

**Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church**

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 The Second Sunday of Easter**

To be able to access the links, go to the bottom of this page and left click on the date. This will download the pdf in a new window, then simply click on the links as indicated.

**Welcome**

Sadly, we cannot meet together today. However, we are able to worship together by using the devotions below. Today is the second Sunday of Easter and so we continue to focus on the events of that followed the resurrection of Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-5**

*Christ died for our sins,  
just as the Scriptures said.  
He was buried,  
and he was raised from the dead on the third day,  
just as the Scriptures said.  
He was seen by Peter,  
and then by the Twelve.*

**Song** [Bless the Lord O my soul](#) *Click on the link*



**Prayer of Praise, Confession,  
Assurance of Forgiveness and Lord's Prayer**

Creator of all, sustainer of all, your glory and majesty are beyond our understanding. We praise your holy name.



You created the heavens and the earth, the universe that is so large it is beyond our comprehension, the atom so small it is beyond our sight. You made us ... in your image each one unique, each one special, each one precious and loved by you. We praise your holy name.

But loving Father we confess that we disobey your will and we fail to love and honour you. We neglect to thank you for all the blessing you shower upon us. We are selfish and disregard the needs of others, causing hurt and distress by our actions and words. We fail

to care for your creation. We ask for your forgiveness, knowing that you are forgiving and patient, loving and merciful.

We thank you, Father God, that in your love for us you sent your Son, Jesus Christ to live our earthly life. That he was sacrificed for us, but conquered death and rose again, to bring your people to new birth. We praise your holy name.

We thank you that you sent your holy Spirit to live within us to guide, correct and equip us for service in your Kingdom. We praise your holy name.

Your love reaches beyond the sky.

Your mercy has no end.

Your righteousness stands like the tallest mountain,

Your justice is deeper than any ocean.

Your grace flows like a never-ending river.

We praise your holy name!

Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name. Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

#### **A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus**

Since the outbreak of COVID 19 there has been an upsurge in People seeking information about prayer. Jeanet Sinding Bentzen, an associate professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Copenhagen, and executive director of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture has found that Google searches for 'prayer' doubles for every 80,000 new registered cases of COVID-19. We do turn to God in a crisis.



The virus is most prevalent in North America, Europe and China. However, spare a thought for those who live and work in the densely populated shanti towns and refugee camps.

Pray .....

Loving God, your Spirit has refreshed the dry bones of our faith,  
and breathed new life where there once was death,  
we stand strong and renewed by Jesus our Lord who died and was raised to glory.

We lay before you the needs of health care professionals who are in the forefront  
fighting this global pandemic. Bless all who work in the care sector providing for  
people's daily needs because they cannot do so themselves. Protect their health and  
give emotional strength as they work beyond normal circumstances and hours.

Pour out your blessing, healing and comfort on all who are infected and every family  
that lives with anxiety of contracting the virus and of financial hardship.

Comfort people grieving family members, neighbours and friends.

Give wisdom and courage to our community leaders, government officials and decision  
makers.

Lord, renew our strength and hope and faith.

In the name of Jesus our Lord we pray. Amen.

#### **Bible Passages:**

Today's New Testament reading takes us back to the evening of the Day of Resurrection and forward to about a week later.

#### **John 20:19-31 (ESV)**

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

## Believing Thomas

"Believing Thomas" is that a noun or a verb... or both?

First, we consider "Believing Thomas" as a noun, a title, *The Believing Thomas*.

I expect you're wondering why this isn't headed, "Doubting Thomas". Thomas does have a poor reputation, or is the fact that we know him as doubting actually saying more about human nature than it says about Thomas? Why do we focus on his uncertainty rather than on the certainty of his declaration that Jesus had risen from the dead and is Lord and God?

We're not told what the other disciples thought when Mary told them that she'd seen Jesus; that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, just like he'd said. Did they believe her, or were they doubters too?

On the evening of the first Easter Day the disciples met together behind locked doors. They feared the Jewish authorities would come and arrest them for their association with Jesus. Also, if word got out about Jesus' body having gone missing, the finger might be pointing at them as grave robbers.

Jesus came and stood among them, as he so often does when are scared and frightened and not knowing quite what the future holds, when we are downcast and pessimistic. Jesus reassures and comforts, giving peace. "Peace be with you", he said.

