

Second Sunday of Easter – Year C

Sunday 27 April 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Ruth Kennedy, Digital Ministries Advisor, The Church of Scotland and Sports Chaplain to Scottish Cycling Mountain Bike Cross Country Race Series for her thoughts on the Second Sunday of Easter.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

When preparing a service, I love to let the Scripture readings percolate and when possible, read the passages a couple of weeks before the service, or at the start of the week. First, the reading selected, then again including the surrounding passages to have a wider perspective, before a close and slow reading of the passages again. My 'percolation time' (prayer and reflection) is usually outdoors; cycling, running, or a quick hike. I find immersing myself in God's wonderful creation is a place of Holy Spirit inspiration, a thin place. Maybe you have your own? I discover God revealing the purpose of the sermon and the threads that are right for those who will receive, beginning with me. For me, as a preacher, the Spirit brings the message to life in me first, before sharing it.

When some of the lectionary readings are not included in the worship that day, I like to see if I can base the prayers or songs on them.

We have a difficulty this week because each of our readings could have a month's worth of sermons on them alone! Each of these wonderful passages presents a wealth of opportunities for a sermon relevant to contemporary life and there are some shared themes to explore, too.

The London Marathon is on 27th April, offering many opportunities for metaphors about endurance and positive pressure (the cheering crowds), rather than oppressive voices. We could also consider these voices as internal pressures with the challenges of mental health stemming from negative self-talk and/or depressive, oppressive thoughts about ourselves and our situations. Here the light and hope of Jesus can break through, reminding us who our hope is, or can be in. This event is also a timely reminder about the world around us. Many are involved in sport, including approximately 54% of the adult Scottish population. How are we ministering to them? How are we supporting those believers whose mission field is the sporting community?

All four passages bring a word of encouragement to Jesus' followers to remain faithful when persecution or oppression comes, pointing to and reminding us whom our hope, trust, and faith is in. Why are we encouraged to stand firm? It is for continuity – to continue the works Jesus gave us to do. The passages from John and Acts in particular, highlight the continuation of the work of Christ in us who believe and that we are not to tire, nor be afraid to take the good news of the love, forgiveness, salvation, and grace of Jesus to those who have yet to know Him. There is an imperative to be intentional about sharing the treasure of Jesus with those beyond the group of believers. This often involves disrupting the status quo and discontinuing patterns of belief and behaviour in order to live transformed lives.

[Acts 5:27-32](#)

The number of the followers of the Way is growing! They have received heavenly power from the Holy Spirit and seen the birth of the Church. There seems to be a repetition of preaching with signs, wonders and miracles, together with persecution and imprisonment (due often to the anger of the Sanhedrin), but the faith community still grows! Stephen is then martyred and the Church scatters – taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Themes to notice in Acts include the continuation of the mission of Jesus - to Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth; and the love of the community of believers.

In verse 28, as an explanation of “bring this man's blood on us”, The Message offers us this wording - “trying your best to blame us for the death of this man.” In referring to the part of the verse where it says, “Strict orders not to” – the subtext to what the Sanhedrin are really saying is, *we told you that we wanted to protect our position, prestige, and safety, and warned you not to challenge it by teaching against it.* The accused also declare their success by following God and not the orders of the Sanhedrin. And what success they had!

In verse 29, F.F. Bruce notes Peter made the reply on behalf of the apostles – just as he did at Pentecost – by addressing the gathered crowd. Peter simply repeats the apostolic proclamation, highlighting the contrast between what the rulers of the people did to Jesus and what God did to Him. What boldness to speak truth to power! In verses 30 and 31, The Message includes, “the gift of a changed life and sins forgiven” which helps us understand repentance in our contemporary culture. The manner of the death of Christ was of utmost disgrace, but God’s mighty power gave utmost honour. The authority of God, who had commissioned the apostles as heralds of the Good News, was far greater than any human governance. F.F. Bruce also notes, the early church had an awareness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, such that it was the Spirit’s ‘organ of expression’.

To note:

Peter, the one who denied Christ three times, is preaching again for the second time with boldness to any who will hear. These disciples who hid in a locked room, are now out in the open, preaching so much that they have “filled Jerusalem” with their teaching. Hallelujah! Despite the persecutions they experienced (and knew were coming), they were utterly compelled to do what God instructed them to do; they looked to Christ, not to the harsh voices and worked with the Holy Spirit to bring the freedom of forgiveness in following the living Christ Jesus –

- Freedom from fear of human forces, societal pressures, and, now, online expectations.

- Forgiveness from denying Jesus and abandoning Him at the foot of the cross, doubt, and unbelief.

There was an imperative to share the Gospel of Jesus with those who did not know it in their community, the people needed to hear it in that sense.

