

Order of Service for Sunday 19 April
Wesley Tauranga, Western Bay of Plenty Methodist Circuit
Behind Locked Doors
led by Viv Whimster

Call to worship

We are gathered to remember whose we are.

We come as we are, with questions and doubts.

We are gathered to be reminded of who it is that makes our hearts glad.

We come, seeking paths of life and fullness of joy.

We are gathered as part of God's people,

aware of those who are close to us but not present with us.

We come in hope, for in God's presence there is fullness of joy!

Opening prayer

Dear God, we need you.

We need your help to open our hearts and minds to trust you with our lives,

with all we hold dear.

We hold out our hands to you and open them,

releasing our fears and hopes into your great mercy and love.

We hold out our hands to you, to be grasped by you

and held within your great mercy and love.

We hold out our hands to you,

to be led by you in your ways of life and peace. Amen.

Hymn

**Christ is alive, and the universe must celebrate,
and the stars and the suns shout on this Easter Day!**

**Christ is alive, and his family must celebrate
in a great alleluia, a great alleluia
to praise the power that made the stone roll away.**

**Here is our hope: in the mystery of suffering
is the heartbeat of Love, Love that will not let go,
here is our hope, that in God we are not separate,
and we sing alleluia, we sing alleluia
to praise the power that made the stone roll away.**

**Christ Spirit, dance through the dullness of humanity
to the music of God, God who has set us free!
You are the pulse of the new creation's energy;
with a great alleluia, a great alleluia
to praise the power that made the stone roll away.**

Shirley Murray Words © 1993 Hope Publishing Company

Prayer of confession

We give you thanks, O God, that you meet us where we are,
isolated, anxious, impatient, frustrated.

Hear us as we confess with our lips and in our hearts

those mixed emotions, doubts and concerns that hide you from us today:

Take a moment for personal confession, spoken or silent.

Words of affirmation

Know that you are loved by God who offers us life

blessing us with gifts, including forgiveness, trust, and joy.

Receive these gifts with the message that Jesus spoke to his disciples
on the day of resurrection and speaks to us today, "Peace be with you."

Amen

A lighter moment...

Have you seen this cartoon?

https://www.etsy.com/au/listing/794485333/dont-even-think-about-it-11420?ref=shop_home_active_3&cr=1

Jean Vanier reflects:

"Resurrection is a process that begins every morning, every night,
every day. We are called on a journey of resurrection to do the
work of God, to bring love into our families, our communities and
the world."

Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John

Readings

John 20:19-31 Good News Translation (GNT)

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

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."

Jesus and Thomas

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!"

1 Peter 1:3-9 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

A Real Reason for Hope

Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on. God has something stored up for you in heaven, where it will never decay or be ruined or disappear.

You have faith in God, whose power will protect you until the last day.

Then he will save you, just as he has always planned to do. On that day

you will be glad, even if you have to go through many hard trials for a while. Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed. They will show that you will be given praise and honour and glory when Jesus Christ returns.

You have never seen Jesus, and you don't see him now. But still you love him and have faith in him, and no words can tell how glad and happy you are to be saved. That's why you have faith.

Reflection

What a strange Easter this has been!

For a start, no Palm Sunday procession with waving fronds and strewn garments! Then, no Maundy Thursday service with its story of a shared meal, betrayal and denial, shadows, extinguished candles and leaving quietly into the night.

No Good Friday gathering either, with its story of pain and violence, desertion and death. Maybe there were hot cross buns - but it wasn't quite the same when we couldn't share them.

Easter Saturday is always a bit of a limbo day, a waiting time, a chance to pause and meditate, to prepare and anticipate.

And Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection? This year, we didn't get up early for communion and breakfast, there were no face-to-face Easter greetings to remind each other that "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" Some didn't even receive Easter eggs...

One thing is for sure though, like the disciples, we are all behind closed doors. For some, living in retirement villages, they are locked doors. It's not from a nervous fear of the authorities, of course, but from a justified fear that we may catch a deadly virus and spread it around.

What we have missed this year is being able to gather in community, to remember together, to celebrate with each other. There is a sense of comfort in familiar routines and practice along with the challenge that we hear each week to live out our faith in Christ.

May I share a comfort and a challenge from my own experience behind closed doors, in lockdown, this Easter?