Thomas was one of the twelve, but for some reason wasn't there. Had he slipped out to get provisions? Had he taken himself off to mourn Jesus death on his own?

Thomas had shown courage and loyalty even in the face of danger when he encouraged the others to go with Jesus to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Thomas, indeed each of the disciples, probably anticipated this miracle would enflame the authorities, as it surely did, leading to Jesus arrest. (John 11:16)

Like many of us, Thomas sought clarity and understanding. On the evening before Jesus' arrest, Jesus spoke to the disciples about his impending death; but he told the disciples not to worry because he was going to prepare a place for them and would return to take them there. "You know the way to the place where I am going," said Jesus. Thomas was baffled. "No, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" he blurts out interrupting Jesus. No doubt, that was a question on all their minds, but it was Thomas who had the courage to ask and the desire to be certain. Jesus replied, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Following the crucifixion, when the disciples told Thomas they had seen Jesus alive, he is baffled once again. 'How can a dead man come back to life?' he must have thought to himself. Thomas wasn't prepared to believe it unless he could put his finger in the nail holes in Jesus' hands and put his hand into the wound the spear had made in Jesus' side. Like so many after him, Thomas wanted physical, cast iron, proof.

A week later, the disciples, including Thomas, were all together once again. They were still afraid of being arrested by the Jewish authorities and so locked the door behind them. Jesus appeared, just as he had done a week earlier and spoke the same words; "Peace be with you." Thomas is not forgotten. He is not missed out. There were no recriminations for Thomas' scepticism, he was just as important to Jesus as the rest of his team! Knowing the evidence Thomas sought Jesus offered him his hands and his side. Whether Thomas actually stuck his finger in a nail holes we are not told, but in seeing he believed declaring his faith in the risen Jesus as, "My Lord and my God."

Thomas saw and believed just as had Mary had done when she turned to see whom she thought was the gardener at the tomb and saw the risen Jesus; and, just as did the other disciples after the first time Jesus appeared to them. When they each saw the risen Jesus, they saw with their eyes and they saw with understanding, seeing what Jesus meant when he had said he would be raised on the third day (Matthew 127:22-23).

Thomas is no doubter, he's a believer.

**Song** [Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus](#) *Click on the link*

## **Believing Thomas**

Now let us consider "Believing Thomas" as a verb.

What is it that makes you believe something? It may depend on whether the person telling you is trustworthy or has authority. Who are they? Have they told you things in the past that you

now know to be true? Has more than one person told you the same thing? Is what they have told you plausible?

Thomas most likely believed what the other disciples said, why would they lie to him? However, he found it difficult to believe in the resurrection even though it was his friends who were telling him. He found it difficult even though they were all saying the same thing, "We have seen the Lord!" A dead man coming to life again, that didn't sound plausible. Thomas couldn't believe in the resurrection until he had seen Jesus for himself

We live in a world that requires proof. As science gives us increased understanding of the way the world works, knowledge rather than belief, becomes a god in itself. 'Knowledge is power' as they say, and we begin to tap into a deep desire in our culture for a hidden knowledge, a kind of secret understanding which once acquired will pierce the mystery and give us the key to life. But, it's as if we are still eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, of which Eve and Adam ate - and we hide from God in the garden.

Thomas was given proof. Jesus appeared to Thomas showing him his hands and side. This was not someone pretending to be Jesus, not an hallucination, not a ghost. The person Thomas saw was the same Jesus he had known over the past three years or so, walking the byways of Judea with him, the one who had raised Lazarus from the dead, the one who had washed his feet, the one who had died on Calvary Hill. He found the witness of the others was true. What Mary said, when she came running back from the tomb, was true. What Jesus said about rising on the third day, was true. (John 2:19; Matthew 16:21)

Thomas, Mary and the disciples did not invent the empty tomb and the sightings of the risen Jesus to explain a faith they already had, but they developed their faith because of what happened. There would be no Gospel, no good news, if Jesus had not risen; his resurrection is at the heart of it.

It was because of their faith that they obeyed Jesus command continuing the work he had been doing; "as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" he tells them. (John 20:21)

How amazed must Vasco De Gama have been, arriving in Kerala in 1497 to establish a trade route between Europe and India, to find Christians. Could he have believed Thomas had travelled east to proclaim the Gospel of the risen Jesus?

Thomas' witness of the resurrection is most powerful for he was the sceptic, he was the doubter, he was the one who refused to believe unless he had seen for himself.

