A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, ‘You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”’ Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.” This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.’

Acts 2.14, 22–32

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

When it was evening on 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.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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.’ 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.’ 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.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ 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.’ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.

John 20.19–31
FOR OUR PRAYERS
Those who are ill or in need: Tony Stokes; Michael Green; Jenny Smith; Sarah Pitman; Hilary Brazier; Judith Sanson; Joyce Smith; Sachin Shah; Fr Michael Shrewsbury; Rufus Crompton, poorly in Kingston Hospital.
Pray also for those who have the COVID-19 virus and those who are working to treat them, particular those members of Christ Church who work for the NHS.
Those who have died, particularly those who have died of this virus, including Daniel Wickramaratne and Peter Pusey.
Those whose anniversary of death falls this week: Anna Harris (2019); Bill Grainger; Betty Robertson (2019); Rachel Boulding; Margaret Ballard (2014)
Link Parish of St Francis of Assisi, Barham
Green, Zimbabwe

NEXT SUNDAY 26 APRIL 2020
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

The actor Sir Alec Guinness once said that he could only really get under the skin of any character he was playing once he had decided how the character walked. Well, during Holy Week and Easter Christians would usually do quite a lot of walking — though of course this year has been completely different. On Palm Sunday we would have walked with Jesus as he entered Jerusalem to the shouts of the greeting crowd. On Thursday we would have walked with Jesus into the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane, resisting the temptation of the first disciples who walked away. On Good Friday we would have walked with Jesus as we followed the Cross and watched as his feet and hands were nailed to the cross. Then, early at dawn on Easter Day, a few of us would have gathered outside for the blessing of the Easter Fire, the lighting of the Easter candle and the walk into a darkened Church as we proclaim the Light of Christ. Then, after hearing the story of the travels of the people of Israel, we would have all walked to the font to renew our Baptismal vows, ready to celebrate the risen Christ together.

But that walking was denied us all this year. Instead, we had to be still and apart from one another. Today’s gospel reading describes another very anxious group of people who had to be apart, terrified of the Jewish authorities even though they are (except Thomas at this stage) convinced that Jesus is alive. Although they know he is risen, they have not yet experienced the power of the risen life and they have, as a bishop once said, the boldness of mashed potato! What Jesus does is to reassure them by his visible and tangible presence. There is a wonderful sense of normality in his greeting. When something dramatic happens, such as the fear of illness or an enforced lockdown, our life is thrown up in the air and what we crave is for everything to be normal again. Jesus understands this and provides his friends with the reassuring presence they need. Then he breathes into them, as Adam was breathed into at the creation. This breath is what gives the disciples the power of new life, and with it comes the conferring of authority — and with that authority comes responsibility, as they are sent out to tell the good news, confident in the living spirit of Jesus.

In this passage we also have a reassuringly human side to the events, as John records them. It lies in Thomas, doubting Thomas. Thomas who is us — who doubts as we doubt, and who wants proof as we want proof. But then we realise that Thomas was also scared. He was scared, like many of us, about the truth of his promises of Jesus. Of belief only being what we wish for. Thomas was going to stick to an honest recognition of where he stood until he had definite proof. When he is offered it, he finds he no longer needs it; the sight of Jesus is quite enough. So, Jesus ends with these wonderfully prophetic and for us today, reassuring words: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”.

And finally, John finishes chapter 20 with, if you like, the narrator’s words of encouragement to us, the listener, the reader: “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. And we quietly respond ‘Lord, I believe, help my unbelief’. Amen.

HELP OFFERED: The Morden Guild & AFC Dons (Wimbledon Football Club) have been around the Borough collecting donations outside shops for those in need.
https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/donslocalactiongroup?utm_term=PpqasQzAbb

If you know anyone 'in need' (elderly or families) there is a link on the page where they can request a food parcel. Sara, our Administrator, arranged it for some of her neighbours. They were very impressed receiving large boxes full of fresh fruit, veg, tinned food, toiletries etc. The easiest way is to email, as trying to get through on the phone can take a while. They have been inundated with fresh donations which need to be delivered to people asap. Name, address & phone numbers need to be provided.

BEING IN TOUCH We are a very friendly and sociable congregation. It is very hard not to see each other week by week. Do keep in touch with those you know in the congregation. If you are able to, do pause wherever you are at 5.55pm each evening, just as the 6pm news starts, and hold everyone at Christ Church up to God in a moment of quiet prayer? Perhaps set an alarm to remind you to do this each day!

Here is a prayer you might like to use which I have composed:

Eternal Father, look with love on your people of Christ Church and pour upon us the gifts of your Spirit. Although we are apart, draw us to you and to one another, so that by our growing love and unity we may bring healing and life to all. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.