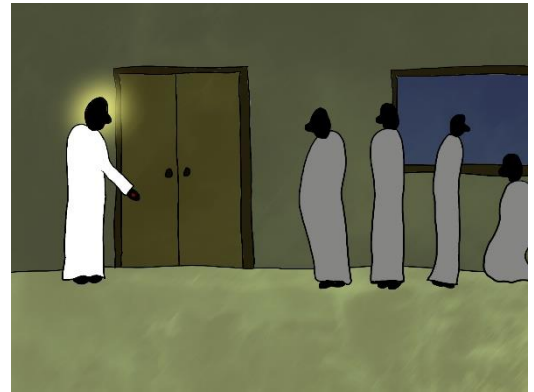


Parish of Central Exeter

2nd Sunday in Easter 11th April 2021

Behind Locked Doors

The reflections this morning are from Sheila, intercessions from Caroline. Many thanks to you both. We have reused some of the material from the Easter Day sheet, as it is still appropriate!



Welcome everyone.

Holy God, Lover of your children:
the tomb has been opened,
and we dance into your future.
Your life has dawned on us,
and we surround you with our praise.
You reach out your hand,
and lead us into joy.

Preparing for worship

We gather:
a community of faith in God's subversive world.
We gather to celebrate
that no darkness can extinguish light,
to remember
that love will always be more powerful than death,
and to trust that
peace will always be stronger than violence.

We gather,
people of faith in the light of God's world.
Welcome to worship.

(written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on [hold this space])

Gathering Hymn

'Alleluia, alleluia, Give thanks to the risen Lord.' In this version we have a trumpet interspersed with the singing to give a glorious and triumphant start to the service. Words and music are on the screen – so you can sing along too!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f9pH_yioGE

Call to Confession

Death could not hold You,
and in Your life is our life.

Prayer of Confession

Risen Lord, You sing over us this morning,
Yet You know that sometimes we drown out Your song.
We sing a different tune, of discord and division.
We don't want to hear of Your harmony or Your help
and turn down Your accompaniment in our lives.

Forgive us God,
for the ways in which we hurt and harm those around us,
the ways in which we hurt and harm ourselves, in word and deed,
and damage the life of Your world.
Forgive us too for the ways in which we have failed to say and to do
those things that would have brought life to ourselves and to others.

Cleanse us and restore us;
refresh us and inspire us
that we would realize again
our need of each other and of You,

that we might be Your community of the resurrection,
abundant in Your grace and power
to tell of Your wonder and sing of Your care. **Amen.**

(written by Rev. David McNeish, Minister of Milestone Church, West Mainland of Orkney. It was posted on the Church of Scotland's Weekly Worship website.)

Words of Assurance

The psalmist says,
*"I am sure I shall see the goodness of our God
in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord;
be strong,
and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!"*
Amen.



Alternative collect for Easter Day

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.

Worship music

‘Crown Him with many crowns’. Sung for us here by the Huddersfield Choral Society.
Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiJYgC_6AFc

New Testament Reading

Acts 4: 32-25 The Believers Share Their Possessions

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Prayer before the Gospel reading

Christ who appeared to your disciples
when the doors were shut;
appear unto all of those in the world today
who live their lives behind closed doors.

Send your Living Word through our locked doors
and into our guarded hearts
that we might be witnesses of your grace
and couriers of your goodness.

Gospel Reading John 20: 19-23

Jesus appears to his disciples

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."

Reflection

The risen Jesus' first words to his frightened friends behind a locked door in Jerusalem on that first Easter day was 'Peace be with you'. This was not a simple greeting, a hello, but the *shalom*, the wholeness and healing gift from God. It is not the peace that brings merely an absence of conflict or anxiety, but the peace that means our hearts need not be troubled and we need not be afraid (John 14:27). It is the peace and reconciliation to God and to each other that is available to us now through Jesus' death on the cross (Colossians 2:14-18). Jesus shows his wounded hands and side. The scars are there – healed, but the suffering still shows. The hymn by Matthew Bridges expresses this well. 'Crown him the Lord of love, behold his hands and side, rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.'

