

## THE METHODIST CHURCH

### LONDON ROAD METHODIST CHURCH

#### WORSHIP AT HOME RESOURCE - SUNDAY 19th APRIL 2020

##### Approach to worship

'The disciples rejoiced when they saw their Lord.'

Although we are not physically gathering together, we come before our God this morning with rejoicing in our hearts.

In these troubled times we put aside all our cares to focus on the one who is risen from the dead.

Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed.  
Alleluia!

##### Hymn – Singing the Faith 297

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
His cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
but saving, healing, here and now,  
and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war,  
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,  
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth,  
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,  
and find the way, the life, the truth,  
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive and comes to bring  
good news to this and every age,  
til earth and sky and ocean ring  
with joy, with justice, love and praise.

Brian Wren © Stainer & Bell

##### Bible Reading: 1 Peter 1: 3-9

This assurance that we will all share in the "inheritance" of Jesus' resurrection was written by and to Christians facing the brutal violence of Roman persecution.

##### Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Loving God, we praise and adore you for your great compassion,  
for giving us new birth into a living hope.  
The glorious truth of the resurrection astounds us.  
We pray that we never lose the wonder of what you have done for us,  
of the wonderful, lasting inheritance that you provide for us.  
Amen.

##### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven...

##### Bible Reading: John 20: 19-31

##### Sermon:

It can be hard to shake off a reputation from something that happened in the past. Some with long memories at London Road expect me always to be the first one up for second helpings at any church meal, due to a (slandorous) misrepresentation of an incident that took place at a church weekend over twenty years ago. Thomas has it worse though. It's nearly two thousand years since he addressed the risen Jesus as "My Lord and my God!" (vs 28). This is one of the very first affirmations in the Bible of the true divinity of Jesus (not "...and my prophet", or "my Messiah", but "*my God*"), yet still we call him "Doubting Thomas". Surely "Believing Thomas" would be a much fairer name.

At the Easter Sunday gathering that Thomas had missed, Jesus commissioned ("sent") his disciples with the authority to forgive sins (vs 21-23). Forgiving sins was, and is, the core of the gospel. Jesus provoked the hostility of the religious leaders because he kept saying he was forgiving people their sins - something the leaders said only God could do. One of the last things that Jesus did before he died was to forgive those responsible for his beating and execution (Luke 23: 34). The words "Father, forgive them" from the cross are so familiar to

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us, yet they would have been astonishing to the people present because, as NT Wright points out, anyone dying in agony on a cross, if they were able to speak at all, would usually call down terrible curses on their torturers, not blessings.

Why is forgiveness so important? Because it is how God's Kingdom is established on earth. It is the basic foundation from which God is able to change and empower us. Forgiveness allows reconciliation with each other and with God. It is only as forgiven people that we can bring God's love and forgiveness to others.

It is, however, not only reputations that can be hard for us to shake off and leave behind. Even as Christians we can let wrongs, sins, from the past continue to warp and corrode our lives, we can become consumed by regret and despair for wrongs we have done, or anger and bitterness against those who have wronged us. Sometimes we may confess and say with our minds that God has forgiven us, but in our hearts still cling to and nurture shame and embarrassment. At times like this, it seems harder to believe in God's forgiveness than in the resurrection. But we must learn to trust what Jesus said and to let go of memories of past wrongs for which we have been forgiven; it is only when *we acknowledge that we are completely forgiven* that we can experience the new life that God offers us right now, and go on to extend that forgiveness to others.

### **Hymn – Singing the Faith 423**

'Forgive our sins as we forgive'  
you taught us, Lord, to pray,  
but you alone can grant us grace  
to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless  
the unforgiving heart  
that broods on wrongs and will not let  
old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals  
the truth we dimly knew:  
how small the debts are owed to us,  
how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls  
and bid resentment cease;

then, reconciled by God to all,  
our lives will spread your peace.

Rosamond Eleanor Herklots © OUP

### **Reflection**

You are probably familiar with this hymn. Take a few minutes to read the words through again slowly. After each verse, knowing you are in the presence of our loving and forgiving God, think of how the words apply to you and to people you know.

### **Prayer**

Father God,  
With the authority of the risen Christ,  
we pray:

For people around the world who are suffering from physical or mental health problems and fear for their future.

For people doing dangerous jobs for the benefit of others, that they may have your strength and courage.

For people responsible for decisions that affect the health and wellbeing of others, that they may act with your wisdom.

For people struggling with the many different consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

For people close to death, and those who mourn, that they may know your comfort.

For people we know, particularly...

And for us, your church - locally, nationally and throughout the world - as we seek new ways to serve and glorify your name.

Amen.

### **Blessing**

Jesus stood among them and said,  
'Peace be with you!

As the Father has sent me,  
so I send you.'

Then he breathed on them, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit!'

Father,  
fill our lives today with the power of your Spirit.  
Amen.

Words and music for the hymns can be found on YouTube here:

Christ is alive, let Christians sing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-M3cuTAINo> Note that the final verse in Singing the Faith 297 in the order of service is not included in the YouTube version - so please just continue unaccompanied!

Forgive our sins as we forgive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zBHyODfjLI>.

If you would like a time of reflection after the service, look at a picture of Jesus and Thomas and listen to the instrumental part of the final (5th) movement of Mahler's 2nd symphony, the Resurrection Symphony: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eozfct\\_AwA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eozfct_AwA).

Try to imagine seeing the risen Jesus for the first time, as Thomas did. What would you say? What might Jesus say to you? Would you want to touch him, as he invited Thomas to do?