



Digital Church Services can be found on YouTube by searching 'ES&D'

## INTRODUCTION

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome to this service of worship of the Digital Church of the East Solent and Downs Circuit of the Methodist Church in the South of England.

I am Bill Berry, one of the Local Preachers in this Circuit.

This service is for the Sunday after Easter, 11 April 2021.

Let us spend a moment in quiet, as we reflect on the momentous events of the death and resurrection of Christ, and what they mean for us today.

O Lord our God, we give you thanks and praise for your great love for us, shown by the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Thank you, Jesus, for taking our sin upon you, and nailing them to the tree. Thank you for your resurrection, showing us that we, also, can share with you in your risen life – if we also die to sin.

You call us, Lord, to love God, and to love one another. Help us to rid ourselves of everything within us which prevents us from living that love. Fill us with your resurrection life, that your light might shine from us, and give You glory. Amen.

**Hymn** Thine be the glory.

Thine is the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son;  
Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won;  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
Kept the folded grave clothes where Thy body lay.

*Thine is the glory, risen conqu'ring Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, Thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
Let the church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;  
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

*Thine is the glory, risen conqu'ring Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, Thou o'er death hast won.*

No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life;  
Life is naught without Thee; aid us in our strife;  
Make us more than conquerors, through Thy deathless love:  
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.

*Thine is the glory, risen conqu'ring Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, Thou o'er death hast won*

.Accompaniment: Small Church Music Tune Judas Maccabeus

Author: Edmond L. Budry

CCLI Number: 21837

## BIBLE READINGS

### John 20 v19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them 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.'

### Jesus and Thomas

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, '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.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

### **The Purpose of This Book**

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### **1 John 1 v1-2 v2**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

**PSALM** The psalm set for today is no. 133.

How good it is, and pleasant, too—  
A witness pure and right;  
When brothers live in unity,  
Together in delight.

It is like oil poured on the head  
and running down the beard;  
Which, running down on Aaron's beard,  
IE'en to his robes appeared.

It's like if Hermon's dew upon  
Mount Zion would be poured;  
For there the Lord His blessing gives—  
E'en life forevermore.

### **SERMON**

#### **1 John 1:1 – 2:2**

Last Sunday we celebrated Easter. This Sunday seems a bit flat after last week's excitement. However, it gives us an opportunity to pause and take stock. We know *what* happened at Easter – now we can think about *why* it happened, and *how* the events of Passion-tide are relevant to us today.

The Gospel is a well-known story of two appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples. It focusses on Thomas, who was absent for the first appearance, and who expressed doubt about the resurrection.

I am going to concentrate on the Epistle for today, from the apostle John.

John has the knack of being able to say an awful lot in a few words. Read through the letter quickly, and let it speak to your spirit, without too much thinking, and you will be blessed by it. However, to get the most out of it, we need to engage our minds, and ask searching questions.

So let's go through it, bit by bit.

John starts "We declare to you what was from the beginning ...". What John is writing is not the product of his own imagination. It has always been. He has received something, which he is now declaring to us.

“what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands ...” John is an eye-witness, an ear-witness, even a hand-witness. He is writing about something he himself has experienced. Therefore, what he wrote in the rest of the letter is not speculative theoretical theology, it is solidly founded on his own personal experience.

But what is this that “was from the beginning”, that John has seen and heard and touched? It is, he wrote, “concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it”.

The idea of “seeing” the “Word of life” is a bit strange. John goes on to write that “this life was with the Father and was revealed to us”. It is becoming clear that John is writing about Jesus.

There are ideas here which are reminiscent of the opening of the fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and was with God”; and a little further on “the word became flesh and dwelt for a while among us.”

John continues: “we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

John is making it as clear as he possibly can that he has met with both the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ. In John’s Gospel, chapter 14 verse 9, Jesus said “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” We can understand how John could say “I have had fellowship with the Son, Jesus Christ.” He was there – one of the disciples. Not just one of them, either – he was one of those closest to Jesus, along with Peter and James. Reading the Gospel, we can also understand how he could claim to have fellowship with the Father.

Past tense – “I *had* fellowship with Christ”. But no – John uses the present tense, even though by this time Jesus was no longer on Earth, because he had risen into heaven. This fellowship with the risen Christ is continuing – even after the Ascension. How? John does not mention the third person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. I believe this is to suggest to us that the fellowship with the Father and with the Son is through the Holy Spirit. John calls us, also, into that same fellowship – fellowship with John, which is also fellowship in God the Holy Spirit with God the Father and God the Son.

I am reminded of a question asked of me long ago by my Local Preacher’s Circuit Tutor when I was On Trial: “Bill, you don’t really believe that God wants to interfere in people’s lives today, do you?” Was he serious? I thought so at the time. Was he being deliberately provocative? I don’t think so.

