

# Collect, Readings and Reflection for 27 April 2025, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

## **Collect** *(the Church's prayer for today):*

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace,  
to the praise of God the Father.

**Amen.**

**Readings:** John 20:19-end; Acts 5:27-32

*Today's reflection is by Reader Cal Bailey:*

### **From Fear to Confidence**

I wonder if you know what it is to be afraid? Afraid of a teacher – perhaps – with the power to hurt you in front of your friends; afraid of a bully, or someone with a weapon; afraid of an unjust judge with the power to lock you up; afraid – if you are an illegal immigrant – of being sent back home where you will be tortured? Afraid of not having enough money to feed your family or pay the rent? Afraid of losing your job, and feeling the need to work extra hard, to suck up to the boss, and to say things that are untrue? There are people in our church over recent years for whom each of these has been true. “On that evening on the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, the doors were locked for fear of the Jews...”

The disciples were afraid. They had seen soldiers bully many people, including Jesus; they had seen the Governor Pilate determine that Jesus was innocent, then guilty a few minutes later, because of his own fear of appearing disloyal to Caesar. Jesus had been put to death in a brutal way which said: ‘this is where power is round here. Conform or die.’ Afraid too of their own denials, their inability to stand by their friend, their shame. Yet not longer after this they were in court themselves charged with disobedience. Far from cowering in fear, they were bold: “We must obey God rather than men.”

They had gone from fear to confidence in a few short weeks. When I was a young Christian, looking for evidence of the resurrection, this was often cited – the transformation of the disciples is good evidence that something happened which caused them to change, something big enough to give them the courage to be fearless, to overcome shame, to withstand beatings and even death. John offers two reasons why the disciples were transformed in this dramatic passage in verses 30-31: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples. But these are written 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.”

Let's ask 2 questions: firstly, what is the significance of them believing that Jesus was the Messiah? Secondly, what is the significance of them believing that he was the Son of God? Understanding these things has been central for me, in coming to believe that God is good, and that God is powerful – both central things to believe if we are to find the life John talks about.

Why is it so important to John that we believe that Jesus is the Messiah? It's because John wants us to know that we can trust God. John tells us that Jesus is the Messiah in order to assure us that God keeps his promises. The Old Testament is the story of God's promises to the chosen people. John's gospel is the story of how all these promises find their yes in Christ. Jesus is the new Moses, who gives people bread in the wilderness. Jesus is the new Elijah, who raises a beloved man from death. Jesus is the new Isaiah, who speaks for God's people in exile and becomes the suffering servant who takes away the people's sins. Jesus is the new Jeremiah, who meets God's people in a time of desperation and scarcity and gives them joy and abundance, bringing home all the outcasts and the excluded to his wondrous kingdom. Jesus is the new Ezekiel, offering in his own body the new Temple that reconciles the people to God. And God does to Jesus one thing that never happened to any of the prophets: God raises Jesus to new life. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the one promised by God, and God keeps those promises, and Jesus fulfils God's promises and makes new promises, and in the resurrection Jesus keeps those promises too. So God is good. You can trust God.

Let's turn to the second question, what is the significance of them believing that he was the Son of God?

Why does this title matter so much? Why, when it comes to summarizing his gospel in a single sentence, does John choose the title Son of God alongside Messiah to identify Jesus? Well, because there was one man in the ancient world who habitually assigned to himself this title, a man who ruled the known universe and had the power of life and death over pretty much every living thing that moved or breathed on the face of the earth. And that man was the Roman Emperor. The Roman Emperor called himself the Son of God. So when we read in Mark and Matthew's gospels that when Jesus breathed his last on the cross and the centurion said 'Truly this man was the Son of God', we're not talking about a centurion who carefully did the sums in his head – 'darkness, drama, agonizing suffering, true goodness ... it all adds up to – well whaddya know – it's the one and only Son of God'. No, it's far more significant than that. The centurion, the man who put Jesus to death, stands at the foot of the cross, sees a dying man and proclaims 'This dying man is my true Emperor, and I shall be loyal to him even if it costs me my loyalty to the so-called Emperor in Rome. This man, not the Emperor, is the real Son of God.' It's a sensational statement for a Roman commander to make.

And we get a similar statement from Thomas in today's gospel. After Jesus has fulfilled all the promises of God in appearing to the disciples on the first day of the week, proving himself to be the Messiah, he comes back a week later and appears again, this time with Thomas present, and what does Thomas say? 'My Lord and my God' – in Latin 'Dominus deusque' – another title given to the Roman Emperor.

What Thomas sees is power over death. Jesus stands before him, having died on the cross just ten days earlier. This is power – awesome, astonishing, glorious power – and power in the hands of one who continues to be gracious, loving and forgiving even after his disciples' betrayal, denial, and desertion. This is good power. Power not used to ride roughshod over enemies to make them cower, to deprive them of freedom. It is power used to invite us to bow the knee, as the Centurion did; or to confess as Thomas did. This is good power. So we begin to see why John feels like this is the moment to sum up his gospel. He's shown us that the God of Israel is faithful, keeps promises, and fulfils scripture. God is good. And he's shown us that the God of the whole world puts Roman might to shame, and overcomes even the horror of death. God is powerful. John demonstrates how God meets our doubts and scepticism at every turn. God is good and God is powerful. This is the God who transforms the disciples' fear into confidence.

So we too can have reason to let our fears dissolve in wonder; and our shame be transformed into confidence. Not self-confidence but confidence in God.

And I think I detect a growth in our confidence in God here at St James. I wonder if you have read our annual report yet? It describes a church which is developing this kind of God-confidence. Confidence which thinks about, decides, builds and starts to operate a Pantry; confidence to *give* - enough to meet our needs, and a bit more to refurbish our church and yet more to give away; confidence to organise events and know we'll get the help to run them; confidence to step out at work in a way which insists on being good as well as being profitable. God is building our confidence.

We've been helped in that journey by Jonathan, whose confidence in God is infectious. His work over 6 ½ years here has been outstandingly faithful, diligent and good. He and Rebecca start a sabbatical in a couple of weeks, and will be away until early August. Today we're going to pray for them; we'll pray that they will know *God's* goodness and power – not the *Roman* sort, which demands conformity, but the Jesus version which comes through trusting God's promises; through believing ever more deeply that it's in him that we find life; through applying this trust in all our circumstances, even the difficult ones.

I wonder where God is wanting you to trust him next?

Amen.