

**Leigh Memorial Congregation
Parramatta Mission
Uniting Church in Australia
Easter 2
19 April 2020**

(To stop the spread of Corona virus, in response to Government's ban and Uniting Church of Australia NSW & ACT Synod's strong recommendation, the Church Council of Parramatta Mission have decided to suspend all meetings and gatherings including Sunday worship. As a result, this is the fifth consecutive Sunday that the doors of the Leigh Memorial Church are not open for worship services. We are sorry and it will remain so until further notice.)

(Here is a full worship service including a reflection prepared by Leigh Memorial Congregation minister, Rev Dr Manas Ghosh for this Sunday, 19.4.2020. to worship from the safety of people's home. Before the service begins, you may prepare a worship space for yourself by placing a cross, a lighted candle and if possible, some flowers on a table. The hymns/songs can be said as prayers if not possible for solo/family singing. Have a blessed worship!)

God calls: We gather

Greetings and Welcome:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Call to Worship:

It's the first day of the week.

The joy of Easter still sings in our hearts.

Take a deep breath as God breathes new life in your spirits!

Open your hearts to receive God's mercy and grace.

Open your mouths to worship God on this glorious day! **Amen.**

Hymn: Together in Song 390

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

Refrain

*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his name.*

Jesus is lord of all the earth;
he is the king of creation.

Refrain

Spread the good news o'er all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen.

Refrain

We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live for ever.

Refrain

God has proclaimed his gracious gift:
new life for all! Alleluia!

Refrain

Come, let us praise the living God,
joyfully sing to our Saviour.

Refrain

Prayer of Praise:

God of the Risen Lord, and our God,
we gather this morning from our homes
as a virtual community of believers.
We come with joy to greet one another
and to tell again and again the amazing news:
Christ is risen!
Love is victorious over death!
You have given us new life
in the name of your Son!
May our singing, praying, listening and reflecting
be a testimony to the power of your love
to make us a new creation
as a community of faith.
We praise you in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

Call to Confession:

When we keep the dark sides of our life locked away,
we have no need to confess.
But God comes into our hearts when we least expect,
so we can be filled with forgiveness, hope and peace.
Let us spend a few moments in silence, confessing our sins to God
that we may receive God's forgiveness and renewal.

(Time for reflection)

Prayer of Confession:

God of empty tombs and emptier people:
when we hesitate to speak of and practice your love and hope,
Have mercy on us.
When we stay locked behind our fears and doubts,
Have mercy on us.
When we cannot believe your Word of new life,
Have mercy on us.
Amen.

Words of Assurance and declaration of Forgiveness:

Christ comes into every shadowed corner of our lives with the light of Easter.
Christ comes into the locked rooms of our fears, doubts and faults,
and gifts us with grace, courage and hope.
Christ comes to fill us with peace.
Hear then the good news of Christ's grace to us:
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song: Together in Song 720 (Sung twice)

Halle, halle, hallelujah!
Halle, hlale, hallelujah!
Halle, halle, hallelujah!
Halle, halle, hallelujah!

The Lord's Prayer: *(In the spirit of the Lord's Prayer please feel free to pray in
our own mother tongue)*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

**Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the times of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

Passing of the Peace: *(You may pass on the peace to your family members present with you, or, you may hold your two hands gently for some moments and think of those people you would like to pass on the 'Peace of the Lord'.)*

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

God speaks: We listen

Bible Reading: (Our reader is Ken Morgan)

John 20:19-31

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he 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!" 29 Jesus said to

him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!

Reflection: Rev Dr Manas Ghosh

Today is the first Sunday after Easter. We all know that. But what we may not know is that many Christians observe this Sunday as "Holy Humour Sunday". And this is not an invention by some crazy Christians. It has a long history. It was begun by the early Greek Christians. They called it "Bright Sunday" or "Holy Humor Sunday". For centuries the Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians have been observing this day as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

We all in life face illness, depression, emotional wounds, loss of loved ones, financial losses. So in this season of Eastertide a day set aside to have some fun is not a bad idea. Christianity is not a bland religion, and to be a follower of Christ one need not be a grumpy person.

As a matter of fact some early church fathers and theologians, like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom, offered a theological rationale for this. They said that God played a practical joke on death, Satan, and all the forces of evil by raising Jesus from the dead. "*Risus paschalis* - the Easter laugh," they called it. It is a testament to the God who, as the Psalmist says, "sits in the heavens and laughs" (Psalm 2:4) at the foolishness of humanity and any forces that might seek to thwart divine purposes.

