

'Spiritual Communion' in the weeks after Easter

*You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place. The words in **bold** you are encouraged to say out loud as worship and prayer.*

Opening Prayer

The Church of which we are members is not defined by the walls of a building but by the Body of Christ of which we are members.

We are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life'.

Opening Sentences Reminding us of our Easter Joy

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia, Alleluia, alleluia.**

I am the first and the last, says the Lord, and the living one;
I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. **Alleluia.**
He has defeated the powers of death. **Alleluia.**
He turns our sorrow into dancing. **Alleluia.**



Prayers of Preparation and Confession

Almighty God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

We are all pilgrims on a journey with you, Lord.
May we contemplate your time on earth that, with Your help,
We might follow in your footsteps.

Knowing that God loves us unconditionally, we can afford to be honest about how we are.
How has the last week been, and how do I feel now?

I remind myself that, as I sit here now,
God is gazing on me with love and holding me in being.

You may wish to pray
Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.



A reading from the Gospel

Read John 10 v1-10 (A reflection attached to the end of the service sheet)

Intercessions

Let us pray for the needs of the world, for our local community, and for those close to you.

End with the Lord's Prayer. **Our Father...**

Let us give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now and in the week ahead.

Lord, you created me to live in freedom.
May your Holy Spirit guide me to follow you freely.
May I never take the gift of freedom,
or the great blessing of freedom of spirit for granted.

**O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.**

Here are words you may trust.
Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead:
He is our salvation, **our eternal glory.**
If we die with Him, **we shall live with Him;**
If we endure with Him, **we shall reign with Him.**
For he has broken the power of death;
and brought life and immortality through the gospel. (2 Timothy 2.11-13)

Blessing and Peace

May the Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

The Peace of the Lord be always with you



Reflection on John 1 v 1-10

In recent weeks it would seem we have become somewhat penned in. We have been told there are things we cannot do and places we cannot go. Like sheep in a pen we have been restricted and locked-down. In many ways we have lost our freedom. So at the moment we might be able to relate a little better than usual to the analogy of sheep in the fold. Waiting to be let out. In the meantime looking for breaks in the fencing, holes in the perimeter, ways to be free! We might turn to voices we would not usually turn to for murmurs of hope and signs of freedom. Listening for a voice, perhaps any voice, that would call us out of the fold. I wonder whether by now you are longing to be let out into pastures new?

This experience of lockdown is one I have seen many times as a prison Chaplain. All of a sudden a prisoner has no say as to where they go, or when. No choice about what they eat or who they spend time with. Penned in as it were with little or no choice to leave. It is possible to become quite angry, anxious, depressed in such a situation. To forget familiar voices and seek another exit strategy to the one we know is safe and real. Frustration and resentment settles in.

Yet I have observed that in times of lockdown it is also possible to become more creative and hopeful. Some people assume that life somehow stops when the prison door closes. That prison is like a vortex where Time stands still until the sentence is served. The truth is Life's journey can, and does, continue inside. And isn't this true of our time of societal lockdown as well. Life's journey has not stopped for our hearts and minds are forever free to wander.

A few years ago now I read a book called 'The Diving Bell and the Butterfly' in which a previously successful executive fashion editor in Paris finds himself paralysed after suffering a massive stroke. He tells the story of how 'locked in his body' his mind continued its imaginative journey. While limited by the physical prison of a body that didn't work he was eventually able to write and be creative by flickering one eyelid to a translator! It seems that like a butterfly, the journey of the mind cannot be controlled or told where to go and when. It reminded me of the truth that serving a sentence is sometimes the beginning of the real business of being alive. Questions of faith such as how we find forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, peace and salvation from others, from ourselves and perhaps from God become unavoidable when we are locked down.

Jesus shares the story of the Shepherd and the sheep acknowledging that we need someone to lead us in life. In many senses this is never more true than in times like we are in now. Times of slowness and limitation. It is all the more important that we have someone to show us the Gate through which we can find good pasture and a source of sustenance at these moments. Because we can understandably be frustrated when we are locked in the fold, looking for another way out, listening for other voices to calm our frustrations and remove the obstacles that frustrate us. But today's Bible passage tells us the freedom we seek comes through a journey that begins with acknowledging the facts of where we are. To understand that we can always choose to move on from fear and frustration to creativity and freedom. Perhaps Christ comes to show us that we have the freedom to leave the sheepfold of anxiety and anger whenever we want to if we will choose a path of freedom that comes from where we are now and not a vision of something different. Let us listen for His voice in these times.