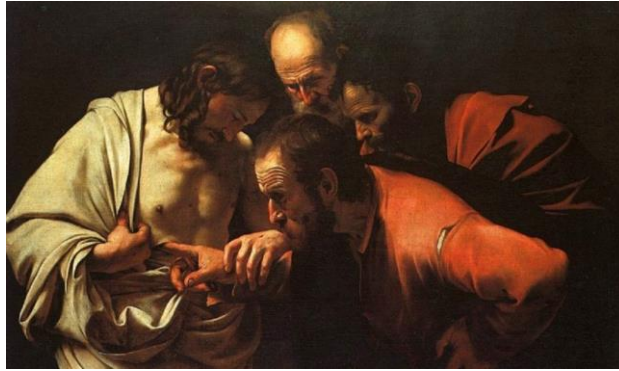


A service for Low Sunday



Note: The hymn numbers are from "Singing the Faith" the current hymnbook of the Methodist Church, you will need to look them up if your Church uses a different book. I have also put links into YouTube for the hymns, my choice might not be yours, so by all means look for alternatives.

Bible Reading: Psalm 16

Hymn 489: All I once held dear <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxpPla-BskY>

Prayer *Creator God, who breathed the world into existence, who called men and women to lead your people in paths of righteousness, who spoke your word through prophets, who loved the world so much that you sent your only son, who showed us the way, the truth and the life through his ministry, we come and we worship you. When all felt to be lost, you raised him from the dead and revealed your glory to the early Church. We can not understand, but we who live centuries later worship believe and worship you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen*

God of love, you have led us into the ways of light, forgive us when we have chosen to walk in the darkness, forgive us for when we have not acted with love, when our words have hurt other and even when our thoughts have been impure. We pray that you will cleanse us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Collect for the day

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; who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Bible Reading Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

I remember many years ago listening to a young Local Preacher, young in both years and experience, I forget the context of what he was saying but remember one statement very well, in his broad Yorkshire accent he said "of course Jesus never went to Hell" he paused, as though considering whether his statement was correct or not and then said "apart from them three days over Easter of course" the thought tickled me, it sounded as though Jesus had been away on a minibreak of some kind. The words "my God, why have you forsaken me always echo around in my head at Easter time.

Don't you think that it is wonderful that Peter, who on Good Friday denied even knowing Jesus, had the courage to stand up and address, not a servant girl, but the gathered community in Jerusalem and name them as the ones who had crucified Christ. His message is not simply a message of condemnation, it is a message of hope, for he tells them that God did not leave him in the world of the dead but raised him up in Glory.

I don't know what became of that young Local Preacher, his delivery and language might have been a bit dodgy, but the message is important. Christ once was dead, who had been cast into the depths of hell for our sinfulness has been raised in glory and dwells in the place that is above at the right hand of the Father.

Reflect on how God is working in your life in these strange times. Pray that God will raise up His Church, so that we might be stronger for him and confident to proclaim his message to the world today.

Hymn 407

Hear the call of the Kingdom https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDfuGb89x_8

Epistle

1 Peter 1: 3-9

One of the strange things about this whole business of confinement for so many people is that holidays people have been planning for seem to be uncertain. We were planning on going on our big family holiday to the Yorkshire Dales at the end of May and we have had to make the decision that it will not happen now. One of the things I will miss, is clambering up the hill near the hostel where we stay onto the top of Conistone Dab. The views are wonderful and even though I'm not as nimble as I once was and find climbing exhausting these days, I stand breathless and take in the views. The simple fact is that if I don't endure the climb, I don't get the benefit of the views.

We catch a glimpse in this section of Peter's letter of the journey he has been on, it is clear that he sees the resurrection as a new birth, he recognises that he has died and has been risen with Christ. He appears to recognise that his readers are struggling and need hope in their lives and to that end, he reminds them that even gold is tested by fire and as they deal with their issues, they will rise to glory with Christ.

As the world struggles today with the effects of the global pandemic, we maybe need to be reminded ourselves that in the midst of our darkness the light of the risen Christ needs to shine through. I believe that we are also called to shine out into our communities.

Prayer

You might find it helpful to light a candle or look a picture that helps you.



In these days of lock down and isolation where life feels to be difficult and lonely for so many, try to be still and silent a few moments.

Pray for the Church of Christ, that we might be Easter people, filled with the love of God, seeking to work in his way in the world today, pray for an end to divisions and a new Church grown in love and unity.

Pray for the people of the world, at a time when we are forced to stay at home, remember those who have no homes, those who have to go out to supply their basic needs like water and sanitation. Remember those whose homes have been destroyed and pray for the rulers of nations as they make difficult decisions

Pray for our own country, our government, our NHS workers and all those in key roles in our nation, putting their own health at risk, so that others can be looked after. People who face the pandemic so soon after having their homes and livelihoods destroyed by the recent floods only eight weeks ago.

Pray for people who find themselves isolated, remembering particularly those who find themselves in dark places, separated from those they love particularly at difficult times in their lives. Remember the people on our prayer list this week.

Pray for those who have lost loved ones, remembering the many people who died due to causes other than the pandemic. Remember those who are not getting the opportunity to say goodbye and can't have funeral services to celebrate the lives of those they have lost.

Finally, pray that God will strengthen you to cope with this difficult time and that you may feel the power of his risen life in you today. Amen

The Lord's prayer:

Hymn 508 Purify my heart <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lvXA0yRDwY>

Gospel: John 20: 19-31:

One of the things I found really difficult at theological college was the whole business of questioning scripture, I'd always been taught that the Bible is the Holy Word of God and my understanding was that I had no right to question it. I remember in one of my first Old Testament study sessions Sean Winter, our lecturer warned that he would destroy everything that we had ever believed, but promised that he would re-build everything, so we would emerge better people for the experience. I hope that he was successful.

The world has developed and grown because throughout life men and women have questioned "what is at the other side of the ocean?" "what would happen if I did this?" "how fast can we travel?" "what causes this?" what a strange world we would live in if we simply took everything at face value? Even in these days of Coronavirus we are asking "how do we do this, now things don't work in the same way?"

Poor Thomas gets bad press, he questions and quite often it is seen as being a negative attribute, I would question that he was wrong. He doesn't simply take the resurrection as a given, he wants to see the evidence, to know for certain, to understand what it all means. I applaud Thomas's questioning; it is only when we ask the difficult questions that we discover hidden truths.

Hymn 357 Jesus – the name high over all <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSeAYKG-8Ko>

Prayer

*Lord have mercy on us,
Come and heal our land.
Cleanse with your fire, heal with your touch,
Humbly we bow and call upon You now.
O Lord, have mercy on us,
O Lord, have mercy on us.*

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen.