

“he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope,”

The readings for today for your perusal are Acts 2: 22-32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1: 3-9 and John 20: 19-31.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – EASTER 2ND SUNDAY

22 “Listen to these words, fellow Israelites! Jesus of Nazareth was a man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him. You yourselves know this, for it happened here among you. Peter’s message is a powerful one, a confident one because he is letting the people and us know that the mighty works done by Jesus were signs to everyone that the Messiah had come. His message is a bold one and a positive one, because just seven weeks earlier he and the others were confused, frightened and afraid to be seen outside because of the events of Easter when Christ was betrayed, abandoned and crucified. But the glorious resurrection has changed all that, it is the reason with the appearances of Jesus as the risen Lord that has instilled confidence, and which has bolstered the disciples to proclaim Christ crucified and the resurrected Christ! 23 In accordance with his own plan God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you; and you killed him by letting sinful men crucify him. 24 But God raised him from death, setting him free from its power, because it was impossible that death should hold him prisoner. Peter has had time to reflect on the momentous events between Palm Sunday and the first Easter Day, Peter was now able to see that Jesus’ earthly ministry, which he and the other disciples had observed from close quarters, provided much evidence of his divine authority. With a Jewish audience, Peter takes every opportunity to make clear that Jesus was the Messiah long awaited by the people of God. He quotes several verses from the Septuagint version of Psalm 16 as he tries to convince his hearers of this truth including reminding them that King David was buried in his tomb in Jerusalem, but Jesus’ tomb was empty because he was resurrected. The passage ends with Peter’s clear confession that he and the others were witnesses to the fact that God had raised Jesus from the dead. 29 “My friends, I must speak to you plainly about our famous ancestor King David. He died and was buried, and his grave is here with us to this very day. 30 He was a prophet, and he knew what God had promised him: God had made a vow that he would make one of David’s descendants a king, just as David was. 31 David saw what God was going to do in the future, and so he spoke about the resurrection of the Messiah when he said, ‘He was not abandoned in the world of the dead; his body did not rot in the grave.’ 32 God has raised this very Jesus from death, and we are all witnesses to this fact.

And so we come to Peter reaffirming his faith in Jesus Christ. Written at a time when Christians faced persecution for their faith, the letter seeks to encourage Christians to hold on to the hope that they have been given. *3 Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy, he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope, 4 and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people.* In spite of the frequent suffering and persecution mentioned in this letter, hope is such a key thought in it that it may be called a letter of hope in the midst of suffering. In the Bible, hope is not wishful thinking but a firm conviction, much like faith that is directed toward

the future. And the hope lies in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which secures for his people their new birth and the hope that they will be resurrected just as he was. *He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away.* 5 *They are for you, who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time.* 6 *Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer.* 7 *Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine.* Peter recognised that faith in Jesus does not cocoon believers from the rigours of life in a hostile environment. He wishes to emphasise the eternal nature of the Christian hope, and that faith in Jesus helps people to endure suffering and hardship because Peter is able to speak from personal experience. He knows what it feels like to fail to stand up for one's beliefs, he denied Jesus after all; he knows what it feels like to fail terribly, when relying on one's own strength. Having himself come to believe in Jesus' death and resurrection and the empowering that belief gives through the Holy Spirit, he is able from personal experience to encourage his readers as many a Christian does today. We lean on Christ and with the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to use our own experiences of life to guide and encourage faith in others, just as they encourage our own faith. *Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honour on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed.* Believers are born again not only to a hope but also to the inheritance that is the substance of the hope, which is Jesus Christ. That is why Easter is so important, it is the most important event in the Christian calendar and so we must celebrate because the inheritance is eternal – in its essence (it is not subject to decay) and in its preservation (it is divinely kept for us). 8 *You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express,* 9 *because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him.* We are called to persevere after all the trial of faith is also valuable, like gold and silver being purified by fire, so our trials make us stronger.

The Gospel reading is in two parts, covering two appearances of the risen Jesus which took place one week apart. Verses 19-25 record the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the evening of Easter Day. Here we see the disciples in a familiar light – confused, scared, and meeting in private in a locked room for fear of the authorities. Mary had already told them about meeting Jesus in the garden in the morning so the disciples knew that Jesus had risen so when Jesus appears and greets them he shows them the physical evidence of his crucifixion, up until then they were not sure, they had hoped that it was true, but now they couldn't deny it because *Jesus Appeared to His Disciples* who were hiding behind a locked door.

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.* They are overjoyed, and are then given a commission by Jesus, *"As the Father sent me, so I send you."* But not just that He also gives them the authority to declare the forgiveness of sins.

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."

The second appearance happened a week later (verses 26-29). For some unknown reason Thomas had been absent that evening. When told later what had happened, he quite understandably is sceptical and demands physical proof. The following Sunday Jesus offers him that proof, but the sight of Jesus is enough and he believes, uttering the words, "My Lord and my God". Here is the high point of Thomas' faith, he no longer doubts. Thomas' response leads Jesus to acknowledge the faith of those who believe without visual or physical evidence which is the situation for people today!

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!"

There is an air of enthusiasm and confidence in the resurrection and in Christ's power to help those who endure suffering for the faith. This comes from a mature faith developed over several years that brought both failures and successes to the early church. In Scotland today we are unlikely to be persecuted for our faith, but we are liable to be met with indifference, cynicism, ridicule and, sometimes, verbal hostility. To have confidence in the power and hope of the resurrection can help Christians when facing opposition or experiencing difficult personal circumstances. Such confidence can also help Christians to live out their faith openly and attractively with a view to commending Christ to others - *these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.*

PRAYER

Today we pray for hope, for the resurrection hope for all the people in the world who do not yet believe or accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. We thank you Jesus for sending your Holy Spirit to guide us and help us to recognise and understand your message and your teachings, which allowed us to know the Risen Christ personally. We know Lord that there are many people today who need to hear your voice, to hear your Words spoken so that they can find your peace as we have. Today we ask you Lord Jesus to come into the hearts and minds of the searching people today we pray, you know who they are so we pray that they will find the courage today to ask you to come into their hearts and forgive their sins.

We also pray today for all those who are struggling today, strengthen them we pray, for the lockdown is a strain on people's mental health as they worry about relatives they cannot go and see, they worry about loved ones in hospital or care homes, they worry about their family members who are out there working to keep us fed, clothed and warm. We especially ask you to be with those today who are grieving the loss of a

loved one, comfort them Lord and let them feel your presence surround them at this difficult time. Strengthen their faith we pray, just as we ask you to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing persecution for their belief in you. Protect them and help and guide them we pray.

Be with our government leaders and give them wisdom to make wise decisions, help them to get provisions and supplies out to all those who need them, and especially to our shops, hospitals and care homes. But today is the Sunday after your glorious resurrection so we ask you Lord Jesus to resurrect people's dead faith and bring them to new life in you.

Amen