You are my lord,
all my good depends on you.’
- 2 All my delight is upon the godly that are in the land, ♦
upon those who are noble in heart.
- 3 Though the idols are legion that many run after, ♦
their drink offerings of blood I will not offer,
neither make mention of their names upon my lips.
- 4 The Lord himself is my portion and my cup; ♦
in your hands alone is my fortune.
- 5 My share has fallen in a fair land; ♦
indeed, I have a goodly heritage.
- 6 I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel, ♦
and in the night watches he instructs my heart.
- 7 I have set the Lord always before me; ♦
he is at my right hand; I shall not fall.
- 8 Wherefore my heart is glad and my spirit rejoices; ♦
my flesh also shall rest secure.
- 9 For you will not abandon my soul to Death, ♦
nor suffer your faithful one to see the Pit.
- 10 You will show me the path of life;
in your presence is the fullness of joy ♦
and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

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Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

22 “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.
23 This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,^[d] put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. 25 David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,
27 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.
28 You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.’[e]

29 “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

John 20: 19-31

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 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!” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 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.”

26 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!” 27 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.”

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of John’s Gospel

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Hannah's Reflection

Many of you will have heard me say this before- one of the places where I learned most about discipleship was at my children's playgroup- Holy Trinity, Belle Vue. The women who run it understand and model something profound about the reality of us all being children of God together- whatever our age. The respect and dignity with which the children are treated is breathtaking, and to step into that setting feels like holy ground.

One of the playgroup ladies (as they're known in our house!) has a catchphrase- 'we can always start again'. It sounds so simple doesn't it?! But we are still learning that it is true. When we think that all is lost, when we feel that deep, pathos-ridden yearning for the 'only if...', when we are full of regret, our Gospel passage today reminds that, in Christ, we really can always start again.

Thomas missed a massive moment. He simply wasn't there when the evidence that changed the world walked through a locked door and greeted the disciples. He missed the risen Jesus. Missed it. More than that, he was someone who needed proof, who needed to be convinced. Lots of us are like that, and it's no bad thing- a questioning nature holds others, and society, to account. He must have felt such regret, but also such alienation- he couldn't travel with the other disciples to that place of bewildered joy at the resurrection because he was still stuck in Good Friday.

But actually, Thomas missed nothing. He was given his own moment. That phrase- 'we can always start again' rings through this story. In the end, Thomas was gifted an encounter with Jesus that was uniquely his, and went straight to his deepest question- 'put your finger here, see my hands....'

That treasure is for all of us- it is the promise of our faith, that Jesus Christ meets each of us in our deepest questions, fears, anxieties, worries and speaks life. Even though we may think it is too late, or we've missed our chance, the truth of it is that we never have- we can always start again.

Starting again will indeed be something we address in the months to come as the world moves through the peak of this crisis and reclaims something of what was, but is also given an opportunity to reflect on what can be let go of. As Archbishop Justin mentioned last week- we must not make the mistake of thinking 'life before' ought to resume without change- that life was problematic anyway. Perhaps the very personal, particular nature of Jesus' appearance to Thomas, reminds us that the future must not simply be the past revisited, but it too will be unique, new, transformed- a real 'starting again'.

At the end of the passage the writer turns away from the scene and addressed us, the reader, directly. That can feel a bit of a shock! He tells us that this story isn't just words on a page- it is testimony and it has a purpose that stands today just as much as it ever did:

'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.'

Even now, amidst all the complex emotions the world today brings, may those words give us hope and draw us back to the one who brings life.

With love, prayers and blessings,

Hannah x