Thomas refused to believe the witness of the others, but he wanted others to believe his witness and so wanted to see Jesus for himself.

We believe because the disciples saw and witnessed to the resurrection and because they took the Good News to the world. We believe because of their eyewitness accounts along with that of Mary's. We believe because we have the testimony of witness to how the risen Jesus has worked in people's lives down through the centuries and is working in our own lives today.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe,” says Jesus. Blessed are you. We believe, Believing Thomas saw the risen Jesus, and we can raise our voices and declare with him Jesus is “my Lord and my God.”

### Prayer

Our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from death, you came to the disciples behind locked doors, and turned their fear into confidence and their despair into hope. Thank you, that because of their belief and witness I too may believe kneeling before you and declare you are “my Lord and my God” and so have life in your name.

Grant me that same faith, confidence and hope in the victory of your death and resurrection, that I, too, may be a witness to your love and power. Amen.



Song [Christ is risen, he's risen indeed](#) *Click on the link*



### Breakout

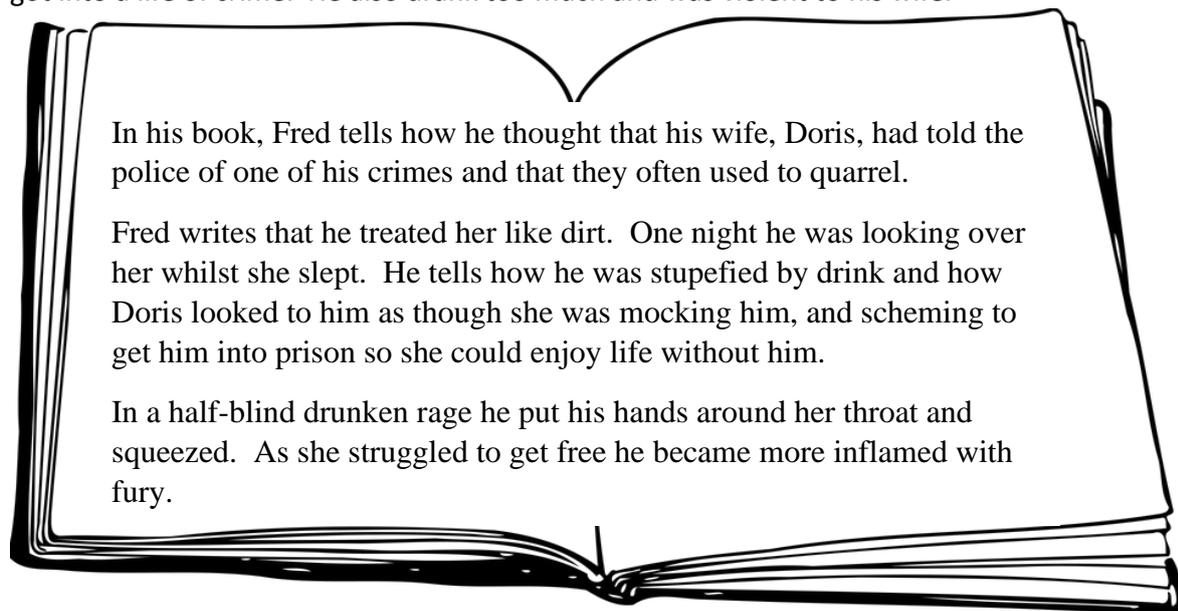
Of course. Jesus doesn't appear to people nowadays like he did to the apostles – or does he?

A year or two after we were first married Diana and I met a man called Fred.

Fred had just published a book titled *Breakout*. There are still a few copies available if you want to buy one and read his whole story. Here's a link;

[Breakout by Fred Lemon Published by Harper Colins \(1977\)](#)

