

# St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

April 2026

## *Weekly Worship Resources*

### **12 April – Knowing together**

Peter, a disciple of Jesus, becomes a wise and inspiring leader of the Early Church. He writes to Christians who are living in scattered communities across the eastern Mediterranean area. Peter encourages them to stay faithful in the face of lots of difficulties and persecution.

Peter writes to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who are experiencing persecution, a test of their faith – faith that is clear even without having seen the one in whom they believe. This prompts questions about how we know Jesus. Though we haven't seen Jesus, we know him. We all have different ways of knowing and growing in our faith. As a church community, we can share our experiences, supporting each other in our journeys of faith.

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Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 2 Year A: Acts 2.14a,22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1.3-9; **John 20.19-31**

John 20:19-31 [NIV]

### **Jesus Appears to His Disciples**

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

### **Jesus Appears to Thomas**

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

### **The Purpose of John’s Gospel**

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

### **Thought for the week: Expressing indescribable joy**

In 1 Peter 1:8 we hear the term ‘indescribable and glorious joy’. How can we describe ‘indescribable joy’ if it is not possible to describe it?! Here is a suggestion for the type of joy we are talking about. A group of Bible translators were translating the Bible into the language of the Inuit people in the Arctic. They were

translating John 20:20 (where the disciples were overjoyed at seeing Jesus) and were struggling to find a word for overjoyed or rejoiced. It was feeding time for the huskies and one of the translators noticed how overjoyed the dogs were when they were given their meat. So, one of the translators asked an Inuit person to describe the dogs at that point. The translator noted what they said and had a go at translating John 20:20. The Inuit all laughed when he announced 'Then the disciples all wagged their tails when they saw the Lord'. What better way to show joy than enthusiastic tail wagging! This is an image we can relate to.

The joy Peter tries to describe in the letter is all the more remarkable when we understand it is joy ascribed to a collection of churches spread out in exile. Their exile might be better understood as being 'resident aliens', living in persecution, at odds with the dominant culture. Peter stated clearly that the churches he was writing to knew Jesus and this was a result of their faith: 'Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls' (vv.8-9). Though they were suffering, their trust in Christ was giving them hope and joy.

Is our situation similar? Living a life centred around Jesus, we could, and perhaps should, be at odds with the dominant culture that very often is the opposite of life-giving. This passage gives us encouragement that we can know God, even, or especially, in challenging times. Peter was an apostle who knew Jesus first-hand, but the churches he wrote to had not known Jesus. But their joy was through their faith in an invisible, but tangible God. There is a feeling that hope is in short supply in our era, with inequality, war, and impending climate catastrophe hanging over us. Can we, like the churches Peter writes to, see beyond the

earthly and celebrate our faith, our knowing Jesus, with joy so great it is akin to tail-wagging huskies at feeding time?



### **A prayer of adoration**

God unseen, yet seeing all, knowing all of us, loving all of us: we bring our adoration.

Jesus, making God known to us in your coming among us: we bring our adoration.

Holy Spirit, drawing us together as we worship: we bring our adoration. Amen

### **19 April – Breaking bread**

Two disciples walk back from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They are in despair about the death of Jesus. Jesus appears and walks beside them, but they do not recognise him. He teaches them from the Scriptures, and they see who he is when he breaks bread with them.

The Gospel passage prompts questions about how we know Jesus: Cleopas and his friend only recognised Jesus when he blessed and broke bread. This act, whether eucharistic or in everyday hospitality, is profound. This week, we explore knowing Jesus in breaking bread and hospitality and consider the stories Jesus was telling before they recognised him.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 3 Year A: Acts 2.14a,36-41; Psalm 116.1-4,12-19; 1 Peter 1.17-23; **Luke 24.13-35**

Luke 24:13-35 [NIV]

### **On the Road to Emmaus**

<sup>13</sup>Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup>As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup>but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup>He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup>One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

<sup>19</sup>“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup>The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup>but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup>In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup>but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

<sup>25</sup>He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup>As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

<sup>33</sup>They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup>and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” <sup>35</sup>Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

### **Thought for the week: Finding intimacy in the act of sharing bread**

When did you last give someone some bread? When did you last receive bread? Who gave it to you? Cleopas and his friend spent time talking with Jesus without realising his identity, but it was in the breaking of the bread that they recognised him. Bread is more than a foodstuff or even a staple; it transcends human cultures and communities and has a place in the soul of many religions and ways of life. Breaking bread together can be a profound experience. The act of spending time together, welcoming and offering hospitality, is central to our faith. Do we sometimes find we are always the ones welcoming? How easy is it for us to receive, especially from those who may be more marginalised than us, or have less power?

