

Collects, Readings and Reflection for the Third Sunday of Easter
18th April 2021

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service
which you can find here <https://youtu.be/RqeR4zxF9WU>,
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel
or via the link provided on our website www.shamleygreen.net.*

COLLECT

Almighty Father,
who in your great mercy
gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord:
give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life
and serve you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.



FIRST READING

Acts 3.12–19

(After a lame man had been healed in Jesus' name)

12 Peter addressed the people,
'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us,
as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?
13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors
has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected
in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.
14 But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you,
15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.
To this we are witnesses.
16 And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know;
and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.
17 And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.
18 In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets,
that his Messiah would suffer.
19 Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.'

GOSPEL

Luke 24:36-48

36 While the eleven and their companions were talking about what they had heard,
Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'
37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.
38 He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?
39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself.
Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'
40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.
41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering,
he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'
42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,
43 and he took it and ate in their presence.
44 Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you
– that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets,
and the psalms must be fulfilled.'
45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,
46 and he said to them, 'Thus it is written,

that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,
47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,
beginning from Jerusalem.
48 You are witnesses of these things.'

REFLECTION *The Reverend Sally Davies; view in our online service*

Doris Day in one of my favourite films, 'Pillow Talk', describes her relationship with Rock Hudson's Casanova character: "He's like the measles: I've had him, it's over, I'm immune." I sometimes think that people feel like this about the great religious festivals as though they are just happen one day and then it's all over for another year: like a firework display, brilliant and exhilarating at the time, but with no lasting effects. Yet Easter only begins on Easter Day; it continues right the way through to Pentecost, fifty days later. Why so long?

Well, partly to equate with the length of time Jesus continued to appear to his followers before ascending to his Father in heaven but also, surely, to reflect, and allow us to reflect *upon*, the full significance and implications of the resurrection. After all, it is no small thing that a man should be raised from the dead; it is no small thing that that man should be revealed as our Lord and God, to echo the words of Doubting Thomas when he finally encountered the risen Christ for himself. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and his appearances to his disciples was, is, more than a one-day wonder or a short-lived romance. It had considerable implications and consequences for his disciples then, and it is no different for us, the contemporary disciples, Jesus' followers in this age.

He says in this morning's gospel: "*You are witnesses.*" We are witnesses? It is an intriguing and challenging thought. A witness is someone who has experienced something. From this two things follow.

Firstly, witnesses *tell* other people what they have seen or what has happened; that is part of being a witness, to give your account, your testimony. And everyone has their own version, the way they remember or understand something. We see this throughout the Gospels and particularly in the resurrection stories. It is part of the joy of those scriptures that we do not get one uniform account or several cloned accounts but an accumulation of stories and memories from different people, handed down to others, told and retold, accruing other memories and anecdotes and levels of meaning as they go. It is also partly why these stories convince, because they are clearly not faked or contrived but comprise a bundle of witness accounts, real people witnessing real events and eager to tell their story. So what about our story? Our witness? If through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, something significant has happened to us, we too have a story to tell, a testimony to give.

Jesus said: "You are witnesses of these things."

Secondly, witnesses do not just see something happen outside themselves: they also *experience* it within themselves and are, to a greater or lesser extent, affected by it, *changed* by that experience. For example, we send our politicians to areas of disaster or hardship precisely in order that they might be moved and affected by what they witness and that this might then influence for good the decisions and policies they make and implement. The subsequent behaviour and attitude of the witness is a crucial element of witnessing. In the Church's calendar over these weeks of Easter we commemorate St. George, patron saint of England and *martyr*, St. Mark the Evangelist and *martyr*, Peter Chanel, missionary and *martyr*, Philip and James, Apostles and *martyrs*, the English Saints and *Martyrs* of the Reformation Era and Matthias, Apostle and *martyr*. The word *martyr* comes directly from the Greek word for *witness*. Martyrs are people who bear witness by their actions and way of life to what they most deeply believe and hold as important and true, at the cost of their own comfort and safety, at the cost ultimately of their lives. To what and to whom do your life and behaviour witness? If through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our lives have been changed, how does the way we live our life now reflect that

change?

Jesus said: "You are witnesses of these things."

What then *has* happened to which are we witnesses? To what are we recalled by these fifty days of Easter? It is this: that through the death and resurrection of Christ a new life has begun. It is a life in which death, loss and failure become the starting point for new possibilities; a life in which hatred, injustice and violence can be defeated by love; a life where power is found in weakness, humility and self-sacrifice. The resurrection is not primarily about "pie in the sky when you die". If we think it is just about life after death, we are missing the point. It is equally about life before death, as the Christian Aid slogan has it.

Dr Tom Wright, the former Bishop of Durham, once put it like this: "It is astonishing - and deeply challenging to half our Easter hymns and sermons - that none of the Gospel Easter stories so much as hints at that (the Christian's future hope). The emphasis is on the most basic message of Easter: God's new creation has begun, and Jesus's followers are its agents, not just its beneficiaries. The stories don't say: "Jesus is raised, therefore we will go to heaven..."; they say: "Jesus is raised, therefore we have a job to do." " (Church Times 17 April 2003.)

And Jesus himself gives an indication of what that job might be when he says that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached in his name to all nations".

Repentance: challenging the injustices and evils of our world and our society and calling both individuals and institutions to radical reform and new creation; being prepared to witness to this by starting with ourselves and our own backyard.

Forgiveness of sins: holding out to people the possibility of a new and clean start, releasing them from the guilt-laden burden of past mistakes and injuries, and seeking reconciliation and healing wherever there is hostility and brokenness.

To all nations: there is no such thing as a 'no-go area' for the disciples of Christ for God's love knows no bounds and crosses all the boundaries of race, culture, language and ideology, as well as all the boundaries of class, economic status, gender, sexuality and age.

This third week of Easter, then, presents us with a two-fold challenge:

- firstly, to look at our behaviour, attitudes, relationships and lifestyle and ask the question: "to what and to whom does my life bear witness?"

- secondly, following on from that, to think how each of us can witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our own life - and not just to *think* it but to *do* it.

"Jesus said, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.' "

FINAL PRAYER

Risen Christ, you filled your disciple with boldness and fresh hope:
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

BLESSING

God, who through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the victory,
give you joy and peace in your faith;
and may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
rest upon you this day and remain with you until we meet again. Amen.

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