Wholeness – or Well-ness – is big business now. There are books and apps on self-care, tips for looking after your own mental health and a lot more. Much of it is common sense while other aspects take ideas from the wisdom of the ancient faiths, such as the popular practice of mindfulness or meditation. Yet none of these deal with the issue of our tendency to 'mess up', to be selfish, have arguments, be bossy or abusive, be greedy or uncaring, and generally to sin. Here the Christian message is that we receive peace and forgiveness from God and are then sent in the power of God's Spirit to share that message of peace and forgiveness to those around us. This is what the writer of John's gospel records in the short section we have today.

Here we have the death (the scars), the resurrection (Jesus is there speaking to them), and Pentecost (the sending out with the breath of the Spirit), equipping them to declare God's love and forgiveness. This is the good news that those first followers of Jesus shared with their families and friends, other Jews and then with those 'God-fearers', people in their society disillusioned with the many gods of paganism, and with other Gentiles.

In the *Rise of Christianity* Rodney Stark brings theories from the social sciences to explain as the subtitle puts it *How the obscure, marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the Western world in a few centuries*. The book group will discuss his ideas on the 17 April. In the short final chapter, on virtue, he notes the importance of mercy as a virtue and that a 'merciful God requires humans to be merciful.' These acts of mercy, along with the fact that Christians practised 'love and charity beyond boundaries of family and tribe', helped greatly in the spread of the faith. People saw that being a Christian changed how they lived and cared for others. The faith made a difference to their lives and to their society.

It has continued to make a difference through the centuries as people have sought peace and wholeness. In search of an Easter poem to share with one of the poetry groups on Thursday 8 April, I turned to an anthology of poems and readings from my childhood.

Compiled by Elizabeth Goudge and published in 1967, it is called 'A Book of Peace'. In her introduction she thinks that humanity has probably always longed for peace and sought it through nature, creative work that leads to self-forgetfulness, love within personal relationships and the 'peace of the eternal mystery'. She uses these categories to group her readings, with her final two chapters on 'The Peace of God' and 'The Prince of Peace'.

Here I found she included a poem by George Herbert which many of you know is one of my favourites, having learnt it at school. However, I was surprised to see that she called it 'Resurrection' when it is titled 'Peace' in collected works by George Herbert. It describes someone searching for peace in nature before learning from a wise old man about a 'Prince of old' whose good life did not save him from foes. Yet from that death rose new life, a peace and joy from 'flight of sinne' for those who accept the 'bread' that is offered. This is what we receive each time we approach the 'table of the Lord' whether now physically or spiritually. May we each experience the fullness of God's words to us 'Peace be with you.'

This is part of the George Herbert poem to which Sheila refers.

.....There was a Prince of old
At Salem dwelt, who lived with good increase
Of flock and fold.

He sweetly lived; yet sweetness did not save
His life from foes.
But after death out of his grave
There sprang twelve stalks of wheat;
Which many wond'ring at, got some of those
To plant and set.

It prospered strangely, and did soon disperse
Through all the earth:
For they that taste it do rehearse
That virtue lies therein;
A secret virtue, bringing peace and mirth
By flight of sin.

Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
And grows for you;
Make bread of it: and that repose
And peace, which ev'ry where
With so much earnestness you do pursue,
Is only there.

Prayer

Holy God,
We are caught in the tension of
light and shadow, death and resurrection.

You spoke the world into being,
you illuminated the universe by your very speech,
then filled the void with life.
Indeed, you have filled the void
of darkness and death,
the empty promises of the abyss,
with new life and new creation.

We look to you in the space between the world and the Kingdom,
longing for the fulfilment of your word
in the work of the Holy Spirit
and the reign of Christ, our Creator and King.
Amen

(written by Thomas Turner, and posted on everyday liturgy.)