The word “interfere” suggests something that is not wanted – resented, even. John, however, uses the word “fellowship” – something warm and friendly, definitely wanted.

Why would someone resent God’s “interference” in their life? Perhaps because they know that there is something in their life that they are ashamed of? That they want to keep hidden from God?

Before I go on, I want to go back a bit, and remember what John wrote about hearing, seeing, touching. John has an on-going personal relationship with the living, risen Christ, and is calling us into the same fellowship. I am reminded about something that Job said in chapter 42: “My ears had heard of you; now I have seen you.”

In the book of Job there is a long theological discussion in chapters 3 to 37. Job disagrees with his companions about certain aspects of God’s character, and therefore about why Job is suffering. Just as the fourth man is telling Job that he is too insignificant for God to be bothered with, God shows up with the words “Who is this who darkens council with words without knowledge?”

How much of *our* theology is like that? A prolonged, sometimes heated, debate between blind people wondering what it is like to be able to see? Arguing about a God who is known only by repute? By what others have said? Are those others equally blind?

In total contrast, the Apostle John is not blind – he sees the God with whom he has fellowship. He is writing about someone he knows personally. This is certainly not theoretical theology – this is theology founded on knowledge. It is also practical – leading to consequences, to results. You have to get your theology right, before you can get your life right.

John then goes on to ask, in his own way, the question: “How can we know we have fellowship with God?” He is aware of people who believe that they have fellowship with God, but in actual fact do not.

For John, knowing God means obeying God. It means living in accordance with God's commands, as revealed in "That which was from the beginning ... the word of life ... revealed to us." It means walking in the light. John 14: 15 Jesus said "If you love me, keep my commandments."

"If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

"Walking in darkness" means living life the way WE choose, rather than living the way GOD wants.

"Walking in the light" means living the way God decides, in holiness and purity of life.

In a recent Methodist report, there was a statement "We need to re-interpret the Bible in the light of modern developments." What the authors meant was, that the plain meaning of certain passages of the Bible came into conflict with their chosen lifestyles. They therefore wanted to re-interpret those passages, to bring them into line with those chosen lifestyles.

They might be able to persuade themselves, but the apostle John has the answer: such people are "walking in darkness", even while they claim to be "led by the Holy Spirit". According to John, in spite of their claim, they do not have fellowship with God. That is, if they do have fellowship with something they call God, it is not the same God with whom John had fellowship.

Those who truly have fellowship with God are those who amend their lives to bring them more closely into line with what the Bible teaches. In John's words, they "walk in the light."

John continues: "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

The statement about walking in darkness challenges us. Am I walking in darkness? What is there in my life that is not in accordance with God's will for me?

I want to say I have not sinned – how DARE you say I have! But I know John is right – I have sinned. There are certain sins I know about. I confess them, ask forgiveness for them, and receive forgiveness. Having received forgiveness, I put my guilt aside, and move on unburdened.

I also know that my knowledge of what God requires of me is imperfect. Am I sinning in ways that I do yet realise are sinful? Probably – but I do not know yet what those sins are. I therefore make my general confession, confessing sins I am unaware of as well as those I know about.

Then I have God's promise, proclaimed by His apostle John: "he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The second part: "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" is just as important as the first part: "forgive us our sins". Left on my own, I would sin again, in the exact same way as I did before. But here, God promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness – to act within us in the power of the Holy Spirit to change us in such a way that we are enabled to sin no more.

Our reading today concludes: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

When we read some books of the Bible, we are left wondering "What is the purpose of this book?" I asked that when I first read Lamentations. We wrestle with the book, trying to find out what its purpose is. Here, we are not left wondering – John says explicitly why he wrote this letter. "so that you may not sin."

Is it possible to live a life which is completely free of all sin? Theologians have been divided on this question ever since John first raised it. The general consensus is "No – not this side of the grave." Martin Luther wrote about "not being but becoming". Also "We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing towards it." For Luther, Christian Perfection was not about having arrived at the destination, but about walking in the right direction – "walking in the light".

John wrote “so that you may not sin”, but immediately goes on to say “But if anyone sins ...”. It seems that he thought that it was theoretically possible to live a life without sin, but that he himself had not attained it, and he didn’t honestly expect anyone else to either.

Hence the last part of today’s Epistle: “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

This is why Jesus died – to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Yet not that only. Because Jesus died on the cross, we can be forgiven. But if that is all, it would not be enough. It would not stop us sinning again. John wrote “So that you may not sin.” This was also, therefore, the reason why Jesus died.