Methodist minister and theologian Inderjit Bhogal talked of a homeless man, Albert, that he knew in Sheffield and who would visit a certain bakery at the end of the day. He would willingly receive whatever they had left over, but he wouldn't store it up for

himself, he would share it with his homeless brothers and sisters in need. When Inderjit asked him for his thoughts on bread, Albert immediately brought out a range of breads from his bag, handing them to Inderjit one by one to taste, describing them, including his favourite rye cob. Inderjit described this profound experience as being 'the guest of honour at a table in the wilderness'

We all need opportunities to give and to receive, to host and to be guests. For some of us, serving becomes so much a part of our identity that we can find it hard to stop, sit down and let someone else serve us, to break bread with us. There is a humility in allowing others to look after us and this isn't always easy. We all have gifts to offer and potential to explore. Whatever our background, however marginalised we may be in society, as Albert was, we can serve as well as be served. Albert shared the little he had with his community and with Inderjit. Can we accept gifts from everyone? It can be challenging for churches to find a way for the young, marginalised 'other' in our church to offer their gifts. But it is important we model an intergenerational community of mutual sharing that allows everyone to work together to find the gifts they have to share, where each can give as they are able and where all serve in some capacity. Albert had very little, and shared what he had. The breaking of bread here brought intimacy and community. The breaking of bread at Emmaus allowed Cleopas and his friend this intimacy and community too as they recognised Jesus. As we break bread together perhaps we too can find intimacy with God and community with one another.



### **A prayer of confession**

Lord, we confess that we live our lives distracted by so many things.

So often this is when things aren't going the way we think they should, like the pair who trod the Emmaus road.

Our feet carry us forward, but our thoughts go round in circles; and at such times, when you come to us, Lord, we often fail to recognise you.

We are sorry and ask you to reveal yourself to us afresh.

### **Assurance of forgiveness**

All-seeing, all-knowing, and ever-present God, you understand how easily we are caught up by life's cares, spiralling into despair and distance.

Yet in your grace, O Lord, you forgive us and walk the way with us, welcoming us back into your presence.

You feed our souls with comfort and hope, teaching us to see life in a new light. Amen

### **26 April – Gateway to life**

Jesus talks about the safety and dangers of caring for sheep. The shepherd calls his sheep by name, and the sheep know the shepherd's voice, but will run away from strangers. The Pharisees do not understand that Jesus is referring to himself. Jesus also says that he is the gate of the sheepfold, and whoever enters by him will be saved.

This passage invites us to reflect on listening to Jesus' voice, as the sheep follow him alone. The image of Jesus being the gate is very powerful and leads the sheep, and us, to an abundance of life. We consider how we might follow Jesus' voice to the life we are in need of.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 4 Year A: Acts 2.42-47;  
Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2.19-25; **John 10.1-10**

John 10:1-10 [NIV]

### **The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**

**10** “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

### **Thought for the week: Knowing God’s voice**

Have you noticed how we herd sheep? It’s from behind, perhaps with a sheep dog, or even a quad bike, guiding them where they need to go, encouraging them in a certain direction. We think of sheep dog trials, where shepherds and their dogs race to round up the sheep in record time. But the sheep do know the shepherd’s voice.

The method was different in Jesus’ time and in the Middle East even today. As John’s Gospel shows, the shepherd goes before the sheep and has a series of calls that the sheep recognise. They

also know his or her voice and each sheep really would have a name that the shepherd would call. For safety, in times of bad weather or under threat of attack, the shepherd would use a sheep pen that would actually be more like a courtyard. The gate to this would be kept by a gatekeeper and they would only let the shepherd through. In this passage Jesus says: 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep' (v.7).