*Anchor Stone by
Filipe Tohi, 1996,
located along the
Coastal Walkway
in New Plymouth,
Taranaki, North
Island, New
Zealand.*

'I give them
eternal life, and
they will never
perish, and no
one will snatch
them out of my
hand.'
John 10 28

Worship Song

'And now O Father, mindful of the love', sung by the choir of Marlborough College Chapel.
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCQy1r-45jw>

Intercessions

After the Lenten journey seeking insights, entering Holy week and joining the triumphal Palm Sunday procession, we watched unfolding events which led us to the Cross. Along with the disciples we experienced their despair which turned to wonder at Our Lord's glorious resurrection.

Now comes the reality check. When Jesus brought re-assurance to his disciples, together with the grace of the Holy Spirit, the simple message was not just for them. The following prayers were chosen to reflect that.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after His resurrection,
Teaching them to love all people as neighbours.
As his disciples in **this** age
We offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
In which we are privileged to live
And our neighbours with whom we share it.

Lord, the resurrection of your Son
Has given us new life and renewed hope,
Help us to live as new people
In pursuit of the Christian ideal.
Grant us wisdom to know what we must do,
The will to want to do it,
The courage to undertake it,
The perseverance to continue to live it,
And the strength to complete it.

Living God,
Long ago, faithful women proclaimed the good news
Of Jesus' resurrection.
Teach us to keep faith with them, that our witnessing may be as bold,
Our love as deep, and our faith as true.

The Lord's Prayer

Eternal Spirit, life-giver, pain-bearer, love-maker
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe.
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world.
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings.
Your kin-dom of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth.

With the bread that we need for today, feed us.
For the hurts that we inflict on one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love
now and forever. Amen

Developed in the early 1980s by the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness

Affirmation

And because He is risen
My eyes see possibilities
And my heart hears hope
Like a whisper on the wind.
And the song that rises in me
Will not be silenced,
As life disrupts
This shadowed place of death
Like a butterfly under the skin,
And death itself
Runs terrified to hide
Because He is risen.

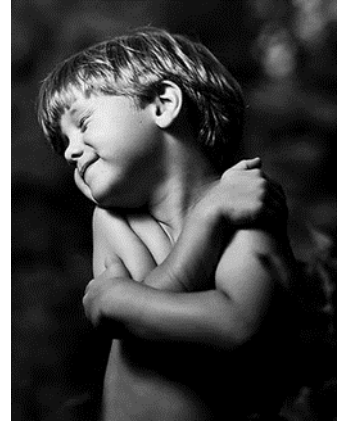
(Extract from a longer piece by Gerard Kelly in "Spoken Worship." Posted on Third Space.)

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

You may like to listen to: Christ is risen from the dead', sung by the Langford Singers. Music is by Nigel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-LHFy40z78>



Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
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.

Post Communion Collect

Lord God our Father,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ
you have assured your children of eternal life
and in baptism have made us one with him:
deliver us from the death of sin
and raise us to new life in your love,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Easter Commission and Benediction

In spite of our doubts,
may we recognize you in our midst:
wounded, bloody, and resurrected

in spite of our doubts,
may we know when we come face to face
with the love that is greater than all deaths

in spite of our doubts,
may we reach out to touch the wounds of the world's pain
trusting that when grace and love surround them
they will become part of Christ's resurrected body.

and in spite of our doubts,
may we live as though we are, too.

(written by Cheryl Lawrie, and posted on [hold this space])

Blessing

May the truth of Easter
The joy of Easter
And the blessings of Easter
Be with us this day and all days
Amen

Closing Hymn

We close today with the Hymn: 'This joyful Eastertide',
sung by the Gesualdo Six. Words are below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxGwrNGyyWg>

This joyful Eastertide,
away with care and sorrow!
My Love, the Crucified,
hath sprung to life this morrow.

Refrain:

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen,
arisen, arisen, arisen.*

My flesh in hope shall rest,
and for a season slumber,
till trump from east to west
shall wake the dead in number.

