

# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## ***The Church's prayer for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April***

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April**

### **A reading from the book of Acts 3:12-19**

<sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup> By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

<sup>17</sup> “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

### **A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 24 verses 36-48**

#### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

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<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.

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## **A reflection from Revd Sally Myers, member of the Lordsbridge Team Chapter**

The Gospel reading this morning continues the theme of Jesus’ resurrection appearances. This particular passage from Luke’s Gospel is a wonderfully evocative portrait of the risen Jesus drawing alongside his at once delighted, but baffled, disciples. In an almost comic series of increasingly demonstrative actions Jesus first appears, then speaks, then shows his scars, and then invites the disciples to touch him to show that he isn’t a ghost; before eventually requesting and eating food. The passage contains extraordinary detail, and was almost certainly included in the Gospel as ‘proof’ of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus appears to his disciples in this and other recorded instances in a way that is recognisable, but it seems not identical, to his previous bodily form. However what is certain is that Jesus was present with them.

This all set me wondering what we actually mean when we say ‘The Lord be with you’. This priestly greeting or blessing has its origin in the Old Testament in the books of Ruth and Chronicles. In the Latin translation ‘Lord’ is a term used for God. As such, it does not mean specifically Jesus be with you in the same way as he was with the disciples. In any case, we know that Jesus ascended to his Father, and even instructed Mary Magdalene not to hold onto him because he must leave to do so. We also know that he promised the Comforter and that the church was blessed with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We do not though say ‘The Holy Spirit be with you’ or even ‘The Holy Trinity be with you’ but this is perhaps what we mean. Whatever we call it, it is the case that many of us have experienced a divine presence, particularly at times of need and anxiety.

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At least one of Jesus' motivations for appearing to his disciples seems to have been to reassure them. They are terrified, but he speaks to them those most precious words: 'Peace be with you'. It is almost like a parent comforting a distraught child saying; 'It is okay. I am here. Everything is going to be fine.' 'Peace be with you' are words we hear in a communion service, where Christ is present with us in bread and wine. We also often hear them in the readings at funeral services, when perhaps our need for comfort is at its greatest. The funeral service yesterday of His Late Royal Highness, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was of course a big national event, but it perhaps also reminded us of our common humanity and mortality; if indeed a reminder is needed after over a year of Covid. Our Christian promise of eternal life is very comforting, but again, though we cannot describe or understand it, that life does not seem separate and limited to a time after death. Rather it seems, everything is all mixed up together.

Celtic Christianity, being 'close to the clay' and consciously in tune with the cycles and seasons of life, offers us particular insights into ways of thinking about life and death, which might also shed some light on how God is present with us not just in church services, or even fellowship, but intimately and all the time; before and through death and beyond. You may be familiar with John O Donohue, the late Irish poet and priest, who is most famous for his book *Anam Cara*, which means Soul Friend. In it he talks about our bodies and souls and how the divine being is as close to us in both, as we are to ourselves. O'Donohue talks about our souls, not as something trapped within us, somehow detached and at war with our frail and sinful bodies, and waiting to be released by death. Rather he describes our bodies as sacred and our souls as our closest and truest friends; infused with the divine within, but also wrapped around us like a protective coat or friend, loving us and longing for connection. He suggests that while our bodies live in chronological time, our souls are always at one with God and operate in the mode of eternity. He also suggests that we can and indeed should try and deepen our awareness of that love and eternity within us. He urges us to practice inner tenderness and hospitality, and to seek to get to know our bodies and souls. He says that if we do so, even as we face the little daily deaths of loss and disappointment, fear and negativity, the divine love within and around us meets that experience with power towards healing, renewal, creativity and growth. Ironically, as we become more and more aware of the divine presence with us, we become not only more able to face the fear of our physical death, but also to become more fully alive in our own uniqueness in the present.

May the peace and presence of the Lord be with you - Amen