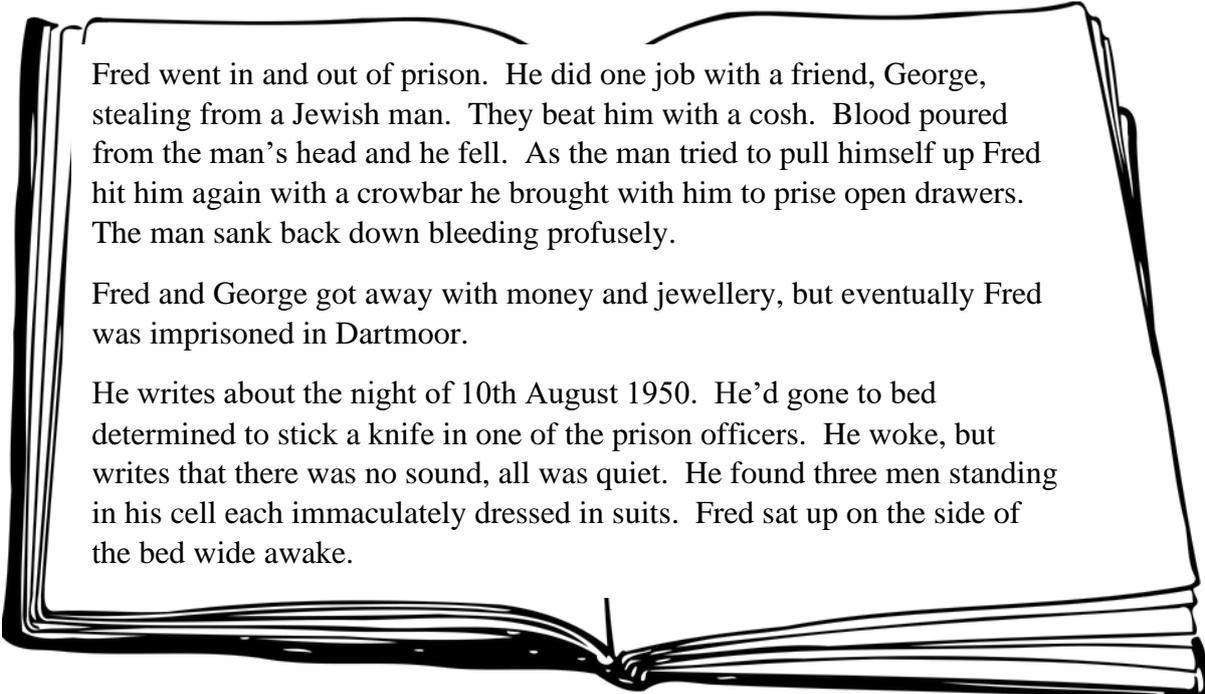
Fred was the last person you would expect to love the Lord. He came from a broken home and got into a life of crime. He also drank too much and was violent to his wife.



In his book, Fred tells how he thought that his wife, Doris, had told the police of one of his crimes and that they often used to quarrel.

Fred writes that he treated her like dirt. One night he was looking over her whilst she slept. He tells how he was stupefied by drink and how Doris looked to him as though she was mocking him, and scheming to get him into prison so she could enjoy life without him.