Refrain:

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen,
arisen, arisen, arisen.*

Death's flood hath lost its chill,
since Jesus crossed the river:
Lover of souls, from ill
my passing soul deliver,

Refrain:

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen,
arisen, arisen, arisen.*



Verrijzenis (Resurrection) by Paul van Dongen, a Dutch artist. 2007

Coffee Break

Resurrection of Christ (detail), *Mosaic* 2006

By Marko Ivan Rupnik (Slovenian, 1954–), St. Stanislaus College Chapel, Ljubljana, Slovenia.



Mosaicist Marko Ivan Rupnik depicts the resurrection as a glory-stream bursting up out of the belly of the earth, with Christ walking atop it, much like he did on Galilean waters, his robes billowing out in all directions. Victoriously, he pulls Adam and Eve up from their graves, up from the valley of dry bones, fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 37. Tongues of fire fall from heaven, the Spirit poured out on the saints from all ages and nations, who, eating bread and drinking wine, are incorporated into Christ's resurrection body. The vibrant greens and other colours behind this great gathering signify a garden: new Eden.

Scroll Down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

2nd Sunday of Easter
11th April 2021

In the garden

Introduction

We are going back to Easter Day to consider one particular element of the Easter morning story, when Mary Magdalene mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener.



Opening Prayers

You take our endings
and you make your new beginnings.
Your surprise and astound us
in places where we expected
that you were absent.
You challenge us to reconsider what is possible.

Within Our Reach: Joy

There is nothing I can give you which you have not;
But there is much, very much, that while I cannot give,
You can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.
Take heaven!

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant.
Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our
Reach is joy.
Take joy!

There is a radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see,
And to see we have only to look.
I beseech you to look!

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering,
Cast them away as ugly, or heavy, or hard.
Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendour,
Woven of love, by wisdom, with power.
Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand
That brings it to you.

Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty
Believe me, that angel's hand is there, the gift is there,
And the wonder of an overshadowing presence.

Our joys, too, be not content with them as joys.
They, too, conceal diviner gifts.
Life is so full of meaning and purpose,
So full of beauty beneath its covering-
That you will find earth but cloaks your heaven.

And so, at this time, I greet you.
Not quite as the world sends greetings,
But with profound esteem
And with the prayer that for you, now and forever,
The day breaks, and all the shadows flee away.

(Fra Giovanni, Christmas Eve, 1513 A.D.)

This Evening's Music

A bit strange you might think for night prayer to start with 'Morning has Broken', but our story starts on Easter morning, and a new day has begun in so many different ways. The version here is music only, played by Rick Wakeman.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VebVIXSQFC0>

Reading John 20: 11-17 (New International Version)

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Reflection

Artists—mainly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—have latched onto this detail of mistaken identity, representing Jesus carrying gardening tools, like a shovel or a hoe, and sometimes sporting a floppy gardener’s hat. A few artists have even shown Jesus in full-out gardener’s getup.



Lavinia Fontana
(Italian, 1552–
1614),

Noli me tangere,
1581. Uffizi
Gallery, Florence,
Italy.

A garden appears right at the beginning of the Bible. In fact, God is the world’s first gardener: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (Genesis 2:8).

The prophets sometimes wrote of God's gardening in a metaphoric sense—for example, in Isaiah 61:11:

For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

Or Jeremiah 24:6, in which God says of the exiles from Judah: 'I will plant them and not uproot them.'

John's Gospel, though, goes even further to ascribe this role to Jesus, and to present his resurrection as the genesis of something new. John starts his Gospel with 'In the beginning . . .', an obvious echo of the beginning of Genesis. In 19:41 he mentions that Jesus was buried in a garden, and in chapter 20, that he was found walking around in it. He mentions twice that Jesus rose on "the first day" of the week, as if this were the first day of a new creation. And then he has Mary mistake Jesus for the gardener.

If you add to these Paul's conception of Jesus as the Second Adam (Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45), these allusions suggest that Jesus is the gardener of the new Eden, doing what Adam could not do. His resurrection broke ground in this garden, marking the beginning of a massive restoration project.

