

11th April 2021 10 am Powerful, Pertinent and Poignant Easter

Service led by Bhav Joshi (St. Paul's Leamington), talk by Revd. Tim Mitchell (Diocesan Healthy Churches Development Mentor), Reading by Jo Mitchell

This transcript is only of the preface, the reading and the talk

Preface

[Statement from the Bishop of Coventry, the Right Reverend Dr. Christopher Cocksworth appeared on screen first:]

"With people across Coventry and Warwickshire, I mourn the passing of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, and I give thanks for the great energy and dedication of his long life of service. I pray for Her Majesty The Queen and for the whole Royal Family, that in the midst of grief and loss, they may know the peace and strength of God."

[Tim Mitchell:]

I'm talking to you on Friday afternoon, having recently learned of the loss of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. This is a shared moment of sadness for our nation. And I'm sure we're going to mark this in a number of ways in the diocese in the coming days. The service we're about to show was recorded before I learned this news, but I thought it would be good for us to pause, to pray and give thanks to God for Philip, to have a few moments of silence and to pray for Her Majesty the Queen and her family.

God of our lives,
we give thanks for the life of Prince Philip,
for his love of our country and for his devotion to duty.
We entrust him now to Your love and mercy
through our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

[pause]

Merciful God, be close to all who mourn,
especially Her Majesty the Queen and all members of the Royal Family.
May they know the hope of Your promises, and the comfort of Your love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Reading: John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.'

22 And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' 27 Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

28 Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

29 Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Talk

[Tim Mitchell:]

Happy Easter! I hope you're enjoying the Easter season. Many of you who celebrated Easter last week will recall that, on that first morning of Easter Day, Mary raced to the tomb to find the body of her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When she got there, she found the tomb was empty. And for that reason she went and sought the disciples to see if they'd perhaps taken the body. And when she found Peter and John, they too raced to the tomb, to see if they could locate Jesus' body. And of course they did race. It was the older disciple, John, who for some strange reason won that race but was afraid to enter the tomb. Peter arrived second, and perhaps in keeping with his bold personality went into the tomb, and discovered that the tomb was empty. The two disciples, unbelieving in many ways, left the tomb perplexed. But Mary stuck around, and she was rewarded for her patience and her desire to find Christ, because she met what she thought was the gardener. And then the gardener said, "Mary, Mary!" and her response was, "*Rabboni!*" She knew that she had seen Christ, that He had spoken to her, and her heart was alive with love for Jesus. And of course, Jesus told her to go and tell the community.

But now we are focusing this week on that evening where we find that the disciples were in the upper room. They were locked away for fear. They were afraid of the of the religious authorities, and of course this is understandable, because they had seen what had happened to Christ, they'd seen from a distance the crucifixion and feared for their own lives. But that first Easter evening was incredibly poignant for us today, because we've spent the last year in and out of lockdowns, and at a distance from people. And we may have suffered from anxiety, been afraid, fearful for the future. So Easter is extremely poignant for us. I was struck by what Stephen Cottrell said to General Synod last September, when he said, "I hate this virus, because people have died alone, they've not had their families around them." And indeed, when I reflect on my own life, I've lost three family members during the last 12 months. So Easter is incredibly poignant for us at this time. One of my daughter-in-laws, when I asked her what she was most looking forward to at the end of the lockdown, she said, "Actually, it's giving you a hug," which so touched me. And each of you will be thinking of embracing people, of giving loved ones a hug, welcoming them into your home.

So for us, this Easter is incredibly poignant, but it's also incredibly pertinent too, because we find that Jesus entered the upper room where the disciples were huddled together. And He breathed over them. When we've spent the last year avoiding breathing over people, Jesus breathed over the disciples. And as He did so, He breathed peace. And of course, that is so pertinent for us, because we need the peace that Christ gives when He breathes the breath of life over us. This of course echoes the breath that God breathed right at the beginning, "in the beginning," the *Ruach*, the breath of God hovered over the

deep¹, and we find breath was present when God breathed into Adam and brought life²; and Elijah breathed into a mother's child who'd died, and brought the child back to life³. And in Ezekiel, the passage about the dry bones, Ezekiel saw the breath of God bring life to the bones⁴.

So breath is very pertinent; and Jesus, in breathing over the disciples, also gave them authority, and He commissioned them to forgive, to restore relationships. And as we gather again in our communities, our families and in our churches, this Easter is so poignant, because we will need to forgive each other. There'll be people we'll reconnect with that we haven't seen for a long time. And I know that there's a temptation to think, "Well, I've not heard from you for three months or six months," and to feel aggrieved. But the lockdown has had an impact on all of us. Easter, the message, is poignant, because we're called to forgive. So I trust that when we do gather in our buildings, we'll be extending forgiveness to each other. If we've felt let down, perhaps we haven't seen folk for many months, or had a phone call or a card, let's extend loving-kindness and forgiveness, as that's what Jesus extended to His disciples.

And of course, Easter is incredibly powerful, because on that Easter evening, Jesus in breathing over the disciples and granting them peace, also brought about a transformation. The disciples were no longer afraid or fearful or anxious about the future. The power of the Spirit came upon them, and the power enabled them to go forth, to open the doors and get out and connect with people. And in many ways that will be what it will be like for us: we'll be returning to our buildings, we'll be reconnecting, we will be extending forgiveness to each other, and of course the power of the Spirit will be sending us out to connect with those in our community. So let us listen to those in our community, and see what their hopes and dreams are for the church. And of course, we'll be able to extend hospitality to our community too. One scholar said, "The future of the church depends upon the hospitality of the world." Jesus sends us out with power to connect and to engage with our communities.

So I hope that you'll be celebrating this season of Easter and will remember these simple points:

- that Easter is poignant, because of the end of lockdown, which is very much on the horizon.
- It's very pertinent, because the disciples were given authority to forgive, just as we have.
- And of course it's very powerful, because we have the commission and the strength to connect with our communities, and to embrace those we've not seen for many months.

Happy Easter!



*May God richly bless you as you celebrate
the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Happy Easter!

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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1 Genesis 1:2 – see, e.g. <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-ruach.html>

2 Genesis 2:7

3 1 Kings 17:17-24

4 Ezekiel 37:1-14