



## Peace Be With You

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### Gathering

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*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.*

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white or gold** cloth or scarf for this special celebration.*

*Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

### Light Candle

In the darkness before the dawn,  
amongst the darkest places of this world,  
in the shadows of our own lives,  
Jesus the Christ, the risen one, the Light of the World,  
breaks in.

*Light the candle*

Christ is risen!

***Christ is risen indeed!***

### Acknowledgement of Country

In this place,  
where the land meets the sea,  
where the sea makes a noise,  
since time beyond our imagination,  
the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders.

And we pray for our future together -

there is work to be done to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

***We commit ourselves to the way of love.***

### Call to Worship - based on Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is

***when we live together in unity!***

Like the blessing of anointing oil,

***may God's blessing upon us***

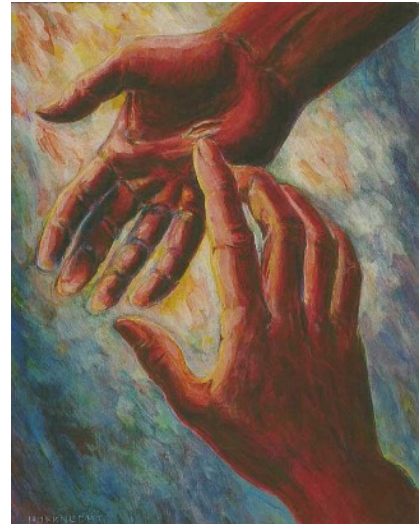
***spill over that we might know your presence.***

As the dew falls on Hermon and the mountains of Zion,

***so may the grace of God reveal truth and justice, love and life for evermore.***

Let us, with saints across the generations, worship the resurrected Christ.

*Spill The Beans, Issue 38, Resources for Easter 2, 2021, p.103*



## Opening prayer

Resurrected Christ,  
the one who has overcome death and doors alike,  
we recognise that any gathering of believers is sacred.  
Fill this space with your abundant joy and send out any hint of scarcity.

God, we know that you meet us exactly where we are.  
We thank you for coming to us in the way that we need.  
When our faith is shaky, and we say, "unless I see..."  
you come to us with outstretched hands -  
hands and sides which bear the marks of your suffering.  
You give us unconditional love, unwavering presence, and abundant grace.  
In return, we give you faith that is not perfect but enmeshed with our humanity.  
And even though this can never be enough, you embrace us completely.

So we come now, offering all that we have to give;  
our lives, our finances, our time, our skills.  
As we worship you now,  
as we worship you in our daily living,  
may we not keep anything behind closed doors from you. Amen.

## Sing - Singing Hallelujah (Seasons 3-32)

*We sang this song last week - it tells the story of Jesus with the affirmation of joy that the tomb is empty!*

Hey now! Singing hallelujah!  
Hey now! The morning has come!  
Hey now! Singing hallelujah!  
The tomb was empty at the rising sun.

Jesus loved people and he made them friends.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

He called to the children and the women and men.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

*Hey now!...*

Jesus healed people and he helped them be well.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

He taught about God in the stories he'd tell.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

*Hey now!...*

Jesus loved people and they said he was a king.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

He turned all the tables on everything.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

*Hey now!...*

*[soft]*

Jesus had power and they took him away.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

They nailed him to a cross and they killed him one day.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

*Hey now!...*

Jesus loves people and he lives again.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

Calls us disciples and he calls us his friends.

*Hey now, the tomb was empty.*

*Hey now!...*

Words and Music: Linnea Good  
© Borealis Music

## **Prayer of Praise and Confession - based on Psalm 133**

Living God,

The palmist declares that: *it is good and pleasant when we live together in unity.*

*It is like oil running over Aaron's head and beard, over the collar of his robe.*

*It is like dew that waters the grass in the freshness of the morning.*

Smooth, fresh, luxurious, even...

We give thanks for our community -

for each person gathered here this morning

for our neighbours and friends

for our families

particularly for the ones who challenge us to

listen more closely and

to love more deeply.

God of life,

we know that you want us to love you with all our hearts and our minds,

our souls and our strength;

the thinking part and the feeling part;

the doing part and the deep, essential being;

all are yours, if all we think we know about you is true.

God, our hearts are yours already - otherwise, why would we be here,

drawn by something we cannot prove and cannot explain even to ourselves?

Today we offer you our minds,

not to be disengaged when we come to worship,

but to be set free to do what they do best:

to seek out knowledge, and test it;

to ask questions and explore ideas,

with no holds barred.