I read of one tradition where the priests gather on this day with cigars, brandy, and jokes to celebrate the God who does this surprising, transforming thing - my kind of Presbytery meeting.

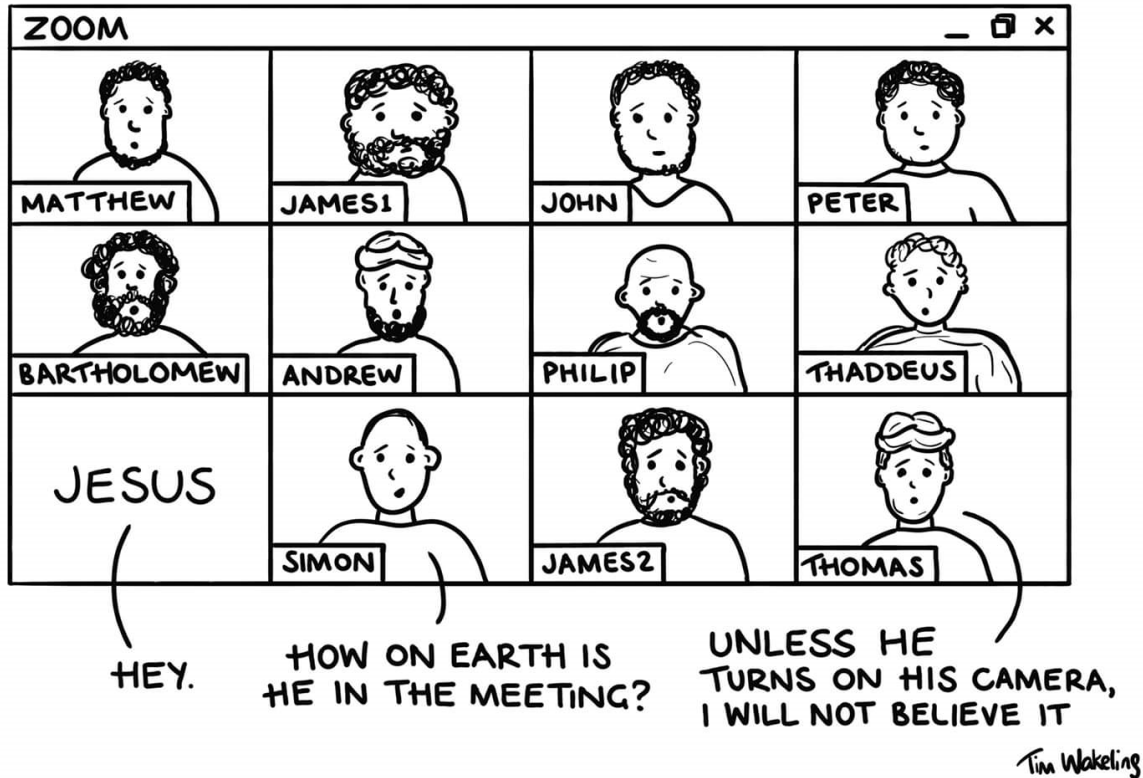
Well, I'm not suggesting you do that but there's no doubt that the resurrection is the comedy par excellence, the unexpected reversal of expectations. The women went to the tomb to embalm a dead body. But they stumbled over the

risen Lord. Resurrection reverses the expectation of gloom and doom in the face of death, and instead brings celebration. Alleluia!

So, after this long trail of despair, death and boredom for weeks we are entitled to have little bit of laughter.

And here's my contribution, two cartoons that I received from family and friends. Hope you will enjoy it.





Now back to the gospel story.

They were hiding behind locked doors. That's what John tells us. In the wake of Jesus' resurrection his followers hid behind locked doors, just like we and the rest of the world are today at this very moment.

Looking back at the disciples we might think that they should have been happy, that their friend Jesus who had been killed on Friday has come alive on Sunday! You'd think they'd be having a huge welcome back party with champagne and confetti and that famous song "Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree" at the background.

But no, there they are – hiding behind locked doors.

Well it is not quite surprising. Resurrection is wonderful – and I believe it wholeheartedly. But the anguish of death and its impact upon peoples' lives are pretty powerful. It doesn't need any explanation as we have been watching the news of death everyday for the last two months from around the world. Death scares us to death. It is our greatest fear, whether we admit it or not. So we lock the doors – and hide.

The disciples of Jesus were hiding from death – behind locked doors.

Not only that, John tells us they were hiding from...the Jews. And that's interesting. They were not hiding from the Samaritans or any other group of people but their own, who did not believe what they believed, and they feared that they would be persecuted by them.