That's why Jesus is so often found carrying a shovel in resurrection art. He is looking after the garden – looking after humanity. So, one can argue that seeing the risen Jesus as a gardener is not actually a matter of misidentification, but rather a recognition of the new post-resurrection order.

And it is not just Renaissance art that follows this theme.

This is a poem by Andrew Hudgins a contemporary American poet.

Christ as a Gardener.

The boxwoods planted in the park spelled LIVE.
I never noticed it until they died.
Before, the entwined green had smudged the word
unreadable. And when they take their own advice
again—come spring, come Easter—no one will know
a word is buried in the leaves. I love the way
that Mary thought her resurrected Lord
a gardener. It wasn't just the broad-brimmed hat
and muddy robe that fooled her: He was that changed.
He looks across the unturned field, the riot
of unscythed grass, the smattering of wildflowers.
Before he can stop himself, he's on his knees.
He roots up stubborn weeds, pinches the suckers,
deciding order here—what lives, what dies,

and how. But it goes deeper even than that.
His hands burn and his bare feet smoulder. He longs
to lie down inside the long, dew-moist furrows
and press his pierced side and his broken forehead
into the dirt. But he's already done it—
passed through one death and out the other side.
He laughs. He kicks his bright spade in the earth
and turns it over. Spring flashes by, then harvest.
Beneath his feet, seeds dance into the air.
They rise, and he, not noticing, ascends
on midair steppingstones of dandelion,
of milkweed, thistle, cattail, and goldenrod.



This painting by Graham Sutherland (1961) is in the St Mary Magdalene chapel of Chichester Cathedral.

We Pray

We thank you for glimpses
Of possibilities
We thank you that
No matter how bad things seem
They will come to an end

As we remember that
To everything there is a season
And that seasons follow
One another
No matter what

Even if there are sometimes
More challenges
Even if there are sometimes
Setbacks
That season will end

And we will move into
A different season
One with its own challenges
But also one which
Is filled with joys and blessings

(excerpted from a longer prayer
by Rev Katherine Burgess. Posted
on RevGalBlogPals)



Janpeter Muilwijk (Dutch, 1960–), New Gardener, 2017

The risen Christ in a white T-shirt and overalls, heads with open arms toward Mary, who is dressed like a bride to receive him. (Mary is modelled after the artist's daughter Mattia, who died.) Butterflies alight on each of Jesus's five wounds, marking them as sites of transformation, and the flowering branches of a tree crown him with spring glory.

Closing Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus

We invite you into the garden of our lives

To dig us over, turning up stuff that is hidden, to pull up the weeds,

Give us a top dressing of manure (but not too smelly please!)

Plant new seeds and care for them as they grow.

There are parts of our garden here that I don't get round to looking after.

They are wild and unkempt,

and we are encouraged to see this as doing our bit for nature,

But truth to tell Lord, I prefer the flowers and the fruit.

May our gardens grow.

Blessing

The love of the faithful Creator

The peace of the wounded Healer

The joy of the challenging Spirit

The hope of the three in One

Surround and encourage you

Today, tonight and for ever.

(Kathy Galloway)

Closing music

We close with the Easter hymn 'The strife is o'er'. The version here is in a quick tempo and triumphant, sung by a virtual choir and orchestra from St Martin's in the Fields, but not London – this is an episcopal church in Philadelphia, USA.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAyi64eagTI>

1 The strife is o'er, the battle done;
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun.
Alleluia!

2 The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions has dispersed.
Let shouts of holy joy outburst.
Alleluia!

3 The three sad days are quickly sped;
he rises glorious from the dead.

All glory to our risen Head.
Alleluia!

4 He closed the yawning gates of hell;
the bars from heaven's high portals fell.
Let hymns of praise his triumph tell.
Alleluia!

5 Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee,
from death's dread sting thy servants free,
that we may live and sing to thee.
Alleluia!

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has participated, especially to Sheila for her reflections this morning, Caroline for the intercessions, and Nigel for communion music. Material taken or adapted from other websites has an attribution made where possible.



Monet's Garden, Giverny, France