To wonder, or do:

How are we intentionally loving those around us in our communities, responding with loving service and sharing the Gospel?

What about creating a short form video (90 seconds) for your social media platforms about the freedoms that being a follower of Jesus brings, inviting followers to explore more with you?

How about volunteering to help at a local race? Event organisers are always looking for marshals and it is a really practical way to serve the wider community!

[Psalm 118:14-29](#)

This is from the fifth book in Psalms, focussing on the Messianic King who defeats evil and brings God's Kingdom. It is often referred to as 'the Egyptian Hallel' and recited at the Passover Meal.

The psalm is about the Messianic Kingdom, helping sustain hope in a future exodus when God's people will be redeemed. Unlike other Psalms, it was not written as an historical account, or to answer historical questions, but is devoted to thankful praise of the Lord and was, and still is, often used for services of thanksgiving. It is a call to praise and rejoice with thanksgiving, where the opening formula of praise is repeated at the end; "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for His steadfast love endures for ever". Steadfast love is translated from the Hebrew 'hesed', encompassing mercy, loving kindness and compassion. It is one of the thirteen attributes of God that the Jewish sages drew from their study of God's revelation to Moses in Exodus 34.

The motif of using the name of "the Lord" connects us with the absolute source of our strength and remembering God is far greater than humankind, or our circumstances. The psalmist was able to resist the strength of the surrounding nations because of the great power, love, and protection of the Lord. Good news for us today, for indeed, God's 'hesed' love endures forever and we can rejoice because of what the Lord has done – easily a sermon in itself!

Interestingly, the psalm moves from the individual (I) to the community (we/us) and back to the individual. Commentators suggest the initial individual is a requesting entrance, then is accepted into the community and finally, there is one communal voice, as though praising as one. This is a beautiful depiction of unity.

In verses 22, 23 and 26, Jesus is identified as, “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” and also the once rejected stone, now most honoured – words Jesus later cites at the religious leaders. Luther suggests the people became angry with the psalmist and condemned Jesus and His disciples. It is the same today, but here is the reason for joy: those who humans cast aside, God honours.

Verse 24 (“this is the day”) creates a special occasion which is formed by what has happened. The events that occurred are the reason for the community to be glad, to pray and have hope for their own salvation. On Easter Sunday we celebrated God completing His work, becoming our salvation, by raising Jesus from the dead and making Christ the crux of all God's saving deeds.

To note:

It inspires an attitude of gratitude, shifting culture, helping us lift our eyes to God when our circumstances are hard, sore and we are feeling crushed, forgotten or rejected. Therefore, we have a reason to praise.

To wonder, or to do:

Why not provide a noticeboard where people can write or draw what they are praising God for this Sunday and share them the following week?

[Revelation 1:4-8](#)

Revelation was written in a time of uncertainty and persecution for the Asian Christians. They were experiencing societal and cultural pressure towards Emperor-worship and John exhorts them to remember and look on the peace that the grace of our Lord Jesus brings us, that God is without beginning or end, all power, might, praise and honour belonging to Him who is exalted. Keener suggests it is not clear if the Emperor was Nero or Domitian – both were wicked in their deeds.

John had a great emphasis and theme about the hope of the imminent return of Jesus. He urges us to stay strong in faith and we can find the comfort of Christ during suffering and persecution.

John writes to seven churches set about 50 miles apart but it is unclear why these specific churches were chosen. There were many others!

New Testament scholar, Robert Mounce suggests verses 4-8 are an introduction that follows the title and blessing in the first three verses. What begins as an expected greeting turns into praise to Christ, preparing us for the vision of Christ that is about to come and the centrality of the Lamb.

In verses 4 and 8, there is the threefold source of God; is, was, and is to come. In the uncertainty and persecution of that time, together with the uncertainty and temptation of apathy and cultural assimilation now, remembering the eternally existent God, without beginning and end, brings the certainty of God's timeless sovereignty.

In verse 4, Mounce notes 'grace and peace' which combine both Hellenistic and Hebrew greetings. Grace first because it is due to God's grace that people can enjoy peace (Metzger). All the Christological statements are wonderful assertions about the exalted Christ, declared sovereign over the Church, who has power and might and exhorts all readers and hearers to regard Christ appropriately.

Verse 8 in the Hebraic tradition ("the first and last") also includes everything in-between these two points. I love how John always keeps his recipient in mind, as this description is an encouragement to the persecuted believers of the time. For us as preachers, we need to keep our recipients in mind, too!

To note:

These verses really raise our faith to hope in the Lamb and pose the question, "In your current ache, where is your gaze?" We can help guide eyes upward to Almighty God.

To wonder, or to do:

How about praying for the persecuted Church? The organisation Open Doors that supports persecuted Christians, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/> has many resources. This might allow ministering with prayer and pastoral care for individuals.