So may we be led more deeply into truth,

and into a deeper knowledge of the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

*Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 38, Resources for Easter 2, 2021, p.104*

God of Love, we confess that there are many times when we are divided -

sometimes by money and power, status and standing,

sometimes by race or gender or religion,

and sometimes by opinion - our views entrenched and unwavering.

Too often we are blind to what divides us,

we are blinded by our privilege

blinded by how things have always been

blinded by our need to be right,

blinded by our insistence on getting our own way.

Breathe your forgiveness once more.

Breathe your peace.

That our living will reflect the joy of the psalmist -

that our unity might be good and pleasant,

like the fragrant oil that cleanses and anoints and heals,

like the dew that refreshes the soil,

in Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

## **Assurance** - Psalm 133

- <sup>1</sup> How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity!
- <sup>2</sup> It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down upon the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down over the collar of his robes.
- <sup>3</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion.  
For there the Lord ordained [God's] blessing,  
life for evermore.

## **Sing** - They'll Know We Are Christians (AOV1-130)

*This song is part affirmation and part prayer - that we might be a community united in love.*

We are one in the Spirit,  
we are one in the Lord,  
we are one in the Spirit,  
we are one in the Lord,  
and we pray that our unity will one  
day be restored.

*And they'll know we are Christians  
by our love, by our love,  
yes they'll know we are Christians  
by our love.*

We will walk with each other,  
we will walk hand in hand,  
we will walk with each other,  
we will walk hand in hand,  
and together we'll spread the news  
that God is in our land.

*And they'll know we are  
Christians...*

We will work with each other,  
we will work side by side,  
we will work with each other,  
we will work side by side,  
and we'll guard each one's dignity  
and save each one's pride.

*And they'll know we are  
Christians...*

All praise to the Father,  
from whom all things come,  
and all praise to Christ Jesus,  
God's only Son,  
and all praise to the Spirit,  
who makes us one.

*And they'll know we are  
Christians...*

Words and Music: Peter Scholtes

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## **Listening for God's Voice**

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### **Reading:** Acts 4:32-37

<sup>32</sup> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup>There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). <sup>37</sup>He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

**Reading:** John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup> 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.' <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' <sup>22</sup>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 retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 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.'

<sup>26</sup> 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.'

<sup>27</sup>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.' <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 come to believe.'

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

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
for the Word of God among us,  
for the Word of God within us,  
***Thanks be to God!***

**Sing** - Listen to The Words of the Risen Christ (Peace Be With You)

*The song invites us to be with Thomas and the other disciples as Jesus enters the room offering peace...*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhMI4UVjV4E>

Listen to the words of the risen Christ:

peace be with you.

Come and see his hands and the wound in his side:

peace be with you.

With the eyes of faith are you ready to see?

Peace be with you.

Come with all your doubts for it's time to believe:

peace be with you.

Peace be with you.

Let the breath of God now fill me,  
wholeness, fullness, life within me.

Full forgiveness, given freely,

I receive as Jesus sends me.

© Joel Payne, RESOUND Worship

## Reflection

Christ, who bears the marks of love,  
as you come amongst us may we know your peace  
and open our eyes to see you among us.  
Blessed One, whether we see or don't see,  
may we believe,  
and through that belief may we know the fullness of life found in you. Amen.

"Seeing is believing" - or so the expression goes.  
And while in today's world of images that can be manipulated or even created by artificial intelligence, perhaps that is not such a bad thing.  
But then, I don't think that has ever been a bad thing - and for a long time, Thomas has been given a bit of a bad wrap - dubbed "doubting Thomas" for what, I think, it is a legitimate response to news that was difficult to get his head around.  
And really, when, a week later, Jesus shows up again, again seemingly appearing beyond a closed door, Thomas is the first (according to John's account) to declare who Jesus is, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28)

But let's go back a bit.  
John's account tells us that it is evening. That morning, the woman had gone to the tomb and found it empty. Peter and another disciple had run to the tomb to check - they had to see for themselves, didn't they?  
Mary had then returned saying that she had seen Jesus in the garden.  
He had spoken to her, called her by name and comforted her and then told her to go and tell the other disciples (20:16-18).  
So now it is evening.  
They are all together (all except Thomas) in a house with the doors locked (20:19).  
They were frightened - frightened of the religious and community leaders.