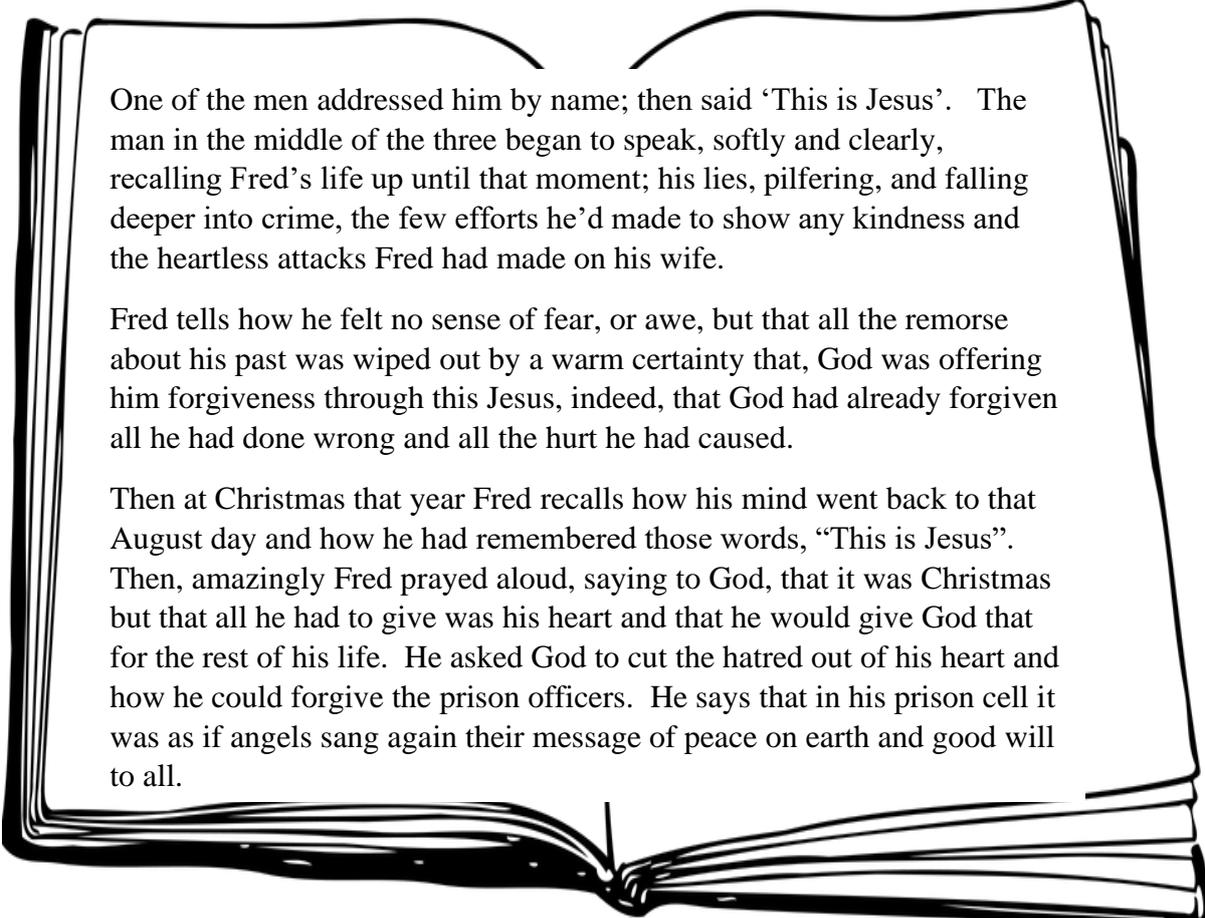
In a half-blind drunken rage he put his hands around her throat and squeezed. As she struggled to get free he became more inflamed with fury.



Fred went in and out of prison. He did one job with a friend, George, stealing from a Jewish man. They beat him with a cosh. Blood poured from the man's head and he fell. As the man tried to pull himself up Fred hit him again with a crowbar he brought with him to prise open drawers. The man sank back down bleeding profusely.

Fred and George got away with money and jewellery, but eventually Fred was imprisoned in Dartmoor.

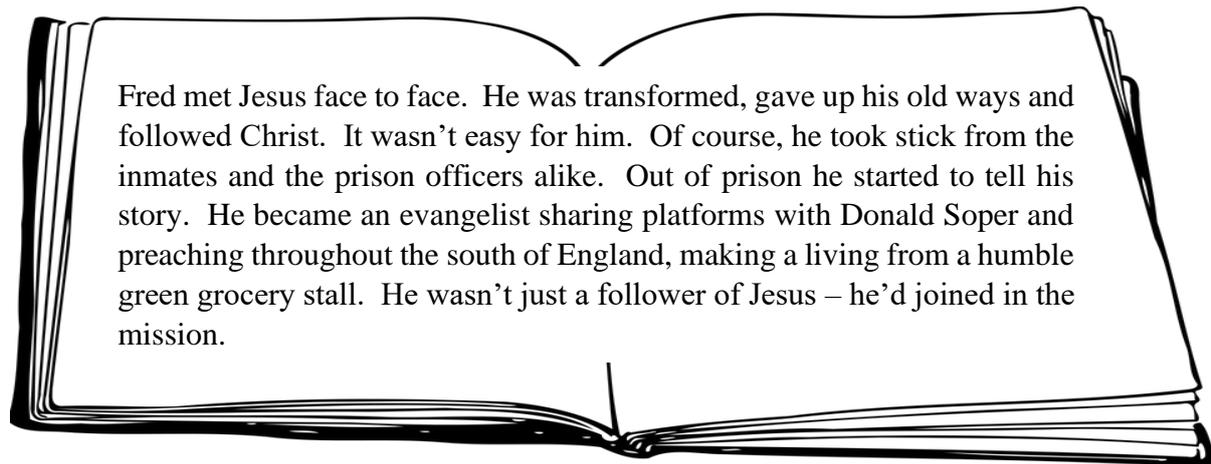
He writes about the night of 10th August 1950. He'd gone to bed determined to stick a knife in one of the prison officers. He woke, but writes that there was no sound, all was quiet. He found three men standing in his cell each immaculately dressed in suits. Fred sat up on the side of the bed wide awake.



