



Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney's Lent Course 2024

THE WAY TO THE CROSS

MONDAY 8 APRIL



THE MERCY OF GOD

The theme from readings for the Second Sunday of Easter that we will take with us through the week is the Mercy of God.

Mercy is a characteristic of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mercy can fuel compassion and provide light in a dark world. Mercy is kindness, forgiveness and empathy. We can see the risen Jesus being merciful to Thomas, being kind and empathetic to his experience and needs. In some Christian traditions the Second Sunday of Easter is known as 'Divine Mercy Sunday'.

In the reading from John we hear the story of 'Doubting Thomas'. Thomas was not present when the risen Christ first appeared to the disciples (John 20.19-23) so we are told that he did not yet believe. When the risen Jesus appears in the Upper Room for a second time (John 20.24-29), Thomas is there and invited to touch Jesus to see, touch and believe in the resurrection. This is the end of John's Gospel and we hear Jesus telling the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20.22). The disciples are commissioned (John 20.21) as Jesus tells them that as God, the Father sent him, he Jesus, God, the Son now sends them into the world. The disciples are empowered for the mission (John 20.22) by the breath of the Holy Spirit. The disciples are given authority for their work in John 20.23 - for the forgiveness of sins - a mercy of God.

Collect for the
Second Sunday of
Easter

Almighty and eternal God, the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt, may we, who have not seen, have faith and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Gospel of John contains many signs and symbols with a thread running through the Gospel of people responding to signs of faith (1.50, 10.58, 11.15, 40, 14.11) and refusing faith without signs (4.48, 6.30). Thomas, and his unbelief until he sees, seems to follow this theme in the Gospel.

Thomas is a skeptic, in the other Gospel accounts other disciples disbelieved as well but in the Gospel of John only Thomas does not yet believe. For Thomas belief comes when seeing the risen Jesus, being able to see the wounds of crucifixion and touch the body of Jesus (John 20.26-27).

The Gospel of John can be seen to conclude with John 20.30-31, with some scholars see John 21 as a later addition to the text. John 20.30-31 is a call to faith, a call to faith through belief, not necessarily seeing signs (the opposite of Thomas).

The reading from Acts (Acts 4.32-35) speaks of how the first groups of Jesus followers dealt with property, possession and community life. This is a community following Pentecost and focussing on unity in diversity. They are figuring out what it means to live a life following Christ in their context.

The epistle appointed for this Sunday is the start of 1 John and the first of six consecutive Sundays of readings from the letters of John (1 John, 2 John, 3 John). None of these letters have 'traditional' beginnings or endings, rather they being and end without traditional letter starts and endings of the time. In this reading from 1 John 1 and 2 we can see some common themes with the Gospel of John, including Jesus being the word of life, Jesus reveals eternal life to us and we have seen Jesus. The balance of the Christian life can be seen in this section of the epistle: walking a life with Jesus, seeking not to sin, confessing to God and being the recipient of God's mercy.

Psalm 133 is a Psalm of Ascent. These were psalms used by pilgrims on their way or upon arrival at Jerusalem as part of festal celebrations. The sight of crowds coming into the city inspire the pilgrims with a sense of belonging to the nation, of the bonds that untied them and their covenant relationship with God. The theme of unity is present in this Psalm -there is not agreement whether this is unity in families or unity in the nation. The church has used this psalm to uphold the portrayal of God's family as the larger family, the true source of blessing and life. Augustine attributed the origin of monasteries and their brotherhoods to this psalm.

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."

John 20.29

Usual Weekly Pattern

Sunday
RCL Eucharist
Readings and Collect

Monday
Delving Deeper into
the Readings

Tuesday
Words from Others
(sacred & secular)

Wednesday
Resources from the
Arts

Thursday
Contemplative Acts

Friday
Personal Reflection
- what this means to
me

Saturday
Acts & Deeds

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT

- In John 20.19-31 we hear and see Thomas' doubts. What do you do with your own doubts or questions about faith and theology?
- Thinking about Psalm 133 and Acts 4.32-35. How are your current relationships with God, with others, and with creation? In what ways can you work towards greater harmony and reconciliation in these relationships?
- In what ways do you think the early Christians are a model for Christians today? (Acts 4:32-35)
- What have you seen, touched, and heard concerning the word of life? How do you declare it? (1 John 1:1-5)
- Is there a situation in your community where you need to be a sign of God's peace and mercy? How can you bring forgiveness and reconciliation to this situation, and work towards healing and unity?



How good and pleasant it is to live together in unity.

*Refrain for
Psalm 133*

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Eternal God,
the light of the
minds that know
you,
the joy of the
hearts that love
you,
and the strength
of the wills that
serve you:
grant us so to
know you
that we may
truly love you,
so to love you
that we may
truly serve you,
whose service is
perfect freedom;
through Jesus
Christ our Lord.
Amen

*after Augustine
of Hippo (430)*