



## EASTER 2A

A complete Sunday service ready to use  
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

**Second Sunday of Easter- Year A**  
19th April 2020



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**15 STF – The Splendour of the King OR**

**41 STF – Blessed be your name**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**175 STF – Light of the world OR**

**173 STF – Into the darkness of the world**

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 22-23; Psalm 16

**Hymn:**

**706 STF – Longing for light OR**

**101 STF – Before the world began**

Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**397 STF – The spirit lives to set us free OR**

**405 STF – Great is the darkness**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR**

**473 STF – Moses I know you're the man**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to Worship**

As we journey day by day, deeper into your love O Lord, may our worship today be a leap deeper into you, may our prayers be part of a loving conversation and may the words we hear draw us into a deeper understanding of who you are and who we are in you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

**15 STF – The Splendour of the King OR**

**41 STF – Blessed be your name**

## **Opening Prayers**

Living and life-giving God,  
You spoke, and light dawned.

You breathed, and life flourished.

By your words and hands creation burst with colour and vibrancy,  
and we praise you.

From your words, the stars shone.

By your goodness, the mountains rose, and the waves crashed.

You ordained all things that we may see a glimpse of your glory and power,  
and we adore you.

Through your grace, we were made in your image,  
From your great love, your son came.

In him, you revealed yourself and we saw love made man,  
and we thank you.

We praise the works of your hands and the love that you lavish upon us. Your love shines into each part of our lives, bringing light and warmth wherever it reaches.

Lord God,  
You are grace and you love mercy.

In the face of our sin, you breath out forgiveness.

We confess those times Lord, when our lives have not reflected love into the world.  
We confess the words that we have said, the things that we have done and thought that have lacked love.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional prayers by Phil Jackson

We confess  
when we have knocked others down and not built them up.  
when we have not shared all that you have given  
when kindness has been an afterthought and we have loved in hindsight.

We give thanks that it is your very nature to be forgiving and ask that you renew your love and light in our lives.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

What is the longest journey you have been on? [Hear people's answers]

What is your ideal holiday destination? Why? [Hear one or two answers]

What is the worst journey you have ever been on? [Hear one or two answers]

Have one participant try walking on the spot, one mimic cycling and one sat as if they were in a car, or on a plane. Which was easier? Which do you think was more fun?

Some journeys are fun and some journeys are long. Some are easy and some are hard. Some journeys allow us to sit and enjoy it all, some (like walking and cycling) require us to be very active participants in the journey. Every journey has a start point and a destination.

Life is a journey. How many of you can remember the start of the journey? We may not be able to remember the start but we are probably aware of being on the journey and some of the highs and lows along the way. Can you remember a time when you were sad? By contrast, what was your best birthday party or birthday present? Which was your most exciting day out?

Each of these are steps along the journey of life. Life with God is a journey too. In the readings that we will be listening to later we see people who journey from some of the sadder memories of life to some of the happier ones, and then on to the end of their journey, their final destination with God in heaven.

If anyone is scared of the dark then starting your journey in a tunnel would not be the best place to begin. King David in the bible knew what it was like to be in the tunnel, in a place where he was really scared, and sometimes it was hard to see the little flicker of light at the end of the tunnel and yet he once wrote a song asking God to carry him out of the tunnel and to a better place. He spoke of how lovely it was to be out of the tunnel and in a better place with God.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Phil Jackson

We too can know what it is like to come out of the tunnel and in to a place where the light shines and we feel better, where the journey is a happier one, and we can also know the ultimate holiday destination, better than Disneyland or sandy beaches, better than the best theme park rides or the deepest swimming pools. It is a place where we will always know the love of God and there will be no more tunnels or darkness.

David, when he was in the dark tunnel, reached out to God so that God could lead him out. Other people in the bible, like Thomas when he put his hands on Jesus hands, reached out to Jesus from places of darkness or sadness so that Jesus could lead them to lighter happier places. Sometimes we just need to take hold of Jesus hand so we can go on the journey with him.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, when we are scared, or in a place where we are unhappy, and the world around us feels dark, help us to put our hands out and trust you so that you can take us on a journey out of the tunnel to a light and life.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

**175 STF – Light of the world OR**

**173 STF – Into the darkness of the world**

**Readings:** Acts 2:14a, 22-23; Psalm 16

**Hymn:**

**706 STF – Longing for light OR**

**101 STF – Before the world began**

**Reading:** 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

**Reflections on the readings**

When was your last significant journey? What were the most memorable parts? Was it a sedate trip on the canal or an adrenaline-fuelled holiday jumping out of planes trains or automobiles?

Journeys can be in a variety of forms, and these readings take us on a journey deeper into the heart of God. Depending on the order in which you take the readings, it is a journey that starts with darkness, moves on to light and develops into full life

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Phil Jackson

for all. In the journey of this sermon then we start with Darkness, move to the Dawning of light and end with the Development of life.

