

Sunday 11th April 2021

Worship prepared and led by Revd John Mackerness

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Call to worship.

We come from a world confused about truth.

We come with our own uncertainties.

Let us bring the darkness of human understanding into the presence of God, who is light.

Let us bring the story of our search for truth and share in fellowship the things we have heard and seen and touched.

God, whose light shines in the darkness, shine on us today.

God, made known to those who met Jesus, touch us through the experiences of our lives.

God, who gave Thomas what he asked, give us what we need so that we too may come to believe.

Amen.

Suggested Hymn To God be the glory.

Listen [here](#)

Introduction – Low Sunday

Today is known as Low Sunday. The reason is that it is the first Sunday after Easter when things go back to normal, oh how we wish that were true, and traditionally the minister took a holiday to recover from the stresses and strains of all the services during Holy Week and Easter. The worship was led by a Deacon or a lay preacher. One thing that I have noticed since we went into lockdown is the fact that one minister can quite happily lead worship for multiple church communities using modern technology. As an itinerant preacher my workload has gone down. Like most people I look forward with a bit of trepidation to going back to church but I don't want to lose the way that zoom has allowed people to stay in community. It is in community that we can explore our doubts, ask questions, strengthen our faith, and discover the truth of God's love for all creation made real in the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayers of adoration and confession.

Lord, you accept our doubts and embrace our questions like a wise parent encouraging your children to express themselves;

hiding your hurt at our scepticism, always hoping for the best and seeing our potential.

We confess that we are so often judgemental of others.

In particular, we berate those who do not share our beliefs.

What need have they of proof? Why can't they just believe?

Yet we live in a world where little is taken at face value.

Fake news surrounds us, and the camera definitely does lie.

Therefore, Lord, forgive us when we look down upon the unbelievers, the doubters, the ones who demand proof;

for this is the world in which we live, and the world to which we must proclaim your truth.

There is no proof we can offer in these times, except to show our belief in the ways in which we reach out, by accepting and loving unconditionally,

by showing patience and forbearance to those who differ from us – or is it we who differ from them?

Therefore, forgive us when we fail to reflect your truths in our daily lives, and let us become testaments to your risen power.

Lord, we thank you for your patience with us, your acceptance of our doubting and questioning, and

your assurance of forgiveness.

How many times do we grieve your heart with our lack of belief, and exasperate you with our lack of faith?

But like a good parent, you gather us to you, and answer our misgivings.

With you, Lord, there is infinite forgiveness.

May Christ be evident in us and in all that we do. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Suggested hymn Have faith in God my heart.

Listen [here](#)

Readings 1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Sermon – Proclaim, pray, confess, praise and be a community who will go and tell.

I find it very easy to put myself into Thomas' shoes.

The man that he had followed for the last three years is dead. He had seen him die, seen his body taken down and buried. He is scared to confess that he even knew him, and he has gone into hiding lest he should be the next one to die. We don't know where Thomas went but he must have kept some kind of contact with the disciples because here we are, a week after the events of Easter Day and Thomas has returned to the fold. The old gang is back together again, and they are telling these wonderful, amazing stories of a risen Jesus, a Jesus that walks and talks and can be touched and who is doing amazing things. Thomas is cautious by nature He's seen things that aren't normal, people healed, demons cast out but it's still hard to believe that everything that Jesus said is true. No, he won't believe until he sees Jesus for himself, touches his wounds, hears him speak.

And then it happens. There he is, 'My God and my Lord'. Jesus invites Thomas to touch him, not that he really need to. Faith replaces doubt, Thomas is a true believer.

That's Thomas' story but what about the rest of us?

Our gospel reading ends 'These are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name'.

I, John, am a child of the enlightenment. I don't take things on trust. In a world of fake news, I need evidence, real evidence before I will believe. Like Thomas I need to reach out and touch the risen Lord. But life's not like that.

I had always gone to church, the first time that I read in church was when I was seven. I knew all the bible stories. I had passed my Scripture Union exams. I went through the motions but whilst my head went along with everything that was being said it was just words in a book. It just didn't touch my heart and, like so many people I could quite happily have walked away from Church as a teenager. But God had other plans for me.

I went to a grammar school when it still was a grammar school and at the school there was a Christian fellowship that met once a week. My friend from up the road took me along one week. Suddenly I wasn't the youngest person in the church I was surrounded by people who were young and who had a faith that was so different to anything that I had ever experienced. The words that I read in the bible began to come alive. They took me to an evangelical conference in Nottingham. It was a fantastic event. I didn't respond then and there to the call to give my life to Jesus but in the

van on the way back I had my Damascus moment. I made Thomas' confession, 'My God and my Lord'. The rest as they say is history.

