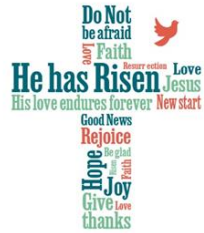




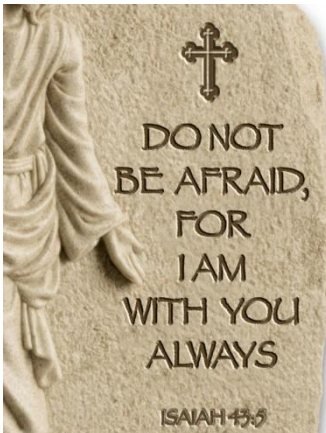
'Worship at home'

April 16th 2023

Do not be afraid,
for Christ has risen:
Christ has risen indeed!



Light a candle to remind yourself that Christ has indeed risen, and is with us always. Easter was not a once-off event: the events of Easter did not signify the end, but the beginning. As the first disciples experienced Christ's ongoing presence, so do we as his Spirit continues at work today in our world, and in our lives.



Opening

Do not be afraid, for Christ is risen:
Christ is risen indeed!

We come seeking Christ:

Seek, and you shall find.

The tomb could not contain him:

Christ is present with us now.

He gives us courage and strength:

In Christ we know

joy, hope and faith.

We rejoice, and give thanks:

for the power and glory of God!

That first Easter day, the disciples gathered together behind locked doors. We can imagine them confused, and scared: afraid of the Jewish leaders who were likely to come for them, as they had Jesus; afraid of public opinion, where the crowds had already shown themselves to be unpredictable; afraid that the women's story of seeing Jesus might actually be true, and what that might mean; unsure of what was to come. They might have been questioning themselves, and the events that had occurred.

- Where is God in all this?
- How do we know that Christ has risen?
- How does this make a difference?

John 20:19-31

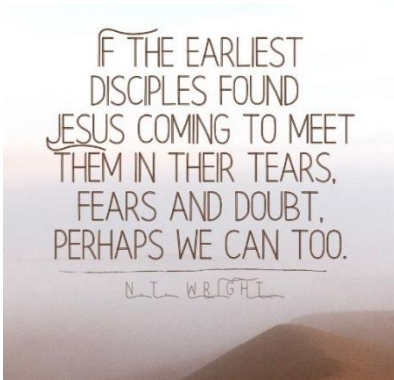
That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." One of the twelve disciples Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand

into the wound in his side." Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. New Living Translation

Thomas wasn't ready to believe that Christ had risen until he experienced it for himself. Some aspects of our faith can be difficult to believe: stones rolled away, bodies gone, angels from heaven, people appearing through locked doors are not a part of our usual experience. This can lead us to have questions and doubts.

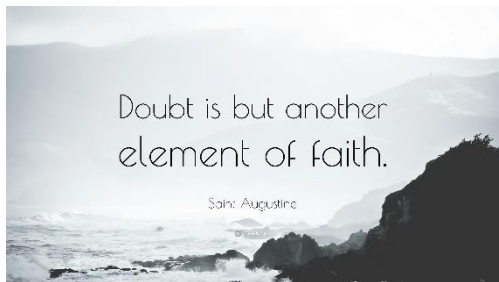
Which aspects of your faith challenge you most?

What questions do you have?



If Columbus had not doubted the maps of his day, we would never know that the world was not flat (so the story goes!). Our world has flourished because of courageous people who doubted the status quo, refused to be silenced by the nagging crowd, and believed in the possibilities of new ways of thinking.

Doubt is not the opposite of faith: doubt can be a healthy and essential part of our faith. Doubt is what happens when we don't simply accept what we are told, but really struggle to understand it for ourselves.



Doubt can make us willing to let go of old ways of seeing and free us to explore new ideas, moving us from simple acceptance to a living, growing faith that encompasses our whole lives and transforms our whole beings

Our faith is a mystery we will never fully understand. However, it seems that those disciples experienced the presence of the risen Christ with them, in a new and amazing way. We are reminded that our faith is not a system of beliefs to be accepted at face value, or a list of rules to be followed; rather faith is a relationship with a living God who offers each of us peace, grace, freedom and wholeness, bringing hope and new opportunities.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

John 20:21

The good news of the risen Christ is not to be kept to ourselves. Sometimes we hide ourselves away, only associating with those who are familiar and comfortable. *“Peace be with you”*, Jesus says. We are not called to practise our faith in a locked room, in fear of what others might think, or of what Jesus might ask of us. *“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.”* The risen Christ calls us to share this good news, in every aspect of our lives. We do so assured of Christ’s presence with us, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

In spite of our doubts,
may we recognise you in our midst:
wounded, crucified, and resurrected.

In spite of our doubts,
may we know when we come face to face
with the love that is greater than all deaths

In spite of our doubts,
may we reach out to touch the wounds of the world’s pain
trusting that when grace and love surround them
they will become part of Christ’s resurrected body.

And in spite of our doubts, may we live as though we are, too.

~ adapted from Cheryl Lawrie <http://holdthisspace.org.au>



Closing

Risen Christ, God with us:

you come to us, sometimes unexpectedly;
you call us by name.

Break in and touch our lives,
so that we might believe and know you as risen.

Walk with us,
so that we might better understand your way.

Commission us,
so that we might embrace your purpose.

Breathe on us,
so that we might receive the Spirit.

Challenge us to love you, just as you have loved us,
so that we might show your love and grace to all others.

This we pray. Amen.

- adapted from [Jon Humphries](#) 4