

Salford Methodist Circuit



Doubt To Certainty - 11th April 2021

Pat Wilson

Good Morning and welcome to our Worship.

As we move forward amidst the Pandemic we wonder if life will ever be the same again.

Just as the followers of Jesus after all the events of Good Friday and the empty tomb of the Resurrection they too must have wondered if life would ever be the same.

As then and now they and us move forward in Faith and in the unfailing love of our God.

Hymn: Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

*Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found -
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.*

*Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight -
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.*

*Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him -
in faith receive from him.
Be still,*

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*for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.*

Let us pray:

Loving God we come together today with our doubts and fears.
Your love for us accepts us just as we are and for this we are truly thankful.
We worship and adore you for believing in us
we put our trust in you.
Teach us to live each day as your Easter people

We praise you for all that the Easter stories mean to us
That your love could not be kept down
Your purpose could not be defeated
Your goodness that could not be destroyed
Teach us to live each day as your Easter people

Forgive us when we are quick to be disheartened
We confess our faults and our failings
We seek your mercy and forgiveness
And ask for renewal in our lives
Teach us live each day as your Easter people

We know that our hope is in you and you alone
Help us to accept that, to live in that assurance
And to follow wherever you might lead us
Assure us of the victory you have won in Christ,
For in his name we ask it
Amen

We say together The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.*



Hymn: Low in the grave he lay.'

*Low in the grave he lay,
Jesus, my Saviour,
waiting the coming day,
Jesus, my Lord:*

*Up from the grave he arose,
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives for ever with his saints to reign:
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

*Vainly they watch his bed,
Jesus, my Saviour;
vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:
Up from the grave he arose...*

*Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
he tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord:
Up from the grave he arose...*

Bible Reading: Psalm 133

A song of ascents. Of David.

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.*

Bible Reading: John 20, 19-31



Jesus Appears to His Disciples

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!"

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

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

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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."

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!" 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."

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

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

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

Hymn: 'I know that my Redeemer lives'

*[[[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!*

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*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, 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, all glory to his name;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!*

"My Lord and my God" Thomas declaration of his risen Lord

We are reminded very much that we are still in Easter time and so it is appropriate we spend some time in reflection of our risen Lord.

So we turn to our Gospel reading for the eye witness accounts of the Disciples encounter with the risen Jesus and the doubt of Thomas. It is quite clear from the gospel of John was originally planned, it comes to an end with this verse summing up those witness statements made to point the way to faith and trust in a risen Lord Jesus. Reliable witness statements are vital when we want to convince folk that what we say we really have witnessed and believe in what we say.

This passage in the gospels sums up the aim of the writers than this. It is clear that the gospels never set out to give a full account of the life of Jesus. They give us a bit of a selection which shows what he was like and the kind of things he was always doing. It paints a mental picture of the of Jesus.

The gospels were not meant to be biographies of Jesus, but to paint a mental picture of Jesus, to show Him as Saviour, Master and Lord so that the reader, you and I would be bound to see that the person who could speak and teach and act and heal like this could be none other than the Son of God; and that in that belief he might find the secret of real life.

We need to read the Gospels not as a piece of history or an academic exercise. We must read them, as men and women seeking God.

With all this in mind we turn to the well known story of Thomas.

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There is something very lovable and very admirable about Thomas and I can identify personally with him. Faith didn't come easily for Thomas; and certainly obedience never came readily to him either. He was the man who had to be sure; he was the man who had to count the cost. But once he was sure, and once he had counted the cost, he was the man who went to the ultimate limit of faith and obedience. A faith like Thomas' is better than any glib profession; and obedience like his is better than agreeing to do a thing without counting the cost and then going back on our word.

To Thomas, the Cross was only what he had expected. When Jesus was going to Bethany, after the news of Lazarus' illness had come, Thomas' reaction had been: "Let us also go, that we may die with him". Thomas never lacked courage, but he was the natural pessimist. There can never be any doubt that he loved Jesus. He loved him enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him when the other disciples were hesitant and afraid. What he had expected had happened, and when it came, for all that he had expected it; he was broken-hearted, so broken-hearted he could not meet the eyes of men, but must be alone with his grief.

