



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Easter 2 - Peace be with you

Sunday 12 April 2026

John 20:19-end

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I hope that you had a really good Easter. As we enter into those familiar stories each year we encounter anew their incredible power to challenge and transform as they explore the heights and depths of human behaviour in contrast to God's incredible love.

Now Easter is past. And it can be easy to pack those stories away in just the same way we pack away the decorations after Christmas. But Christians are Easter people. We live in the light of the events of that first Easter. That first Easter changed things for good.

It changed things for good, but in truth, it did it slowly.

Think of what it would have been like for those first disciples, gathered together in the upper room that first Easter evening, which is when today's gospel reading (John 20:19-31) begins. Think of what they witnessed in the days leading up to Easter: There was that emotional Thursday evening, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, and shared a last supper with them. There was his agony in the garden, when those same disciples fell asleep as Jesus prayed. There was the betrayal by one of their own, Judas, and Jesus' arrest. The denial by Peter, the crowds shouting for Jesus to be crucified. His trial, his torture, and then, finally, his crucifixion. His burial in the tomb meant that it was all over. After all, death is final. Supposedly.

But now, two days later, there are these stories from the woman who went to visit the tomb; that the tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive. Just imagine the swirl of emotions those disciples must have been feeling when Jesus came and stood among them that evening! They felt joy, of course. But also, sadness over what Jesus went through. And confusion over what his resurrection meant. And fear; we know that they were very afraid. And I strongly suspect, they felt guilt too, over deserting Jesus in his hour of need. Guilt also, maybe, at their misconceptions over who Jesus was and what he came to do. Yes, they may have understood him to be the Messiah, but there were various understandings of how the Messiah would win. Dying didn't feature much in those. And in response to all of that joy and sadness and confusion and fear and guilt, Jesus simply said: "Peace be with you."

Peace be with you.

In the Christmas stories we have angels/messengers appearing several times, preparing the way for the wonder of incarnation. Their opening line is usually; "Do not be afraid." A pretty appropriate start in an experience that could only have been startling. At Easter it is "Peace be with you." God gets human nature, how we respond to the unsettling, even when it is good news. God understands how we ordinary people react in the face of things that threaten to overwhelm our understanding of how life, even how God, works. We all have our own "creation story"; that set of beliefs on how things should rightly be and operate. Both Christmas and Easter show us that sometimes those beliefs, and our understanding of God, are just too small. God gets it, and says; "Peace be with you."

What Jesus did on that first Easter evening was to show those frightened disciples the same grace and mercy and forgiveness and love that he always showed. He came and stood among them and simply said, "Peace be with you." And then, to ease their doubts, he showed them his hands and his side. No wonder the disciples rejoiced to see him! Not only was Jesus alive and among them, but he had also forgiven them for all that they had done – and not done – over these last dramatic days.

We often read today's gospel reading and focus on Thomas, the doubting disciple who needed to put his finger in the marks of the nails before he would believe. But this story is really about all those fear-filled disciples, trembling behind that locked door, and wondering what it all means. This story is really about each and every one of us: trying to live a life worthy of our Lord; struggling with doubt, weighed down with fear and misconceptions, and constantly falling short of what we know that he expects from us. And this story is also about how Jesus comes to us, in the midst of our doubts and fears and sin and guilt, to offer each and every one of us that simple word of grace, and mercy, and forgiveness. "Peace be with you."

This gospel reading is really about the peace which surpasses all understanding; the peace which the world cannot give; the peace that can only come from our crucified and risen Lord; and the peace that comes when we most need it. That peace that can never quite make sense in contrast to the brokenness of our world and yet has that deep compelling sense of truth about it that continues to draw us to be disciples.

Think back to a time in your life when you feel as though you have truly let God down. And now, imagine Jesus showing up at that very moment, and saying to you: "Peace be with you." That is what our Lord does for each and every one of us. That, too, is what the miracle of Easter means for us.

But today's gospel reading is also about the ways in which we are called to share that peace and that joy, with a world so filled with doubt and fear. Jesus did not join his disciples in the upper room simply to celebrate his resurrection with them. He also joined them there to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to send them to the world to continue his work. "As the Father has sent me," Jesus said to them and to us, "so I send you."

The word "Apostle" literally means one who is sent. The word "Disciple," on the other hand, literally means one who learns. The disciples have learned from Jesus many things. By his words and his example, he has taught them about the Kingdom of God, and about God's purpose for them and for the world. Now, these disciples are becoming apostles. Disciples who are sent into the world. Jesus sends those first disciples out into the world to be his apostles. Just as he sends us out into the world in the same way. We are all apostles, members of the apostolic church, as we say in the Creed.

But Jesus doesn't just tell us to do this. He helps us to do this. That, too, is the miracle of the resurrection. After he said to those first apostles, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," Jesus breathed on those apostles, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

When Jesus breathed on them, imagine those disciples thinking back to the creation story in Genesis: when God took dust from the ground, formed Adam from the dust, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. As the Father did at the beginning, so the Son did to those first disciples, and so the Spirit does to us in our baptisms.

So that's what those first apostles did: They ran out and shared their joy with the world. Well, not exactly, not right away. A week after this story takes place, the first Sunday after Easter, we find those disciples back in the upper room; the door locked again. Has anything really changed? Jesus shows up again, and this time he's upset, right? This time, he's going to give them a talking-to, and tell them to get out there and do what he asked, right?

Well, again, no. The first thing he says when he shows up this time is "Peace be with you." Then, he turns to Thomas. Now remember, Thomas was not there a week ago, when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples. We are not sure why he was absent, but when the others told Thomas that they had seen the Lord, Thomas famously said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

So, what does Jesus do when he appears to Thomas? Again, Jesus shows understanding, patience, forgiveness and mercy. He said to Thomas, "Put your fingers here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Again and again, in the midst of our doubts and fears, and in the midst of our misunderstandings and failings, our risen Lord comes to us and says: "Peace be with you." Again and again, he comes to us and says, "Do not doubt, but believe." Again and again, Jesus forgives us, breathes new life into us, and offers us the gift of new life in him, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

And again and again, our risen Lord reminds us of our task; to go and share the peace and the joy and the hope of this new life, with a world that struggles to find peace, joy or hope. Again and again, the risen Jesus comes to us; to give us peace, to give us new life, to forgive our sin, and the fact that often our God is too small, and to gently remind us not to doubt but to believe. And again and again, he invites us to go, not alone, but with each other, his Church, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit at work even in us. To go in peace, to serve our risen Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.