We all encounter the risen Lord in our own way. For some it is a slow process over many years, for others it is a dramatic conversion. But the end result is the same. Jesus fills us with the Spirit, and we make our confession of faith, My God, and my Lord.

But it doesn't, it shouldn't end there. Our confession of faith is just one step on a life-long journey. The disciples returned to Galilee praising God and there Jesus finally left them, but he also promised them that they would receive a gift of power the coming of which we celebrate at Pentecost. But not only did Jesus promise them this gift of power he also gave them a commission to go out into the world to baptise people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What about us? Well, being a Christian is still a risky business. If you don't believe me try being a fourteen-year-old standing up in front of a room full of fellow schoolboys telling them of your experience of coming to faith or the first time that you admit to being a Christian in the workplace. Try telling your family of non-believers that you have come too faith. Try standing up week by week in front of a congregation who see all your faults and failings, real and imagined.

But our readings remind us that, as Christians, we are called and gifted to do four different things.

We are called to proclaim, to proclaim that Jesus is indeed risen, that he is our Lord with all that means for how we live out our lives. John reminds us that the disciples met the risen Christ first-hand and believed but Jesus says blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed, and they can only do that if someone shares the wonderful story that Easter is about more than eggs and that what those first witnesses reported is true and can, by grace through faith in Jesus, change lives.

We are called to priestly activity. Now that sounds very scary. It doesn't mean that we are all called to become ordained ministers or anything like that. What it does mean is that we are called to be a people of prayer. We are called to stand before God in all our frailty and pray for the world, to pray for the people that we meet every day, the situations that hear about in the news, to hold them up before God. But we are also called to let our faith shine out to the world as individuals and as worshipping communities so that through the spirit working in us people may by the grace of God catch a glimpse of that same Lord who first called us and changed us.

Our third calling is that of confession. We recognise that we are far from perfect, that there are times when, if we are honest, we find it hard to believe, living as we do in a lockdown world that appears to be so down on religion, in a world that asks for proof of something that we cannot prove only faithfully live.

Remember that the opposite of faith isn't doubt, it is certainty. If you are certain of something then you don't need faith, the hope of things unseen. So, we repent and are, by the grace of God, forgiven and given the chance to begin again confessing anew 'My God and my Lord'.

Finally, we are called to praise, to praise the living God from whom all blessings flow. Sunday by Sunday we sing our praises to God, but we can praise God in other ways as well. Francis Ridley Havergal put it this way, take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

They also remind us that we are called to be a community of believers. We belong to our own churches, our spiritual home if you will but we also belong to a wider community. This is a worldwide community that confesses Jesus as lord. We are also part of that great cloud of witnesses that stretches back to the first believers and goes forward to the end of time.

At the end of the gospel reading for today from John's gospel we read that the disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offering

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen (H Whyte)

Suggested Hymn The Church is Wherever God's People Are Listen [here](#)

Prayers of thanksgiving and for the world

Thanks be to the God who embraces us even in our times of greatest doubt.

When our thinking is clouded and our spirit bewildered, God holds sacred space for us.

Thanks be to the Son who accepts our questions without judgement.

He who was questioned by pauper and priest alike remains a touching place for us.

Thanks be to the Holy Spirit who guides us to answers in our day.

The one who breathes God's understanding into us opens a safe place for us.

But we also remember that there are many for whom there is no sacred space, no touching place, no safe space.

Let us pray for a world in need of peace:

 peace between warring nations,
 peace between conflicting political ideologies,
 peace between peoples of faith.

Let us pray for a world in need of love:

 love for people who have lost their self-respect,
 love for friends who have become alienated,
 love for relatives who have lost their affection for each other.

Let us pray for a world in need of hope:

 hope in the midst of despair when all seems lost,
 hope when evil seems to be winning,
 hope for a better future for everyone.

Let us pray for a world in need of joy:

 joy when there is cause for celebration,
 joy where there is a reason to give thanks,
 joy as a means of sharing in the wonder of creation.

Let us pray in silence for those in our communities known to God who has placed their names on our hearts this day.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested Hymn This is the truth we hold. (Rejoice and Sing 607)

Blessing

Father, your Son Jesus did not reject Thomas. Help us to value questions and questioners, and not to reject either when they are awkward; to discern what kind of evidence is appropriate and trustworthy in different situations; and to have the courage ourselves to be questioners and seekers of truth. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and those we love today, tomorrow, and forever more. Amen.