Looking first then at the darkness, the opening line of the Psalm suggests that David was either going through a time of trouble, or had just come out of one, when he wrote the psalm. He turns to God for safety and refuge with the language “keep” either saying he is in that place of safety or forming a plea to take him in to it. We know that God was so often David’s first port of call when he was in a time of trouble and a number of the psalms are a clear prayer to God for help in time of trouble. One of the most famous of these, Psalm 23, balances the pleasant language of the still waters with the deep darkness of the valley, David sat by the waters reflecting on what he had come through, and so aware of what lay ahead.

But what impact does the darkness have? Fear of the dark is actually one of our primal fears, for you do not know what might be lurking in the dark. There was a time when wandering off in to the dark where the predators may be lurking was not usually a good idea, and so a healthy fear of the dark kept you in at night. We see this fear often replicated in children as they learn the boundaries of the world around them until, as adults, we realise that with the front door locked and windows closed, the landing light is no real protection and under the bed is actually free of monsters.

Take yourself out of the safety of your home, beyond the relative safety of UK wildlife, and actually a fear of the dark can become healthy again. Out on a night hike where a cliff edge may lurk, in the depths of the jungle where predators still roam and the darkness can still hold danger. But what of the spiritual darkness, what lies there?

Is it possible that Thomas was scared rather than doubtful? Fearful that it might not be true, fearful that Jesus hadn’t defeated death and that the darkness still prevailed. Thomas stood in the twilight on the cusp of light and dark with death and Good Friday behind him and light and Resurrection ahead. Perhaps he feared that it wasn’t true and that he would actually be turned 90 degrees back into the dark and the reality of death, pain, grief and so much more.

Fear often increases with levels of vulnerability and the sad reality is that we are all vulnerable to the reality of spiritual darkness. We are not immune to grief and pain, if we may be able to identify the times when we have longed for that which we don’t need and swayed towards grief or identify the people that we struggle to get on with and stray towards feelings that do not uphold the love of neighbour that Jesus pictures for our lives.

If we can identify the darkness close around us then we cannot fail to recognise the darkness that is so prevalent in the world. As the bombs drop, the darkness gathers, as the drugs kill, the darkness deepens and as hatred bubbles, the dark enfolds. There are those whose way of life seems to be entwined in the dark and those who don’t seem to be able to escape the dark no matter how hard they try.

The difference between light and dark however depends upon what you are reaching for. Thomas reached out and found life and not death. He found truth rather than lies

and he proclaimed “My Lord and my God!” He found that the light had defeated dark and he left the twilight behind. Both David, and Peter when he quoted the Psalm to the crowds before him, realised that God would never abandon us to the “realm of the dead” and thus the light dawns.

## JOURNEY ELEMENT IN DARKNESS

As we turn to the dawning light we must first understand the power of light. A photographer went in to the crypt of a church to try and capture the nature of light and dark. The intention was simple, to photograph the way that a candle lit up the stonework next to it, bringing out the detail of the rough chiselled stone. As the pictures were downloaded on to the computer it was clear that the photoshoot had not been as successful as intended. The stone was still dark and the candle too bright from the long exposure – one bright candle, a small patch of stone and a great deal of black – the darkness had won. And then the photographer played around with the exposure on the computer and more of the stone came in to view, reclaimed from the darkness. A little happier the photographer sat back and admired the picture now on the screen, until a thought struck them. Pushing the exposure as far as it would go the whole of the crypt came into view, cracks on the back wall and the rough steps that were a good 8 feet from the candle (and even further from the camera) were now visible, the darkness not quite as powerful as first thought.

Unless the light had hit that step, the camera could not capture it, the human eye could not see it and even in the first instance the camera rendered it black, and yet the light reached all around that room and touched every corner of it. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.”

In his psalm, David does not dwell in the darkness, he moves on to how good God is. Whatever he was going through, or had just been through, he knew that there was something greater and better. Peter particularly draws out the meaning of that in v31 of the Acts reading as he speaks of how David foresaw what was to come. Bringing that in to their own experience he speaks of the journey of the Easter weekend, experiencing the deepest darkness and the most glorious light of the resurrection and offering this same journey to all those listening. We know from the next part of the Acts reading that so many took this journey and came to faith having experienced the light in their lives.

There is a challenging thing within these readings, and particularly Peter’s own experience of the journey from light in to dark. We sometimes feel that, as people of the light, we are immune to the darkness and yet the reality is that the darkness is only a power cut away. A child once asked their mum whether all fairy tales began “once upon a time” to which the mother responded “no darling, some begin ‘when I became a Christian all my troubles went away’”. In the epistle reading we see that Peter was no stranger to the darkness despite his deep faith. Sometimes, even with the light in our lives, the darkness still comes. Each and every day is split between night and day, light and dark and sometimes in life we have to travel through the night until the next day comes.

The reality of night however is that the sun is only on the other side of the world and never actually goes out (despite some childhood fears). As Peter writes to a number of churches in present day Turkey he speaks of the way in which they will suffer all kinds of trials, some of which may have been because of their faith and yet he promises them the fulfilment of their faith, of greater worth than gold, when Jesus is revealed – the “salvation of their souls” and the development of full life. The journey moves from the light into life.

