



CALL TO WORSHIP It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and to sing your praises O Lord most high.

HYMN 298 Christ the Lord <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppkfVTco4-g> Maddi Prior

1 Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

2 Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Vain the stone, the watch, the seal Alleluia!
Christ has burst the gates of hell, Alleluia!

3 Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!

Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

4 Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

5 King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!
Thee to know, thy power to prove, Alleluia!
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you create all things out of nothing through your eternal Word.

Blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you redeemed the world through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you empower your people through the gift of the Holy Spirit. **We glorify and adore you. Amen.**

We come despairing at our brokenness, weeping with our disappointments, doubting that things will get better – but Jesus has turned our despair into hope, our weeping into joy, our doubt into faith.

He grants us the assurance that we are forgiven people. **Thanks be to God. Alleluia!**

READING John 20:19 – 31

SERMON

... To begin at the beginning ...

... and the beginning, as we all know, is another word for genesis. The creation of things.

So way back at the genesis of the world God breathed his life into humanity.

And now here is Jesus, God incarnate, who recreates as he breathes the spirit of God on his disciples. Except one ... I love Thomas.

Do you remember that famous story of Jesus talking of his death saying “You know the way to the place where I am going.” Most of the disciples nodded wisely.

Not Thomas – “Lord we don’t know where you’re going, how can we know the way?”

Here again excited disciples on the day of resurrection “We’ve seen the Lord!” “Humph – unless I see it for myself, I’m not going to believe you.” And who can blame him?

I imagine the following week might have been a pretty uncomfortable time. 10 happy disciples, full of the Holy Spirit and Thomas sitting in the middle of it all.

I have an unholy picture from Christopher Robin of Eeyore surrounded by Piglet, and Roo and Tigger. But no amount of trying to bounce him out of it, or reason him into belief was going to do.

What did it, a week later, was his own encounter with the risen Jesus, who greets them all and turns straight to Thomas. Without having to be asked Jesus offers the marks of his suffering to Thomas as proof.

“Stop your doubting and believe” or “stop being unbelieving.”

Thomas didn't have to actually do what he'd said he wanted to do. He didn't have to inspect and touch Jesus. The offer was enough for him to fall in worship with the dedication of his life “My Lord and my God”.

There's no doubt that Thomas was transformed by this encounter. Tradition has it that he was 1st missionary to India.

Three things strike me about the relationship between Thomas and Jesus.

1. At no point did Jesus tell him to stop being such a pain in the neck with his tedious questions and “yes ... buts”. Instead, he answered him.

And Thomas stayed the course. 3 years of trying to make sense of what was going on. Perhaps he wasn't with the others the first time because he was off on his own trying to work it all out...

Questions are OK “Doubt challenges the dogmatisms and questions the neat schemes by which we think we have truth wrapped up. Faith is not the absence of doubt but trust and commitment despite the lack of infallible dogmas.”

Rev'd Dave Tomlinson

2 Jesus knew what Thomas needed for faith and provided it. Perhaps Thomas should have been able to believe on the testimony of the others, but he didn't or couldn't and Jesus graciously offers the conditions he needed.

Although part of our calling is to make disciples, in end it is Jesus who makes disciples. We can do all we can to make conditions right but, in the end, it is in a personal encounter with Jesus that faith lies.

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit offers you whatever you need for a relationship with him. Perhaps you find him in silence or prayer, perhaps in bible study or discussion groups, perhaps in doing and service.

If Jesus were to come into this room and turn to you, what would he offer that would strengthen your faith?

3. Thomas was able to come to belief and a new understanding of Jesus **because he was there**. He'd missed out the first time, but a week later he was there. Jesus hasn't left us alone he sent the holy spirit, the helper, the comforter, but we have to be “in it to win it” as the phrase goes.

However, it is that you draw near to Jesus, if you ignore that activity you risk missing out on the blessing.

So ... when faith seems hard – which it will from time to time, remember the blessing which we received in our time because of the doubts and disbelief of Thomas. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

HYMN 644 when our confidence is shaken <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ4JHkjFtll> (sung to Cwm Rhondda)

When our confidence is shaken
In beliefs we thought secure;
When the spirit in its sickness
Seeks but cannot find a cure:
God is active in the tensions
Of a faith not yet mature.

In the discipline of praying,
When it's hardest to believe;
In the drudgery of caring,
When it's not enough to grieve:
Faith maturing, learns acceptance
Of the insights we receive.

Solar systems, void of meaning,
Freeze the spirit into stone;
Always our researches lead us
To the ultimate Unknown:
Faith must die, or come full circle
To its source in God alone.

God is love; and he redeems us
In the Christ we crucify:
This is God's eternal answer
To the world's eternal why;
May we in this faith maturing
Be content to live and die.

PRAYER

Place your hand Thomas, on the shaking hands of frightened young people forced to fight.
Place your finger Thomas, on computer keyboards churning out hate in speeches and newsprint and social media.

Wrap your arms Thoms, around folk who are cold, homeless and grieving because their homes are no more.

Touch, Thomas the gaping wounds of my world.

Feel, Thomas the primal wound of my people.

Reach out your hands, Thomas and place them at the side of the poor.

Grasp my hands, Thomas and believe.

HYMN 296 Christ has risen while earth slumbers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgriexwclAc>

Christ has risen while earth slumbers,

Christ has risen where hope died,

as he said and as he promised,

as we doubted and denied.

Let the moon embrace the blessing;

let the sun sustain the cheer;

let the world confirm the rumour.

Christ is risen, God is here!

Christ has risen to companion

former friends who fear the night,

sensing loss and limitation

where their faith had once burned bright.

They bemoan what is no longer,

they expect no hopeful sign

till Christ ends their conversation,

breaking bread and sharing wine.

Christ has risen for the people

whom he loved and died to save;

Christ has risen for the women

bringing flowers to grace his grave.

Christ has risen for disciples

huddled in an upstairs room.

He whose word inspired creation

is not silenced by the tomb.

Christ has risen and forever

lives to challenge and to change

all whose lives are messed or mangled,

all who find religion strange.

Christ is risen. Christ is present,

making us what he has been —

evidence of transformation

in which God is known and seen.

BENEDICTION

"Peace be with you," Jesus says to you in your room. *"As the Father sent me, so I send you."*

No doubt or fear can lock God out of our lives. Remember that as you put aside this paper.

And may these words echo through your mind, as well:

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.", **"Amen!"**