

**Call to Worship** (Tim Graves, LiturgyBits)

We gather as people on a journey. We believe and we have doubts.  
We do good and we sin. We are imperfect humans, and still beloved by God.  
Love and grace, hope and faith; these are the essence of God.  
Though we are full of trust and full of doubt, we are here.  
Speak to us, God! Continue creating us!  
Inspire our hearts. Enlighten our minds. Guide our actions.

**Hymn:** StF 300 (Charles Wesley, 1707-1788)

1 Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!  
to his throne beyond the skies. Alleluia!  
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!  
enters now the highest heaven. Alleluia!

2 There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!  
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!  
He has conquered death and sin; Alleluia!  
take the King of glory in. Alleluia!

3 Highest heaven its Lord receives; Alleluia!  
yet he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!

Though returning to his throne, Alleluia!  
still he calls us all his own. Alleluia!

4 Still for us he intercedes; Alleluia!  
his atoning death he pleads, Alleluia!  
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!  
he the firstfruits of our race. Alleluia!

5 There we shall with you remain, Alleluia!  
partners of your endless reign, Alleluia!  
see you with unclouded view, Alleluia!  
find our heaven of heavens in you. Alleluia!.

**Prayer**

Holy God, lover of your children: the tomb has been opened, and we dance into your future. Your new life has dawned on us, and we surround you with our praise. You reach out your hand and lead us into joy. You breathe peace into our souls, so we may bring healing to a troubled world.

*We come now to make our confession.* O God of grace and new beginnings, when we hesitate to speak of your hope, forgive us, and help us to find our voice. When we stay locked behind our fears and doubts, forgive us, and send us out to share your grace. When we cannot believe your Word of new life, forgive us, and fill us with your joy. Amen.

**Scripture**      John 20:19-31

**Reflection**

Thomas has gained the nickname *Doubting Thomas*. He was not going to blindly follow the crowd and believe without seeing. And so, Thomas lives with his doubts and wrestles with them until Jesus appears to him. Then it is Thomas who having satisfied his doubts makes the bold sweeping confident statement of faith "My Lord and my God." Thomas came through his doubts, through a crisis of faith, to a more authentic faith. He doubted and waited and then one day his doubt turned into knowing.

We can learn from Thomas that it is okay to have doubts. Jesus let him wrestle with his doubts for a whole week before he appeared to help him out. And then Jesus did not criticize Thomas. Jesus appeared and enabled Thomas to discover the answers to his doubt. Thomas grew through the experience. His faith became more authentic as it enabled him to come to a new recognition of who Jesus was. If the gospel writer John thought this story was embarrassing then he could have left this story out, but he included it and by doing so, I think John is saying that our doubts are okay, they are a part of our faith.

Theologian Paul Tillich says, "Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith." And Christian author Phillip Yancey says, "Doubt is the skeleton on which the flesh of faith attaches itself."

Faith must have a way to mature. As new Christians, we start by believing as we have been taught, and then we realize that we have many tacit and unexamined convictions and we explore them and make explicit commitments, or we come to realize that we may not see the total truth and we enter dialogue with others. As we wrestle and entertain the doubts, we come to find new patterns of imaging, valuing, and committing. None of these stages of faith are less faithful than the others. It is just our faith maturing as our heads and hearts catch up with how God is moving in our lives and the experiences that we are trying to make sense of. Mature faith is hard-won, but it is worth struggling for.

Most of us go through periods when we become aware of the limitations of what we believe leading us to doubt and question. It may be a crisis that throws our faith into turmoil: perhaps a fatal car accident, or a suicide, or a cancer diagnosis, or COVID or a tornado. It might be disillusionment that sets in over unanswered prayer. Or as we try to answer questions that we thought we knew the answers to, such as: Why does God allow suffering? Why does God heal some people and not others? Or it may be our knowledge of science that calls our faith into doubt as we try to figure out how the Biblical world speaks to us in the post-modern world when the literal answers we were given as young children seem inaccurate.

The problem is that we worry that we will be criticized for voicing our struggles, so we shy away from them. Thomas, however, is strong enough to voice his doubts to his fellow disciples. And Jesus waits and does not rush to him, but when he comes, he lets Thomas look at his scars that he is still carrying, and Thomas courageously reaches out to touch them and cries out "My Lord, and my God."

To be a church to those who doubt means bearing our scars to one another and recognizing that we are all broken and scarred. It means we do not hide behind fake smiles, but we extend our hands to others, showing them the holes and we invite them to touch and to feel, to enter into our lives that include struggles and joys, pain and healing, death and resurrection. It does not mean agreeing with each other all the time either. We may come out in different places as we wrestle with our own questions, doubts, and fears, but we can compassionately and lovingly both support each other and challenge each other. It does not mean "NO Doubt" spelt "N-O" but rather "Know Doubt" spelt "K-N-O-W." Together, let us embrace those doubts, so that we too can honestly cry out, "My Lord, and my God."

## Prayer

God of light and love, in our moments of loss, confusion and chaos, we struggle. We thank you for the lessons that we can learn from your disciple Thomas. Enable us to understand that doubting is a part of faith. Give us the strength to be honest and to bare our scars to each other. When we stand in places of fear as wounded and searching disciples, come to us, and miraculously breathe your peace and wholeness back into us. Out of our struggles, draw us into a more mature faith, and bring us to new life-giving understandings of who Jesus was. *We lift up now the concerns for others that we have on our hearts.* ... In the name of the resurrected Christ, we pray the prayer that he taught us: *Our Father ...*

**Hymn:** StF 303 (Samuel Medley, 1738-99)

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 and grants me daily breath;  
He lives, and I shall conquer death:  
He lives my future to prepare;  
He lives to bring me safely there.

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, all glory to His Name!  
He lives, my Savior, still the same.  
What joy the blest assurance gives,  
I know that my Redeemer lives!

## Blessing

We go rejoicing in the knowledge that Christ has risen.  
And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.