I guess we all have people in our lives that we hide from. At this time of Corona virus a particular ethnic group of people are blamed for our misery and we lock them out. Perhaps that's better than spitting on their faces. People hide from people of other religions, from those who hold a different theology, from minority groups, from people of different sexual orientation, even from each other.

So next to the fear of death, we have this fear of others – the fear of strangers, people who do not fit in our nicely constructed social or economic success system, people who are not like us, and we often lock them out of our lives.

But then John shows us another “door-locking” fear in this story: the fear of facing the truth about ourselves.

I've often wondered why Thomas wasn't with the others that night when Jesus showed up. Have you ever wondered about that? I suspect it wasn't because he was just out buying some hamburgers from the local Maccas. Maybe he had given up – on God – on Jesus – on the church. He no longer believes.

Neither do many of us.

Many of us grew up with a faith that was full of quick fixes, easy answers, a religion that we thought would empower us to have more control over life and insulate us against disaster. And that was all well and good until the COVID19 came and started claiming lives indiscriminately. And that old idea flew right out the window.

If God is in control of everything, he should do a better job. How can a good and loving God do something like this to innocent people? And if he isn't in control, then what can I do?

Run away!

Run away, like Thomas!

Are you a Thomas – running away from the truth about yourself and what you no longer able to believe?

What a messed up group of disciples we meet on the evening of the first day of the week. They are hiding behind locked doors – hiding from death, hiding from others, hiding from themselves and their doubts.

Then suddenly, there is Jesus. He comes to them from nowhere. And please note, THEY didn't let him in. No one unlocked the door and welcomed him in.

He just shows up – unannounced!

To those who fear death, he says, "Peace! I'm with you."

To those who fear others, he says, "As I was sent to you, I send you to them!"

And to Thomas – Jesus holds out his wounded hands and says, "Come, touch me – face your doubt – and find the truth."

You see, there is no easy answers, no trite formulas, no enlightening theology. All we have at the end of the story is this: To those who fear death, to those who fear others, to those who fear themselves and their doubts, Jesus comes. He simply shows up, assures them that it's okay to unlock the door and go outside; calls them to get reengaged with life; and promises his presence with them.

At the end of the story, Jesus says something wonderful to Thomas, "Because you've seen me, you believe." Then he turns to you and me, and says, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe."

Believe what?

Only this, that the risen Lord is always with us. Amen.

Offering and Dedication: (This is an excerpt from an important email from Ian Gray in regard to your offering which I endorse.

The stark reality of this time is that since we have not been able to meet in person to worship God, congregational giving has dropped by 70%.

Unfortunately, all the costs associated with our congregation are continuing. So please consider setting up a direct electronic transfer of financial giving to support the continued ministry of our congregation. The process is simple

and straightforward. You need to ask your bank to send funds to the nominated account below. You can amend or stop these arrangements at any time.

The bank account details for Giving Direct (Offerings) is:-

Bank account name: Parramatta Mission Giving Direct

BSB: 634634

Account number: 100025901

So, would you please give this request a serious consideration. Thank you.)

Prayer of Dedication:

With grateful hearts we bring before you our humble offerings, O God, and we pray, please accept and bless them that the hungry might be fed, the despaired be offered hope, the fearful be given courage and the lonely be offered a community. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

Prayers of the People:

Today I would like guide you in a silent prayers of the people. I'll mention the prayer points one by one, and please offer your own prayers. Thank you.

- All those suffering from COVID19
- All medical staffs, chaplains and carers of COVID19 patients
- WHO and Governments of all nations fighting against COVID19
- Doctors, scientists and researchers trying to find a vaccine
- People who are under quarantine or self-isolation
- People who have lost their jobs
- People who are under lockdown
- Students, overseas students, children at home
- Teachers and education staffs
- Parents who are looking after their children
- Small business owners, daily labourers
- Churches all over the world
- Uniting Church in Australia
- Parramatta Mission, our three congregations and the Korean faith community

- PM staffs and volunteers, especially those working in the Mental health area, Mealplus and Emergency shelters
- Members of Leigh memorial Congregation, especially our senior friends and those who are unwell.

Amen.

God sends : We go

Hymn: Together in Song No. 382

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwVEIxKp-0>

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 awake again,
 laid in the earth,
 like grain that sleeps unseen.
 Love has come again,...

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,...

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 has come again,...

Benediction:

Doubts cannot hold us.
Fear cannot bind us.
Death cannot defeat us.
For the Risen Lord is with us.
Now may the blessings of God
the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer
be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.