[John 20:19-31](#)

This passage contains themes about God's love, the true humanity and divinity of Jesus, and the decision to believe in God. It refers to the second appearance of the risen Christ, preceding the disciple's ongoing mission. J.R. Michaels suggests the purpose of the book is to explain to the recipients that they are being asked to believe what is written and what

they hear, like the disciples were before Jesus appeared to them. Is the congregation ready to believe the Word of God?

In verse 19, we read of another enclosed space; tomb to room. Isn't it curious they were locked in a room, perhaps expecting destruction, given the marvellous news shared by the women in the morning? In their time of pain, confusion and fear, they gathered together. In verses 19-23 there is tender love from Jesus, giving them, again, the gift of peace. He drew so close to His disciples, they could feel Jesus' breath on them.

What a response in verse 20! Joy, rejoicing, gladness, or 'awestruck' (as in The Message). I imagine this did not last only a moment, but have lasted for some time!

For Burge, verse 22 is the "climax to the entire Gospel, where the Spirit is given to the disciples in a provocative and personal way". The role of the Spirit here – and in its outpouring in Acts – is to equip the disciples for mission, where the receiving in John is one of life (breath) and acts of power (fire). I must mention the humour of God in verse 24. Bultmann points out there is no mention of how Jesus left. It's up to our own imagining.

In verses 25-29, the love of the disciples is evident in their behaviour towards Thomas and Jesus' love for His disciples is obvious. The invitation to believe in Jesus is quite explicit. What is our response?

To note:

Mary and the women shared good news, but the disciples did not believe them, they doubted until they saw and heard Jesus. They in turn, shared with Thomas, who did not believe them, continuing to doubt until he saw and heard Jesus. There are times when we share the Good News of Jesus and it may well be doubted, but this must not dissuade us!

Consider the response of Jesus; there was an encounter with Him. The Holy Spirit is still at work in the world, bringing similar experiences to people. We must therefore, continue to do our part.

This passage is similar to Acts, where we see the followers of the Way hiding in fear or facing oppression from religious rulers in their society. What are we hiding in fear from? We see Jesus meeting them in their fear and speaking peace and life to them, releasing them from this fear. Why not take what we are fearful of to the Lord, asking God to meet us as Jesus met the disciples and receive the holy peace and life that God brings?

We might create space after or during the sermon, where musical worship could be played as people do this.

Sermon ideas

There are sermon and creative suggestions in the exegesis. Also, the passages offer a sermon flow that begins with the self to God and to those not yet connected with faith.

Firstly, consider how we are. Are we locked in a room? Do we know others who are locked in a room, either individually, or wider as a church?

Secondly, how are we remembering and perceiving God in these current situations? As we draw close to look upon the pierced Christ, we are close enough to feel He is breathing on us and flooding us with His forgiveness, mercy and grace. Our faith thus increases and the Spirit comforts, guides and empowers us so that we do not live in our own strength.

Finally, the purpose and application of this is to be involved and engaged with the communities around us, in which there are the lives of many who do not yet know the Gospel. We respond to them with loving service, walking alongside them and sharing Jesus with every step.

In this post-Christendom society where Church is marginalised, the need for Christ is great. The 'Belief in Britain' report (2025), 82% of Generation Z (born approximately 1996 - 2010) identify as spiritual, compared with 22% of Generation X (born approximately 1966-1980). The younger demographics, whilst less interested in institutionalised religion, are desperately seeking connectivity and answers from God.

Take a look at [The-Devils-Gospels-Report final.pdf](#)

This relates to the conclusions of the Talking Jesus report (2022). [2022 Talking Jesus Research Report](#)

Where is the Holy Spirit bringing grace so we can be part of the longed-for Jesus continuation this week?

Questions for an alternative approach to a sermon may include:

- Have you wondered what the disciples might have been doing that evening, had they believed Mary and the women?
- Consider our response to those who share the Gospel with us – do we overlook them or doubt it?
- How might we help those who are sharing the Good News in hard places where it is not being readily believed or received?

Prayers

Gathering/call to worship: Psalm 118 offers an effective call to worship; ‘This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!’

Thanksgiving/gratitude: adapted from Psalm 118

God’s my strength, and also my song,
and now, God is my salvation.

Hear the shouts, hear the triumph songs

“The hand of God has turned the tide!

The hand of God is raised in victory!”

So, swing wide the city gates—the *righteous* gates!

I’ll walk right through and thank God right now!

This Temple Gate belongs to God,
so we enter and praise.

Thank You for responding to us;

You are truly our salvation!

Your work takes the discarded, rejected, dejected and gives honour, value, purpose and worth.

We can hardly believe it!

This is the very day *You do this* and we celebrate with hearts full of gratitude and joy.

Bathe us in light.