The character of Thomas is clear.

He made one mistake. He withdrew from the Christian fellowship. He sought loneliness rather than togetherness. And because he was not there with his fellow Christians he missed the first coming of Jesus. We miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from the Christian fellowship and try to be alone.

We've known this in this pandemic, and we've had Zoom meetings to be able to be with each other in worship, and lately we have YouTube. But it's not quite the same as being together. We've phoned each other and been in contact with each other, but it's not quite the same.

Things can happen to us within the fellowship of Christ's Church which will not happen when we are alone. When sorrow comes and sadness is all around us, it seems natural for us not to want to meet people. But that is the very time when, in spite of our sorrow, we seek the fellowship of Christ's people, for it is there that we are likeliest of all to meet him face to face. There is a reference in the Psalm reading of the importance of God's people living together in unity and we know ourselves how good this is.

But Thomas had two great virtues. He absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There is an uncompromising honesty about him. He would never cover up any doubts by pretending that they did not exist. He was not the kind of man who would rattle off a creed without understanding what it was all about. Thomas had to be sure--and he was quite right.

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I know there have been times in my working life when I battled on struggling to understand something until a good friend would notice and point the way and there followed what I call a light bulb moment and it all became clear. Once things become clear and understandable we are in a position to share that knowledge and lead others to understand for themselves.

Thomas' other great virtue was that when he was sure, and when he was sure he went the whole way. "My Lord and my God!" said he. There was no halfway house about Thomas. He was not airing his doubts just for the sake of it; he doubted in order to become sure; and when he did, his surrender to certainty was complete. And when we fight our way through doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, we will attain a certainty which nothing can shake.

We do not know for sure what happened to Thomas in the after days; but legend tells us that he travelled to India preaching the Gospel and forming the first Christian Church in that part of our world.

Thomas the doubter became a man of unshakeable faith from the day he declared "My Lord and my God."

Many years ago a young devout Jewish young man asked Alfred Ackerly "Why should I believe in a dead Jew?"

Mr Ackerley's reply was "He lives! I tell you, He is not dead, but lives here and now! Jesus Christ is more alive today than ever before. I can prove it by my own experience, as well as the testimony of countless thousands."

Mr Ackerley went on to write the hymn: "He lives He lives Christ Jesus lives today He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way, You ask me how I know He lives He lives within my heart."

May we join with Thomas in that wonderful heartfelt declaration; the declaration that was Mr Ackerley and mine too, and hope that it will always be so, for all Christians everywhere.

"My Lord and my God". Amen

Hymn: My Jesus, My Saviour

*My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like you
I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love.*

*My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,*

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never cease to worship you.

*Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.*

*I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in you.*

Prayers of Intercession

Living God

At this time we bring to you those who face the future with uncertainty or anxiety

Those who fear it

Who despair of it or feel they have no future

We pray for those in the troubled places of our world

Those who long for peace,

An end to conflict and a time of harmony,

But who in their hearts have given up hoping.

We pray for those who face trauma and upheaval in their lives

Those who are sick and their carers, those who are mourning,

Those overwhelmed by pressures, paralysed by fears

And those crushed by sorrows.

Living God, Reach out to all who feel uncertain of the future,

Give hope out of despair, joy out of sorrow and good out of evil.

Grant confidence that nothing can separate us from your love

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn: God Forgave my sin in Jesus name

*God forgave my sin in Jesus' name;
I've been born again in Jesus' name,
and in Jesus' name I come to you
to share his love as he told me to.*

He said:

*'Freely, freely you have received,
freely, freely give;*

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*go in my name and because you believe,
others will know that I live.'*

*All power is given in Jesus' name
in earth and heaven in Jesus' name;
and in Jesus' name I come to you
to share his power as he told me to.*

*He said:
'Freely, freely you have received,
freely, freely give;
go in my name and because you believe,
others will know that I live.'*

Closing prayer

As we came to worship
So let us go now to serve
Showing the truth in our lives
Which we have declared with our lips
In the name of Jesus Christ
Amen

Be Still - David J. Evans

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