When, there is Jesus standing amongst them.  
He offers peace.  
He sends them into the world to do what he has done.  
He breathes on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22).  
Here is another significant difference between the accounts of the gospel writers.  
The gospel attributed to Mark doesn't get this far. That writer leaves the story as the women flee from the tomb in fear and amazement telling nothing to no-one.  
The gospel attributed to Matthew, simply has Jesus meeting the disciples in Galilee and sending them, into the world to make disciples.  
In Luke's gospel, we get an account of Jesus being taken into heaven, and then the Holy Spirit comes in fire and wind a few weeks later (we celebrate that event towards the end of May).  
But for John, the Holy Spirit comes with the resurrected Christ.  
Jesus breaks into the fear of the disciples, offers them peace, sends them into the world as he was sent and then breathes the Spirit upon them.

And then Jesus says something that is not all that easy for us to grasp.  
He says, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (20:23).  
These words echo the words Matthew's gospel has Jesus saying to Peter (Matthew 16:19), words that have been variously interpreted to enable, for example, the system of confession in the Catholic Church.

Today, I want to suggest to you, that this responsibility is a serious one - given by the risen Christ to his disciples. And I think what Jesus means is, not that we get to choose who we forgive and who we don't and bad luck to those we choose to withhold forgiveness from. Rather, I think Jesus is describing a reality that if we forgive, then we all know the peace and possibility for reconciliation that forgiveness brings - in time - but if we choose not to forgive then so be it - but without forgiveness, we curtail the opportunity for healing, for restoration, for reconciliation, for life in its fullness - for all of us. I think, Jesus is saying again, I am sending you as I have been sent, but how you do that is your choice, your responsibility, and the consequences will also be your's.

But Thomas missed out!

And, I think, quite fairly, he wanted evidence that what the others were saying was true. The Greek word used in this little section that we translate as "doubt" is *ἄπιστος* - which is more like "unbelief" (20:27).

"Doubt" in English seems to introduce a whole lot of negative connotations that aren't in the text. "Doubt" is not the opposite to "belief".

And just because someone has questions, or wants more information, doesn't mean they don't believe.

More than that, if we look carefully at what Thomas is asking - it is not that he wants proof of resurrection, he wants proof that this person they are talking about, was indeed the crucified One. "I want to see the scars", he says. For the writer of John's gospel, this is about bringing together the One who is crucified, risen and breathes the Holy Spirit.

Remember, believing is not about agreeing to a collection of statements or doctrines. It is not just about me agreeing that what you say really happened.

Believing is about being prepared to commit your life to the truth.

So for Thomas to be ready to commit his life to the truth of Jesus' resurrection, it is entirely understandable that he wants a bit more than the say-so of the other disciples.

So when Jesus appears a week or so later, Jesus offers Thomas his wounded hands and side, inviting him to touch him and believe (20:27) - to commit his life to the wonder of God's new life in the risen One.

To which, Thomas, then declares - "My Lord and my God" - he declares Jesus not just as his Master, but acknowledges publicly, his belief in who Jesus is, God incarnate. In the scarred but risen body, Thomas recognises God. And blessed are you who recognise God in the world - in its brokenness and breath-taking beauty - even though we will never be able to place our hands on Jesus' scars (20:29)

Lastly, Thomas' declaration, and the experience of the disciples, inspires the birth of a community that in this description in Acts 4 is almost utopian!

They hold everything in common and no-one is in need (4:32, 34).

They tell of their experience and understanding of God in the risen One and there is grace upon them all (4:33).

If seeing is believing - does our community bear witness to God in the risen One?

The example of the early Christian believers invites us to consider that the resurrection of Jesus is not just about what I as an individual might gain; it is not just about forgiveness of *my* sins; rather, it is about how my experience and understanding of the risen Christ drives me towards other believers to build a community that is radically different to the world around us - a community that shares everything, that is deeply gracious, that is of one heart and soul.

Are you prepared to be generous - to ensure no-one is in need?

Do you strive for a unity of heart and soul?  
And what of our grace?

What happens when you don't like a decision Church Council makes?  
Or what happens when you don't like something I or one of our worship leaders says?  
Do you raise it with the people concerned? Or do you complain about it behind their back?  
Do you engage in genuine conversation or discussion, or is it just a matter of letting your opinion be known and walking away?  
Are we prepared to share of our wealth and possessions generously - or are we keeping it to ourselves or leaving it to our children to fight over, sorry, divide up?  
And do we hold grudges, or do we find the grace to let go and move on?

