

Dear friends,

Now we move on to events after Easter and here we think about Thomas who didn't doubt that Christ had risen, he just couldn't accept the story the other disciples told him as being credible.

It doesn't seem possible that this Worship at Home started 6 years ago at the beginning of the Covid lockdown. At the beginning I shared this with Deacon Becky, taking it over completely more than four years ago! I shall endeavour to keep it going a while longer – though, as with us all, the years are beginning to catch up with me! I wish you all every blessing. Margaret

Call to worship:

Come and know the Lord your God.

Come and know the joy of your Lord.

Come and know the love of God.

Come and know by faith alone.

God of knowledge and truth, help us to know you more fully – to seek joy in knowing you, and to share this with our brothers and sisters. Amen.

Heavenly Father, although we can't see you, we love you, and we know your voice.

We answer your call to draw close to you today and, setting aside our other cares and concerns, we come now to know you better in worship. Amen.

The words to 'I know that my Redeemer lives' by Samuel Medley [1738-1799]**StF 303**

1 I know that my Redeemer lives – what joy the blest assurance gives!

He lives, he lives, who once was dead; he lives my everlasting Head!

He lives, my everlasting Head!

2 He lives, to bless me with his love; he lives, to plead for me above.

he lives, my hungry soul to feed; he lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, to help in time of need.

3 He lives, and grants me daily breath; he lives, and I shall conquer death;

he lives, my mansion to prepare; he lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, to lead me safely there.

4 He lives, all glory to his name; he lives, my Saviour, still the same;

what joy the blest assurance gives, I know that my Redeemer lives!

I know that my Redeemer lives!

Prayer

God unseen, yet seeing all, knowing all and loving all of us – we adore you.

Jesus, making God known to us in your coming among us – we adore you.

Holy Spirit, drawing us together in this act of worship – we adore you. Amen.

Lord, in some traditions this is known as Low Sunday, and we confess that that is how we often feel after the celebration of Easter. We love the holidays, the days of feasting and joy when we shared our

faith together. Remind us that we are drawn together in knowing you better through the companionship of one another travelling together in the ordinary every day as well as the high days. Amen.

Heavenly Father, sometimes when our faith is tested, we falter and we fail to live up to your holy standards. But with you, Father, there is forgiveness.

We call to mind any times this week when we have fallen short in faith.

We feel your forgiveness refreshing us, lightening our load.

Thank you for knowing our hearts. Amen.

Almighty God, we give thanks that you have welcomed us as your children – and we praise you for our inheritance, imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

In your family we are sisters and brothers bound by faith and the knowledge and love of you.

We thank you and praise you, Lord, for the joy of learning and growing in you. Amen.

John 20: 19-31 – taken from The Holy Bible, New Living Translation, British Text, copyright 2000

That evening, on the first day of the week, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. As he spoke, he held out his hands for them to see, and he showed them his side. They were filled with joy when they saw their Lord! He spoke to them again and said: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Then he breathed on them and said: “receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you refuse to forgive them, they are unforgiven.” One of the disciples, Thomas [nicknamed the Twin], was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him: ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he replied: ‘I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.’

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. He said: “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

‘My Lord and my God!’ Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him: “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven’t seen me and believe anyway!”

Comment: Jesus’ disciples had locked the doors to protect themselves from the Jewish authorities, who were eager to round up Jesus’ supporters and dispose of any threat they might pose to the peace of Jerusalem. Jesus’ appearance behind locked doors was enough to breathe new life and hope into his frightened followers. Thomas’ absence and subsequent reaction revealed the natural, questioning spirit he displays elsewhere in this gospel. Perhaps his actions also showed that he was seeking emotional safety behind his inner locked doors.

Thomas’ Easter story was unlocked a week later, not by his companions attempting to argue him into belief, but by the repetition of the previous week’s evening events. Thomas had made demands which turned out to be unnecessary. The sight of the risen Lord and the sound of his greeting were enough to validate the witness that went back to Mary Magdalene. Now Thomas could make the full Johannine confession of faith in the descending and ascending ‘Lord and God’. The sequence of appearances

and testimony that starts with Mary Magdalene and culminated in Thomas laid the foundation on which this Gospel's Easter faith was built.

Thomas – by Marjorie Dobson and first published in 2019 by Stainer and Bell Limited. Copyright 2019 Stainer & Bell Ltd.

It must have felt like walking into a nightmare.

All those sensible, down-to-earth friends of yours, ranting and raving; telling you the most bizarre stories; jumping up and down with excitement, flinging their arms around you and expecting you to believe everything they said.

It must have seemed like a betrayal.

When you left, they were as grief-stricken as you, faces blank with disbelief, shocked, silent, devastated – even the most ebullient ones – the atmosphere so heavy with sorrow you needed to escape to mourn alone.

It must have tested you in nerve and temper, tinged your doubt with rage, yet filled you with despair.

If what they said was true, why had you missed out?

You were as much part of the group as any of them.

Was this a rejection?

Did you not deserve a miracle too?

So you lashed out, refusing to believe, demanding proof, remaining on the outside until there was evidence to draw you in.

It must have taken your breath away to see him standing there, speaking to you alone – willing you to accept his wounded hands, filling you with wonder and humility: drawing you to belief.

Thomas – you stand for all of us who live in that gulf between doubt and faith, waiting for Jesus to say: 'Come, see! Come touch!

I am here!'

Prayer:

Living God, we are some of those people who have not seen Jesus, but yet we have believed.

There are times when we have felt that you were very close to us and times when we know that you have held us through difficult patches in our lives. But we recognise that there are also times when we feel very much like Thomas and we need some kind of proof that you are here.

Forgive us for those times when we doubt you and when it seems so hard to hang on to our faith.

Reassure us when we feel lost and far away from you. Comfort us when other people seem to be so strong in their faith that it is almost discouraging, especially if we are wavering or under attack.

Remind us of Thomas, who couldn't believe anything that others told him until he had seen it for himself.

Guide us gently into that place where we can meet with you and be certain of your presence with us; where we may hear your voice echoing: 'Peace be with you.'

Close: Let us take the touch of the risen Christ, and the peace that he gives, out with us into the world. Let us breathe his life-giving Spirit on all those we meet this week. Amen.

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