

'In him was life'

Call to Worship

Hope is never extinguished. Love is never conquered. Death and World is Overcome.

Jesus, today, we celebrate. Because You have made it clear that death does not have the last word; Because You have filled us again with hope and faith; Because You have given us a vision of new possibilities, new realities, and new ways of being.

Open our minds to believe what we cannot explain; Open our hearts to hope for what we cannot see; Open our lives to live and to love in the midst of death and despair; Let resurrection happen again in us today. Amen.

Hymn: - STF 548 – Blessed Assurance

1 Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine:
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,

visions of rapture burst on my sight; angels
descending bring from above echoes of
mercy, whispers of love:

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —
watching and waiting, looking above, filled
with his goodness, lost in his love:

Frances Jane van Alstyne

Opening Prayer: -

Almighty God, With Joy and praise, With awe and wonder, With gladness and celebration, We bring our Easter worship.

We lift up our hearts, We lift up our thoughts, We lift up our voices, We lift up our souls, Recognizing afresh all you have done for us in Christ.

We rejoice in the message of this day, The good news at the heart of our faith

Light after darkness Joy after sorrow Good after evil Life after death.

Almighty God, Speak to us again today Through all we read, All we hear, All we sing, All we do. May the truth of the resurrection inspire us with new hope. May the victory of Christ fill us with new joy. May the reality of his presence fill us with new faith. And so may we serve you with new vigour To the glory of your name, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer of Confession: -

If we have fallen into despair, **Lord, forgive us.** If we have failed to hope in you, **Lord, forgive us.** If we have been fearful of death, **Lord, forgive us.** If we have forgotten the victory of Christ, **Lord, forgive**

us.

(pause to bring confessions of heart and mind to God).

May the living God raise us from despair, give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ. **Amen.**

Readings:

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.

Sermon

On my trip to the Isle of Wight this week with Cora, we were visiting one of the many arts shops, on one of the stands which had some beautiful blue glassware on it, read the sign: "*Nice to look at, lovely to hold, but if you break it consider it SOLD!*" In those kinds of shops I always remember my mums catch-phrase – "*John – LOOK but don't TOUCH*".

One of the first sensations that we engage with as humans is TOUCH, it is how we explore the world and our place within it. So this morning as we explore Thomas and his encounter with Jesus, I wonder if we can put aside our natural inclinations to cast him as the DOUBTER – and simply see him as human. After all, he simply makes the point – DON'T TELL ME THAT JESUS IS ALIVE – SHOW ME JESUS, let me TOUCH him and I will know – My LORD and my GOD. Indeed Verse 31 tells us: "*these are written that you may believe that the messiah is Jesus, ... and that you may have life in his name*". With that verse as the backdrop to our explorations this morning, lets dive into the reading, a little more now.

Before we go any further this morning, lets put this all into some context. This is the continuation of the story that we celebrated so vividly last Sunday, on Easter Day, with Mary Magdalene's encounter with the Risen Christ, in the Garden. The disciples are still in shock, devastated after the crucifixion. They have lost their beloved teacher. They will be treated as badly as Jesus if they are implicated as one of his followers. His body is missing. In the span of just a few days, their lives have

been turned upside down, changed forever, and the future is looking bleak, for them and for all that Christ had promised as he taught them. **Yet . . . Jesus comes to them.**

Thomas seems to have missed a lot of all the commotion of the past few days, and yet Jesus comes to him, at his, at our, particular points of need. No one is left out. There is a place for everyone – that’s the beauty of a life in Christ. For a moment I would like you to forget everything you think you know about Thomas. Forget that somewhere along the way you came to believe that Thomas’ primary reason for being present in this particular scene was his DOUBT. Forget that he lacks Faith. Forget that he’s somewhat of an inferior disciple. Forget all of that, because I want to say to you this morning that the opposite of all those attributes is actually truth here.

First – Thomas, the twin, is not a doubter, we have to look back to John 11 to know that when Jesus declared that he would return to Judea, the disciples tried to persuade him that he should not go, because they knew it would lead to his death. But it is Thomas who suggests that they should follow Jesus – *“so that we might die with him”*. Thomas in my mind is not so much the doubter, but the realist. A few days earlier, Thomas saw his Lord, nailed to a cross, ultimately, leading to his death. Now his friends tell him, **THEY HAVE SEEN THE LORD** – he reacts with the realism of a human skeptic. *He’s dead – HOW CAN YOU HAVE POSSIBLY SEEN JESUS!*

Second, I want to defend Thomas – he only asked for what the other disciples had already seen. If you remember, when Jesus appears to the other disciples – he shows them his hands and his side. And it is only then that the disciples *“rejoice because they saw the Lord”* (John 20:20). Maybe this is counter to our view that the more faith we have, the fewer questions we’ll ask. Faith isn’t about knowledge, it is *“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*. With that backdrop, I think that Christ’s words *“those who have believed and not seen”* it is not a rebuke for Thomas, but a blessing, and a blessing for us all as well. Looked through that lens, I wonder if Thomas emerges a model disciple in John’s Gospel. Thomas is no fool – rather he comes at life, at faith realistically, and indeed he counts the cost of that life of faith as he does so. As Thomas encounters Jesus his faith is as realistic as was his scepticism. He doesn’t simply believe, but he declares that Jesus *my lord and my God*.

To finish then, we return to those words from verse 31: *“These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name”*. In other words, what happens to Thomas is exactly what John hopes will happen to each of us when we read his story. So how many of us reading this story this morning see that DOUBT is not the opposite of Faith, but an essential ingredient of it. How many of us see that REALISM is an asset to vibrant faith? That in our believing, without seeing, we are among the blessed of Christ’s kingdom. How much more will we be blessed if we are prepared to share our faith, with others that are yet to believe, seeing Christ’s wounds of love, through our actions, choices and testimony of Christ’s transformation on our lives.

Despite the risks associated with touching, instead of just looking, I am Thomas too. Like him we have all had moments of loss, confusion and chaos. But in those moments, time and time again, Jesus Comes to us, that we might believe, and have life in all its fullness, in his name. Now and forever more, that we might declare – **MY LORD AND MY GOD. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession: -

In the power of the resurrection we offer our prayers to God.

Let us pray:

We Remember, O Lord, in your love
the Church throughout the world . . .
those recently baptized and confirmed . . .
those who minister to others . . .

Silence

May your whole Church know your power and be a sign that Christ is risen. Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

Remember in your love the world you have made . . . those who seek a fair and proper use of the world's resources . . . those who strive for justice and peace among the nations . . . **Silence** May the whole earth be transformed by mercy and rejoice in hope. Lord of life, **hear us in your love.** Remember in your love those who suffer . . . the victims of violence and injustice . . . those who mourn . . .

Silence

May all in need find comfort, strength and freedom in the living Christ. Lord of life, **hear us in your love.**

May all your children receive grace and light according to their needs and come at last to share with all the saints in life eternal. Gracious God, we ask these prayers through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: -

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And Lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

Our worship has not ended it has only just begun, for God is with us, every moment, of every day. Go then, and offer the worship he desires, To do justice
To love kindness, And to walk humbly with him, May the blessing of, God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Rest, remain and abide with you all,
With those you love, And those you are called to love, Now, in the name of Christ. **Amen**