The comfort I found on Good Friday. After we had followed the Good Friday Stations from our church website, with the words, images and music, we sat outside to have a coffee. It was quiet - no traffic noise, no pressing tasks, no need to be anywhere else. A tui sang in the kowhai tree and we heard another answering in the distance; the breeze rustled the trees and a dog barked. There was a sense that some things had stopped and that the earth, that life, was waiting quietly to be healed. In so many ways, this time of lockdown has been a gift - time to reflect, space to breathe, an opportunity to connect with what is important. I have embraced it with gratitude and joy. Strangely, I found peace and joy on Good Friday.

The challenge I have found in reading a book entitled *The Last Week*. Its co-authors, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, suggest that Jesus did not simply suffer on our behalf so that we do not need to do so. Following the story in Mark's gospel, they write that "Jesus ... does not speak of suffering vicariously to atone for the sins of the world. Instead, we are called, with the disciples and the crowd, to walk with Jesus toward death and resurrection. To follow Jesus means to accept the cross, to walk with him against imperial violence and religious collaboration, and to pass through death to resurrection. Nothing is said about Jesus's doing it alone to excuse everyone else from having to follow him..."

So I feel challenged to ask what is "imperial violence" today and to see how I can help to make the world a fairer place, how to share resources more equitably, especially in this crazy upside down COVID-19 global crisis.

I also feel challenged to explore what "religious collaboration" might mean in Aotearoa New Zealand today. Have Christians simply endorsed the way society runs and collaborated with businesses that underpay their workers and exploit the earth? How can we be a prophetic voice and express the life of Christ in a society where human well-being and economic growth are often in competition? And let's

remember that we are not alone in articulating a yearning for the world to operate differently post-COVID-19.

Maybe that brings me back to the gift offered us through this lockdown. Nationally, we have had the opportunity to hear endorsement of the value of family and friendship, recognition that health care and supermarkets and food chains all hold an essential place in our communities, and that being kind and putting the needs of others ahead of our own will actually enable our country to survive. We have seen some amazing examples of good leadership. Where else have you seen the love of God in action over these past weeks?

We have discovered new possibilities in terms of a meaningful church community as people connect through phone calls and build deeper relationships. We are finding ways to keep worship real, now that we are physically isolated from each other. In some ways we are having to rely on our own resources, yet many of us also have access to a worldwide network of insights and inspiration. What new possibilities have opened for you? What have you missed during this "stay at home" time? What would you like us to do differently?

On that first Easter Sunday, the disciples met behind locked doors. This Easter, we celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in isolation behind closed doors. Perhaps it still feels like Easter Saturday and we are waiting for the tomb to be open and empty! In terms of timing, we are more likely to be closer to Pentecost when we start to emerge and share the life of community again. But when that happens, it may well bring joy and feel like resurrection.

Prayers for Others (Penny Guy)

God of love and hope,
you made the world and care for all creation,
but the world feels strange right now.
We miss our friends.
We miss our usual activities.
We miss our customary worship services.

But you told us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need as if we were caring for you.

And so, we stay at home.
For we are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people, God.

May our hearts be your heart, overflowing with love.
May our hands be yours, bringing relief,
comforting the fearful, tending the sick,
and assuring the isolated
of our love, and your love
wherever we are,
whatever it costs,
for as long as it takes.

Loving Father, in this time of uncertainty and distress.
We pray that those who are sick or dying may know peace,
that those who are caring for the sick may be skilful, sympathetic and resilient,
that those who are searching for a cure may be inspired,
that those who are leading us may be both wise and kind.

Thank you that even in these anxious times,
you are with us - nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen

Offering prayer

God of life, in whose presence
is the fullness of joy,
we offer and entrust to you
portions of our labours, talents, and time.
**Receive and use them and us
to provide life, hope, and joy to those
in need in our world, to your glory. Amen.**

Hymn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfNwvNhpK4>

**'Christ, the Lord, is risen today!' Alleluia!
earth and heaven in chorus say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high; Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply: Alleluia!**

**Love's redeeming work is done! Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won: Alleluia!
death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise! Alleluia!**

**Lives again our glorious King; Alleluia!
where, O death, is now your sting? Alleluia!
Once he died, our souls to save; Alleluia!
where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!**

**Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
following our exalted Head; Alleluia!
made like him, like him we rise; Alleluia!
ours the cross, the grave, the skies: Alleluia!**

Charles Wesley

Blessing

The God who is the strength of the weak, protect you.
The God who remembers the forgotten, cherish you.
God who brings us from the margins of life,
and from behind closed doors,
into love and community,
convince you of your worth and possibilities.

The blessing of the God of love -
Creator, Redeemer
and Sustainer of the World
be with us always.
Amen

liturgy adapted from Seasons of the Spirit ©