One of the men addressed him by name; then said 'This is Jesus'. The man in the middle of the three began to speak, softly and clearly, recalling Fred's life up until that moment; his lies, pilfering, and falling deeper into crime, the few efforts he'd made to show any kindness and the heartless attacks Fred had made on his wife.

Fred tells how he felt no sense of fear, or awe, but that all the remorse about his past was wiped out by a warm certainty that, God was offering him forgiveness through this Jesus, indeed, that God had already forgiven all he had done wrong and all the hurt he had caused.

Then at Christmas that year Fred recalls how his mind went back to that August day and how he had remembered those words, "This is Jesus". Then, amazingly Fred prayed aloud, saying to God, that it was Christmas but that all he had to give was his heart and that he would give God that for the rest of his life. He asked God to cut the hatred out of his heart and how he could forgive the prison officers. He says that in his prison cell it was as if angels sang again their message of peace on earth and good will to all.



Fred's encounter with Jesus transformed his life. He made Jesus his number one priority. And many that he encountered said, "It must be true, Jesus lives!" and, in turn, many became followers and they, in turn, joined in Christ's mission.

### **Prayers of the People for the People**



Almighty Father, Thomas refused to believe until he had seen for himself. By the power of your Holy Spirit help us to believe his witness, the witness of the other disciples, Mary's witness and the witness of one another to your real and living presence in our lives. We pray for those who have turned away from you and for those who doubt the reality of Christ's resurrection. Banish our own doubts and fears that we may witness to what you have done for each of us. May those who doubt or have turned away see the transformation of our lives, and like Thomas come to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Our Lord Jesus, was put to death by injustice, false witnesses, and illegal procedure, and the disciples hid from the Authorities behind locked doors. We pray for those who live in tyranny, for those jailed, persecuted and abused because of their beliefs, race, or the colour of their skin.

We pray for broken communities and those experiencing political unrest, war and violence, and for those exploited or restrained by oppressors. May the leaders of peoples, factions and nations seek justice, have mercy, and work for the good of all. Breathe the peace of your Spirit within them.

Lord Jesus be with those who live in poverty, in shanty towns or on the streets, those who have lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods, through earthquake, fire, flood or storm. As you gave your peace to the disciples help your church to be channels of your peace and love, bringing practical relief and eternal hope.

Gracious God, we recall how you cared for Thomas, an individual who missed out on Christ's first appearance to the disciples. We pray for those who reach out in our church and our

community to minister to others. We ask that you will be with each individual suffering poor physical and mental health; in a moment of silence we name in our hearts those known to us particularly in need today.....

Lord, grant patience, understanding and strength to families, neighbours, and friends who meet others needs simply out of love. Give them the knowledge that you there for them too.

Almighty God , the friends and disciples of your Son must have been utterly bereft at the death of Jesus, with their hope and purpose broken and their guilt of denial and betrayal. We bring before you all who live in darkness today; those facing the disappointment of broken hopes, lives damaged by broken relationships and broken trust; and those locked in desperate circumstances beyond their control. Through his death Christ broke the shackles of sin and releases us into the joy of resurrection. We pray that their eyes may be opened to see his glory, that they may experience his transforming power in their lives.

We pray for all who are mourning the loss of loved ones that they will find comfort in their memories and receive peace and comfort in the knowledge of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and that you have gone to prepare a place for us and that in your house are many rooms.

Almighty God, accept these prayers for the sake of your son our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever Amen.

### **Benediction and Blessing**

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Lord God, may we each feel your love, experience your forgiveness and sense your power within us. Shower upon us your hope, your peace and your love. Help us to live as those who know and love Jesus as our risen Lord and Saviour.

[Blessing](#) **click on the link**

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One of the consequences of us not being able to worship together is that the church anticipates a fall in income. However, we continue to incur costs, of insurance etc. There will be little financial saving to our not meeting, yet revenues could be severely hit. Please prayerfully reflect on this and, if you are able, continue to put aside your financial offering so that you can make your contribution for the work of the church when we next meet together. Thank you.

Thank you too if you already give by standing order or by bank transfer, that is much appreciated.