

Dear everyone,

Attached below our reflection for this week written by Karen Hatch before the sad news of the death of HRH Prince Philip.

We will continue to send our weekly reflections until the end of May, particularly for those who feel unable to join us in churches for our services.

Please do contact me if you need any help or support or would like prayers said for anyone you know in need. Prayers can be offered publically in our services or confidentially by me.

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The service this Sunday 11th. April has been changed to 9am. at All Saints, Leamington Hastings and will include an act of remembrance and prayers for the life of Prince Philip.

A prayer for the Duke of Edinburgh;

*"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."
Matthew ch. 25 v. 21*

*God of Majesty,
Give rest to your servant Philip
Who, having served his Queen and Country,
Has passed from this life,
Full of years yet strong in spirit.
As we give thanks for his life,
As Prince and husband,
As consort and family man,
We pray that all he has done
May continue to bear fruit
In the lives of individuals.
We ask this in the name of Jesus
Our risen Lord.
Amen.*

Readings for the Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Reflection on John 20:19-31

Karen Hatch

In last week's Gospel reading we heard that Jesus had risen from the dead and the disciples Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene had reported that she had seen the Lord and she told the disciples what He had said to her.

So why do you think the disciples would be hiding in a locked room; as we hear in this week's Gospel reading from John? (See reading below) Why are they not looking for Jesus?

Could they have been worried about what Jesus would say or do? Maybe they were feeling guilty because they had all deserted Him when He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter had followed Jesus when He was taken away, but even he had denied knowing Jesus three times, as Jesus had predicted.

The disciples must have felt very ashamed of themselves. Maybe they were frightened of how Jesus would react? Would he be angry with them? But what did Jesus do? He enters the room and he says to them, "*Peace be with you*". These words are the exact opposite of fear and shame and anxiety. Jesus is saying to them that everything is okay; He is not angry. He knows their weaknesses and their mistakes, but He loves them anyway. He does not mentioned what has happened before, but as verse 22 tells us; "*He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'*".

This is a reminder of Genesis 2:7: "*Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live.*" God breathed on Adam and he began to live. In John 20, Jesus breathes on his disciples and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are re-born.

What does this mean for us today? Perhaps we are often like the disciples, trying to hide from God. Have you ever tried to lock your heart away from Jesus like the disciples locking the door? I know that I have, frequently over the years. Maybe something you have done in the past, something you are ashamed of or maybe fear of the future. Sometimes we are frightened of what Jesus might think of us or even fear of what Jesus might want us to do for Him! So we try to lock our hearts to keep Jesus out.

But what does Jesus do; He comes and stands among us. Jesus shows the disciples that everything is okay and He does the same for us. He knows all our failures, our weaknesses; He knows everything about us, but He loves us anyway and He wants us to receive the Holy Spirit and live. He invites us to start afresh and go back to the beginning. We can try to hide and lock our hearts but Jesus loves us so much that He will seek us out and He will say "*Peace be with you*"

The Easter story is about re-creation, about starting again from the beginning. Jesus will seek us out but He does not force Himself on anyone. In Revelation 3:20 the risen Christ says "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will eat with him, and he with me.*"

More than anything else, Jesus wants a *relationship* with us. He does not force His way in, or come to condemn us; Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts in order to say, "*Peace be with you*", and to breathe the Holy Spirit on us and bring us to new life, to give us a fresh start, a new beginning.

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

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

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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!" ²⁷ 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."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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