A recent trip to Morocco showed a remarkable illustration to this statement of Jesus. The Moroccan camel herders needed to keep their camels safe at night in the desert. The camels were penned in and the herders themselves lay down to complete the enclosure. They are the gate for the camels, risking themselves with the wild animals and other threats of the desert at night. Similarly, Jesus is the one who protects the sheep from the threats around them. The 'thieves and bandits' (v.8) who came before were ignored by the sheep as they did not recognise their voices. Jesus, the gate, did not let them prevail.

Voice is a very powerful sound. I have caught my breath before when hearing the voice of someone who had died on discovering an old voicemail message. We can still recognise voices that we may not have heard for many years. But do we recognise God's voice calling us by name? I wonder where God's voice is calling to us personally today? Perhaps it is calling us into safety, away from things that aren't good for us. Maybe this is you. Or perhaps it is calling us to pasture, like the sheep. God knows what is good for us, and what we need. Perhaps, like the sheep, we need to go to pasture, to rest, maybe, to eat good and nourishing food, and to lie down. Can we listen for God's voice together, attentively, and follow what God is calling us to, both individually and collectively?



### **Call to worship**

Listen to the voice that is calling you.  
Reject the other things calling you away.  
Follow where Jesus leads.  
Enter the gateway to new life.  
Come, live life to the full.

### **A gathering prayer**

Heavenly Father, our shepherd, let us follow your voice as you lead us to rest and peace and life everlasting. Amen

### **A prayer of approach**

Good Shepherd, we know your voice and we heed your call to us now to come into your presence and gather before you, to receive succour for our souls. Amen

### **03 May – There's a place for you**

Peter encourages Christian communities facing persecution that they are specially called by God and given a new identity as 'living stones', built together like a new temple, supported by Jesus the cornerstone. The believers should keep on trusting and praising God who has shown them light and mercy.

Like the church in 1 Peter, we might question our place in the world and how we navigate life and all its complexities. This week, we learn that even amid our doubts and fears, God has a place for us.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 5 Year A: **1 Peter 2.2-10**; Psalm 31.1-5,15-16; Acts 7.55-60; John 14.1-14

1 Peter 2.2-10 [NIV]

<sup>2</sup>Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

### **The living Stone and a chosen people**

<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – <sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.’

<sup>7</sup>Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,’

<sup>8</sup>and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful

light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **Thought for the week**

If you've ever seen the musical *West Side Story* you might recall the wonderful song, 'Somewhere', which repeats the line 'There's a place for us'. The musical is based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a story about two young people from warring social groups who fall in love. Both feel out of place with where they've come from and face further alienation and rejection because of their desire to be together.

The words of that song are a wonderful summary of the Christian call to live differently. It says, 'We'll find a new way of living, we'll find a way of forgiving ... Somewhere'.

In one of today's lectionary passages, 1 Peter 2, Peter is speaking of the Church being a special people, set apart for God. But Peter starts this passage by reminding us that the one we are built upon – our cornerstone, Jesus – was rejected by humans. From his birth, through his ministry and to his death, Jesus wasn't given a 'place' to be. He was rejected by the religious authorities, by the Roman rulers, and he was even rejected by those closest to him.

Peter reminds us that Jesus overcame that rejection to become the cornerstone on which the Church is built, and that it is built with living stones – that means us! Because of Jesus' rejection, death and resurrection, we can now be God's special people, set apart, together. There's a place for us!

This also means that anyone who faces rejection or loneliness from the world can find a place to belong in God's church. That might feel like a challenge to us. As with the gangs in *West Side Story*, we can prefer to be with people who we know or seem

most like us, or we can assume that those from other social groups won't want to be around us.

God's church is made up of all of us, misfits who follow the way of this countercultural messiah. We are 'God's own people'. We are called to proclaim God's works and demonstrate his grace, mercy and love. Perhaps as we think about the call to be this chosen people, we might remember the words of 'Somewhere' and consider how we might create a place where there is space for all of us, and all who hunger for belonging.

Some questions to consider:

- Where do you know there's a place for you? Draw a picture or talk to someone.
- Who do you know who often feels rejected? How might you encourage and include them?
- What can we learn from Jesus in how he faced rejection?



### **A prayer of praise**

Thank you, precious Lord,

that we are called to be living stones.

Confident knowing our place, and generous enough

to go out and live our lives serving others,

helping them to find their place in you. Amen



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**New International Version (NIV)**

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