If we continue to sin by “walking in darkness”, then the cross of Christ has achieved nothing for us. In order fully to benefit from Christ’s death and resurrection, it is absolutely necessary to “walk in the light”, by living a life of holiness and righteousness, fully obedient to the commands of Christ, our Saviour, Lord, and King.

### **HYMN** Into the darkness of this world

Into the darkness of this world  
Into the shadows of the night  
Into this loveless place You came  
Lightened our burdens eased our pain  
And made these hearts Your home  
Into the darkness once again  
O come Lord Jesus come

*Come with Your love to make us whole  
Come with Your light to lead us on  
Driving the darkness far from our souls  
O come Lord Jesus come*

Into the longing of our souls  
Into these heavy hearts of stone  
Shine on us now Your piercing light  
Order our lives and souls aright  
By grace and love unknown  
Until in You our hearts unite  
O come Lord Jesus come

O Holy Child Emmanuel  
Hope of the ages God with us  
Visit again this broken place  
Till all the earth declares Your praise  
And Your great mercies own  
Now let Your love be born in us  
O come Lord Jesus come

*Come in Your glory take Your place  
Jesus the Name above all names  
We long to see You face to face  
O come Lord Jesus come*

Written by: Maggi Dawn  
Accompaniment Source: My Midi (via Small Church Music)  
CCLI No: 1044277

### **INTERCESSIONS**

Lord Jesus Christ, as you have commanded us, so we pray, making our prayers for ourselves and for others.

We pray for ourselves, that you will shine your light upon us, to illuminate the dark areas and make them known to us. Show us, Lord, those parts of our lives which we have not yet fully surrendered to your will. Transform us by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that our lives will be full of your light, and show that light to the world, that your name be glorified in all that we are, and all that we say, and all that we do.

**By the power of your resurrection life, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those known to us, and also for others: all who need your forgiveness and your healing today. You said, Lord Jesus, that you came to give fullness of life; to set the prisoner free, to heal the sick, and to bind up the broken-hearted. We pray for all people who need you to do those things in their lives, that they also might rejoice in your salvation.

**By the power of your resurrection life, hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church. Lord, purify your church, and bring to repentance all who come under your judgement – all who are walking in darkness, and teaching others to walk with them. Restore to us that holiness of life to which you call us, and give us shepherds after your own heart, who will lead your

church in the way you would have us go. We pray for those faithful ones who are suffering persecution for the sake of your name, that you will strengthen them and empower their witness to change the lives of their persecutors, so that persecutors will follow the example of the persecutor Saul, whose life you turned around to become St. Paul. Give to all Christians everywhere courage and boldness to proclaim your truth, and make a real difference in your world.

**By the power of your resurrection life, hear our prayer.**

We pray for your world; for peoples and their governments. We pray that you will bless them by bringing them to repentance for their rejection of you; for their false philosophies and religions which bring repression; for pride, selfishness and greed which restricts and imprisons the lives of others. We pray for governments, that they will turn to you and seek your wisdom, that they might rule in love, righteousness and justice.

We pray for all those struggling with the current pandemic – a plague which you have not protected us against. We ask, Lord, that you will have mercy on us, and stop this virus. Thank you for all those who are working to relieve suffering and to heal the sick. Thank you for all those who have developed, and are now making, vaccines against the virus. We ask that you will empower the makers of vaccines, to make enough quickly enough to keep up with the demand. We pray for the arrangements for delivering the vaccines; for the logistics, and for those working at the vaccination stations. Lord, encourage them, and keep them safe from infection.

**By the power of your resurrection life, hear our prayer.**

We pray as you taught us:

Our Father in heaven, help us to honour your name. Come and set up your kingdom, so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven. Give us our food for today. Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others. Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil.

(Matthew 6:9-13, Contemporary English Version)

**Hymn** Psalm 51 (Have mercy on me, O God)

*Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin*

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy,  
the joy of your salvation.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise

Author: Graham Kendrick

Reference: [www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/resources-for-lockdown/graham-kendrick-albums/resources-for-lockdown](http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk/resources-for-lockdown/graham-kendrick-albums/resources-for-lockdown)

Source: 'Songs of Comfort and Hope'

## **CONCLUSION**

God commanded Aaron to bless the people, using a particular form of words. This blessing can be found at Numbers 6: 24-26. Jeff Benner of the Ancient Hebrew Research Center has his own translation of the Hebrew, which is as follows:

The LORD will kneel before you presenting gifts and will guard you with a hedge of protection.

The LORD will illuminate the wholeness of his being toward you bringing order and he will give you comfort and sustenance.

The LORD will lift up his wholeness of being and look upon you and he will set in place all you need to be whole and complete.