

Hymn

The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
the passover of gladness,
the passover of God.
From death to life eternal,
from earth unto the sky,
our Christ hath brought us over,
with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil,
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal
of resurrection light;
and listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and, hearing,
may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heavens be joyful!
Let earth the song begin!
Let the round world keep triumph,
and all that is therein!
Let all things seen and unseen
their notes in gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord hath risen,
our joy that hath no end.

Introduction

The season of Easter continues even though churches are closed and readings for the few weeks of Easter tell of how the disciples responded to the resurrection; what they said, and what they did.

Today, in John's Gospel we'll be reminded of their encounter with Jesus behind locked doors. As we lock ourselves out of churches and other places to keep safe; they had to lock themselves inside to keep safe. For us it is an unseen deadly virus that keeps the doors locked; for them then it was the deadly threat of oppression and persecution.

The disciples had gathered and all of a sudden Jesus wished them peace which is something just everybody wants and often longs for. And Thomas opens his mouth to express his doubts. Thomas needs to see the evidence before he can believe.

But before that, a reading from the Acts of the Apostles where Peter, on the day of Pentecost is in no doubt as he affirms his believe that God has raised up Jesus from the dead.

The words of this hymn originate from the 8th century Greek poet St John of Damascus. A wealthy man who at the age of 40 became dissatisfied with his life, gave away his possessions, freed his slaves, and entered the monastery of St. Sabas in the desert near Jerusalem. One of the last of the Greek Fathers, John became a great theologian in the Eastern church. The words were translated by John M. Neale (1818-66) who, though born into an evangelical home but had sympathies toward Rome and the Oxford Movement of the Church of England. Of scholarly temperament, he devoted much time to improving social conditions in his area; often ignored or despised by his contemporaries, he is lauded today for his contributions to the church and hymnody. Neale contributed to church music by writing original hymns, including two volumes of Hymns for Children (1842, 1846), but especially by translating Greek and Latin hymns into English.



Acts 2:14, 22-32

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them.

²² “You that are Israelites,^[a] listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth,^[b] 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— ²³ 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. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death,^[c] because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. ²⁵ 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;

²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will live in hope.

²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.

²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

²⁹ “Fellow Israelites,^[d] 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. ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Foreseeing this, David^[e] spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah,^[f] saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,

nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

John 20: 19-30

¹⁹ It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!”

²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”

³⁰ In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ But these have been written in order that you may believe^[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

Reflection

Victor Meldew's famous catchphrase was 'I don't believe it. He seemed to say it so often that it is hard to imagine that there was really anything he did believe in – except of course, his own disbelief. I sometimes wonder if Victor was a modern-day version of the doubting disciple Thomas?

But of course he wasn't. Thomas believed enough to give up everything to follow Jesus and it was only at the ultimate moment that to be able believe, he really needed evidence to convince him. He needed to see the wounds that Jesus had received from crucifixion. He was just that kind of person – he wouldn't take things at face value. He had almost certainly given up everything to follow Jesus for the last three years – it was just at this point he needed some proof.

And then of course he got that proof when Jesus offered to show him his broken hands and shattered feet, and to touch the wound in his side. But then comes the challenge from Jesus who said 'that those who believe without having seen are the ones who will really be blessed by God'.

Believing without seeing – now there's a challenge. Some will say 'I believe something' because 'I saw it with my own eyes' – but when it comes to faith, we haven't, or we tend not to think that we have.

And that is almost as extraordinary as trying to imagine Victor Meldew saying 'I do believe it, I really do believe it'.

The disciples saw it first-hand and for the last 2000 years people have taken their experience of Easter on trust and not just because of what happened then. Christians believe it because we see evidence of the living Christ all around us and especially in times like this when life is hard for so many.

In hospitals and care homes around the country Christ-like people are being truly Christ-like as they see, touch and care for the wounds of those who are suffering with this horrid virus. People are being Christ-like in their acts of kindness and care for neighbours and others they don't know or have never met.

People in their daily lives are doing what Jesus asked – which is to love their neighbour. We may not have the evidence for which Thomas asked for but it is all around us if we need it. And on top of that we can also believe without seeing - which is to be truly blessed.

Prayers

Let us pray

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep,
give food to the hungry, recover the straggler, bind up the injured, strengthen the sick
and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.

Jesus, light of the world,
bring your peace and new life to all nations; bring wisdom and compassion to those with authority and power;
help them to listen, to see and to understand the evidence of your love for the world.

Jesus, bread of life, nourish us all people of your world with your word. Give strength to the frail; energy to the young and motivate us all to build a better and kinder world.

Jesus, healer and teacher,
be with doctors, nurses and carers – and all who use their skills in the service of others.
Be with families as they watch and wait – and give them courage in times of loss.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life,
we give you thanks for the lives of those who have died this week.
Raise them to eternal life.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Prayer for today with flowers by Ottie and Clemmie



Heavenly Father hear our prayer. Keep us in your loving care. Guide us through this day, in our work and in our play, keep us pure and sweet and true in everything we say and do. Amen.

Blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, make us perfect in every good work to do his will. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us, and remain with us always. Amen.

He is not here. He is Risen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia. Alleluia.

In the name of Christ. Amen. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Hymn

Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Hearts to heav'n and voices raise;
sing to God a hymn of gladness,
sing to God a hymn of praise:
he who on the cross a victim
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ, the King of Glory,
now is risen from the dead.**

**Christ is risen, Christ the first-fruits
of the holy harvest field,
which will all its full abundance
at his second coming yield:
then the golden ears of harvest
will their heads before him wave,
ripened by his glorious sunshine
from the furrows of the grave.**

Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Glory be to God on high;
alleluia to the Saviour,
who has won the victory;
alleluia to the Spirit,
fount of love and sanctity.
Alleluia! Alleluia
to the Triune Majesty.**

The words of this hymn are by Christopher Wordsworth (1807-85), nephew poet, William Wordsworth. He was educated at Winchester, and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was ordained priest in 1835; became head master of Harrow School in 1836; Canon of Westminster Abbey in 1844; Hulsean Lecturer at Cambridge in 1847-48; Vicar of Stanford-in-the-Vale, Berks, in 1850; Archdeacon of Westminster, in 1865; Bishop of Lincoln, in 1868.

The hymn is sometimes sung to the tune Blaenwarn but more frequently to the tune Lux Eoi by Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900).