Breathe on us.

Be here in the midst of us.

As one, we say:

You are my God, and I thank You.

O my God, I lift high Your praise.

Thank God—who is so good.

God’s love never quits and so we rejoice. Amen!

Confession/Repentance. It is important to remember repentance is ‘turning back to God’ and as we pray these prayers, that they echo our actions of realising where we have our back turned to God and God’s ways. Therefore, we confess, receive forgiveness and draw closer to God.

Holy God,

My words so often fall short in expressing my gratitude to You.

We have every reason to praise You, our faithful God,
to give thanks to the God of love, and yet, we fail to.

We forget to.

But not today.

Today, we say, “blessed are You, oh Lord our God, whose love endures forever.”

On those days when our praise is on mute,

please forgive us and strengthen our voices to speak of Your love and justice into the
heavens and on this earth.

There are days when our perceptive sight is switched off.

Forgive us, lift and soften our gaze to You and to others,
so we perceive ourselves and others as You do.

There are days we choose to ignore You, others' stories and cries of help, or think You are
uninterested in ours.

We are sorry, God.

Through Your Spirit, please gift to us an increased sensitivity to Your presence and love for
ourselves and others.

Heavenly God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

it is only by our faith in Jesus we can ask for and receive forgiveness.

Even though we might not see You on the cross like Your disciples did,
we believe You made a way for our forgiveness,

to wipe our slate clean and You rejoice over us with singing.

On this day, the day You, our Lord have made, we can, and do, rejoice
and pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Prayer for others / Intercession. When praying for others, I like to think about matters which are internal to the individual, the communities constituted by individuals, the wider Body of Christ and the world. Often in my prayer time, God will lead me to pray for topical issues or events, or I might be moved with compassion (sometimes tears!) about a news item that week. When leading worship, these can often be exactly what God wants us to bring into our corporate prayers. Scripture has many wonderful ways of being weaved into our prayers, this prayer includes words from the reading in Revelation.

Prayer:

To You who is, who was and who is to come,
who loved us and washed us from our sins,
who has made us Kings and priests to God,
to You be glory and power forever and ever.

Jesus,
You are our faithful witness, interceding at the throne of God for us.
We are Your faithful witnesses here on earth and we intercede for those here.

For those who are voiceless, stumbling, or in need,
we praise You when our loved ones cannot, standing in the gap for them as they navigate difficult circumstances.
We cry out to You for help and healing,
for those of us who are struggling with depression and oppressive, confusing thoughts which conflict our souls and impact our mental health and wellbeing.
Free us from being tangled in the net, set to trap and hold us, so we soar like free birds, on Your wings.

We think of young people and students who are now in their exam season.
Give them and their families peace, reminding them that You are with them every day.

Tender Lord, we pray for those sent into mission fields, as we all are.
In particular, we pray for those sent into the sporting community, that their competitive natures do not lead them astray,
but that You make them compassionate and bold in their faith
and that You would open doors for Your church to minister well in this area.

Your word tells us You are the ruler of the Kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5), and in all the earth,
one in seven believers face persecution and discrimination.
God, bring righteous rulers to these countries to end this persecution and strengthen our brothers and sisters to remain faithful to You, as You are faithful to them and their families.

Help us all, Holy Spirit, to remember Jesus is our hope, trust and faith –
the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord God Almighty and whose praise is forever on our lips.
In the name of the One who is faithful and true,
Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

Blessing / Closing prayer

We have drawn near to You today, Jesus
and You have drawn near to us.
Before we leave this space,

breathe on us again, Your life in us stirring up our faith
and encouraging us to be Your living witnesses.
For surely today, and every day is the day You have made
and so we rejoice and are glad in it.

Grace and peace to you from Him who is, who was, and who is to come,
for this blessing and the joy of the Lord is on you and with you and those you love,
today and every God-made day. Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 48 – “Let our praise be your welcome” – an opportunity for gathering together and opening hearts for worship.
- GWA 124 – “How great the chasm that lay between us” – a heartfelt account of God’s saving work through the events of Easter.
- CH4 432 – “How often, we like Thomas,” – ties in well with the passage from John 20.
- CH4 363 – “We have a gospel to proclaim” – ties in with Peter’s speech in Acts 5.

- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout the Easter period can be found on the Church of Scotland website <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/easter>

Two more recently written songs really appeal to me:

- Baptist Hymnal (2008) 99 – “Give thanks to the Lord” (actual title: ‘Forever’) CCLI No. 3148428 [Give thanks to the Lord - Music Ministry](#)
- ‘Gratitude’ by Brandon Lake (Bethel Music Publishing) [Andrea & Angus - Gratitude | Sanctuary First](#) or [Gratitude \(Chosen Performance\) - Brandon Lake](#)

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.

- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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