Having spoken earlier, as we looked at Thomas, about how the difference between light and dark is what you are reaching for, the same can be true of the difference between life and death. It is very simple for us to define life in technical terms, with breath, a heartbeat and food and drink, that life ends when the last breath is taken and the heart stops beating. And yet those who reach for Jesus find a life that they never knew existed for life is more than just whether we are breathing or not. Jesus came to bring “life in all its fullness”.

In David and Paul’s exploration of a God who does not abandon us to the realm of the dead, we are reminded that sometimes we may be in a place of darkness, a place that speaks of death, and yet our home, our dwelling is elsewhere. We may be in that place and yet we are not abandoned to it. In that part of the psalm, David quickly moves on “the path of life” to a place where he is filled with the joy of the presence of God, a place of eternal pleasure, of eternal life. Peter reminds us that all of this is because God raised Jesus from the dead, in whose resurrection death and darkness are defeated.

The challenge for the church is the way in which we embrace that life not just for ourselves but for those who are in the darkness around us. Take a trip on any train and the chances are pretty high, at some point, you will see a buddleia, or even a whole bank of them. Some plants will spread quickly to every part of the space they are in, and even to the darkest parts of the garden. The truth is, the church needs to live a viral lifestyle, spreading light and life into the darkest parts of our communities, pushing out roots, sowing seeds, spreading life.

David did not keep quiet about his refuge and joy in the presence of God, he wrote psalms for the people to sing. Peter did not keep quiet about the life-giving resurrection of Christ, he stood and converted thousands and wrote letters to thousands more. Every form of life is inbuilt with the ability to create more life, otherwise the species dies. Sometimes we forget that, spiritually this is true of us too, we have the ability to create life, abundant life.

We would be naive and self-centred if we thought that the journey from dark to light and on to life started and ended with us. It was there before Peter and David, and it was there before him as well. It has travelled from Peter through many others to us and we are called by Christ to ensure that it does not stop with us either. In a moments silence think of three people who you know who live in the darkness.

*[Silence]*



How might you sow a seed in their life, how might you push out roots of eternal life towards them? How might we support the church in places of deep darkness to be a beacon of light and life, to be the viral life of God in those communities?

For other people to know the life that Jesus offers we have to live the life that he offers, full, abundant, Christ centred and Christ focused lives. Let us live lives that people want to be part of, lives that have greater worth than gold and speak of the joy that David knew. In living life that rings true to Jesus, we spread the life that he promised.

At the moment, like David, the darkness may be very real for you. As Peter puts, it you may be going through “all kinds of trials”. Or you may stand with Thomas in the twilight between dark and light, fearful that the light is not powerful for the darkness that lies behind you. Or it may be that we minister to, know and love people who rest in this place. Sometimes, the journey from dark to light seems to be slow going, and yet the light shines in the darkness and will never be overcome. Just like the camera in the crypt, the light is often doing work that we cannot see and reaching into the deepest parts of the darkness beyond our eyes reach. As the light dawns on our lives and the love of Jesus warms our hearts we start to journey through the light in to life, not the life of this world, of breath and heart beat, but the life of eternal joy and pleasure with Christ. May we be up to the challenge of living that life so that it might spread in to the darker parts of our communities and become viral, a channel of light and life into the world.

Let us pray.

Light of the world,

Shine in to the dark parts of the world and of our lives. Help us to remember that you are the light of the world and help us to see the promise of eternal life in you.

Lord Jesus, we confess our doubts and our fears, may we reach out and feel your hands. May we know the power of your wounds and know the truth of your resurrection, leading us into light and life.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

**Hymn:**

**397 STF – The spirit lives to set us free OR**

**405 STF – Great is the darkness**

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Phil Jackson

## **Prayers of intercession**

We pray for our world, often it seems so broken that it is hard to know where to start so this morning we simply ask that you would give us ears to hear your prompting, hearts that feel yours breaking and the courage we need to respond as you call us to be your hands and feet in this place. Help us make the world better today than it was yesterday.

God in your mercy,

Hear our prayers.

We pray for those called to serve in position of leadership in our country, place in them a heart for those who need their help the most and guide their decisions that through their work they may bring you glory.

God in your mercy,

Hear our prayers.

We pray for our church, unite us in our love for you and help us to be a people that sees everyone the way that you see them. Pour out your spirit on us as we strive to love people and to love people well.

God in your mercy,

Hear our prayers.

We pray for those in our lives who are hurting, as we hold them in our hearts and minds, we know that they are your children and you love them dearly. We ask that you grant them your healing power, that their faith may be strengthened and their bodies restored.

God in your mercy,

Hear our prayers.

We pray for ourselves and ask that you would fill us with your spirit so that as we step into this week we are able to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you our God.

God in your mercy,

Hear our prayers.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

**We will now take up the offering.**

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Lauren Brabbs

### **Blessing the offering**

You Lord have given light and life, receive these our gifts to you.

Bless these gifts that they may become light and life to others.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

**465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR**

**473 STF – Moses I know you're the man**

### **Blessing**

Step out from here in to the light and life of God,

May his life be in your hearts,

May his light be in your eyes

and may life and light go from you to others.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Phil Jackson

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Phil Jackson