If seeing is believing, then we need to acknowledge that our words and actions, both individually and together, bear witness, one way or another, to the risen Christ.  
May we be people of generosity, grace and genuine witness.

Let us pray...

Living Christ,  
as we gaze on the scars on your hands and in your side,  
may we see God.

As we tell your story to our friends and family,  
may they see God - in you, and in who we are.

As we live together in this community in faith and love,  
may we be generous and gracious, and may we be an embodiment of your risen life in the world. Amen.

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### Responding

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**Sing** - Go Now In Peace (Seasons 1-11)

*This song is new - it is really a blessing song - and it invites us to share the peace of Christ in all our living...*

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.  
Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.  
Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.  
Peace in your heart, peace in all your thoughts. *(repeat)*

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.  
Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.  
Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.  
Peace in your heart, peace in all your thoughts. *(repeat)*

Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.  
Go now in peace, give the peace of Jesus.

Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.  
Peace in what you say, in what you do, peace to all.

Go now in peace.  
Go now in peace.

*Words and music: Monica Brown*



## **Prayer for Others**

Creator God,  
you are here in our community.  
Help us to show your presence through our loving concern for one another.  
(pause)

Loving God,  
you can see all our needs and concerns.  
Help us to show grace to others who are struggling and in need of support.  
(pause)

We particularly think of people amongst us who are unwell - in body, mind or spirit.  
We think of people in our community who are lonely or feeling isolated.  
We think of people who are grieving and learning to live with the absence of one they have loved deeply.

Gracious God,  
you inspire a spirit of reconciliation.  
Help us to discuss difficult issues sensitively,  
with an awareness that marginalised people are likely to be affected more than those of us who have cultural and social privilege.  
(pause)

As you breathe peace into the world, so inspire us to be peace-makers.  
Give us courage to speak up when we hear words of hate or violence or ignorance.  
Keep us mindful of people around the world who are caught in situations of conflict not of their own making.  
We particularly think of the people of Gaza and Israel, Ukraine and in many parts of Africa, and we pray that you will watch over the people who work to bring aid to people who are hungry and homeless due to the ongoing conflict.

Holy Spirit,  
you are moving among us.  
Inspire us to care for those around us,  
to be sensitive to needs both articulated and kept silent,  
to act with generous love to all those around us,  
and to share generously that with which we have been blessed.  
Amen.

## **Offering**

*This part of our service is not about the money.  
It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you, nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?  
Each one of us is precious.  
Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money.  
How will you respond?*

Ever-present God, we desire to walk in the warmth of your sacred light.  
Grant us your peace in the face of uncertainty.  
Give us courage to tell those around us of all that we have seen, heard, and felt.

May we use the gifts you have given us, a portion of which we offer here,  
to tell of your matchless grace to the rest of creation, so that all may hear;  
Help us to live, always, as those who have encountered the resurrected Christ. Amen.

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## Sending

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### **Sing** - The Lord of The Dance (TIS 242)

*This song describes the whole of God's redemptive work as a dance, with Christ, the Lord of the Dance... Again, watch out for the part where we go soft, where we notice that this story is sometimes hard...*

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;  
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,  
at Bethlehem I had my birth:

*Dance then, wherever you may be;  
"I am the Lord of the dance," said he;  
"and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,  
and I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,  
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.

I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,  
they came with me and the dance went on:  
*Dance then...*

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:

the holy people said it was a shame.  
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,  
and they left me there on a cross to die:  
*Dance then...*

*[soft]*

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;  
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.  
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;  
but I am the dance and I still go on:  
*Dance then...*

They cut me down and I leap up high,  
I am the life that will never, never die;  
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:  
"I am the Lord of the Dance," said he:  
*Dance then...*

Sydney Carter

### **Sending and Blessing**

May your lives reveal the Resurrection to the world,  
and be a living expression of the love of Christ.  
May you walk in the overwhelming abundance of God's provision.  
May you live joyfully and love fully with all your heart and all your soul.

And may the peace of God, that is beyond our comprehension,  
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of God's son, Jesus Christ.  
Now and always. Amen.

Liturgy drawn from:

Michelle Eastwood , L3, Mediacom, resources for Easter 2, Sunday 7 April 2024  
*Spill The Beans*, Issue 38, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021  
*Seasons of the Spirit*, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021, p.122

Rev Kath Merrifield  
7 April 2024