

**East Durham Methodist Circuit:**

**On-line Service for Easter Sunday 11th April 2021**

**Prepared by Peter Walsham and Heidi Ure  
Reader: Jim Murray**

**Theme: Believing the unbelievable**

**Call to worship:**

Welcome to worship on this the first Sunday after Easter Day.

Jesus said to Thomas, "Come here Thomas and see my hands, and here, put your hand in my side, only stop doubting and believe." Thomas replied, "My Lord and My God!"

**Hymn:            **Low in the grave He lay**            Robert Lowry            **StF 305 / H&P 202****

1. Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus my Saviour,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus my Lord!

2. Vainly they watch his bed,  
Jesus my Saviour,  
Vainly they seal the dead,  
Jesus my Lord! **Up from the grave...**

**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 forever, with his saints  
to reign.  
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah!  
Christ arose!**

3. Death cannot keep its prey,  
Jesus my Saviour;  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus my Lord! **Up from the grave...**

**Prayers of Approach and Confession:**

Sovereign God - Christ is risen – He is risen indeed !

We praise You that the resurrection of Jesus was not a discreet event in its own right. Unconnected to anything which had gone before; unconnected to anything which was yet to happen but it was part of Your divine plan, begun in the story of creation, continuing in the history of Your people shown in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Your Son and yet to be completed – in Your time – when Christ returns in glory.

As we go forward on our Easter journey from the day of Resurrection, towards the day when the promise of the coming of God's Spirit was fulfilled, we continue to praise You:

that the message of Easter is a message of triumph;  
that death is not the end – but is followed by new beginnings;  
that Your love will always be stronger than any force working against it;

that Your plans can never be defeated;  
and in Your plans – there is a place and a role for each of us.

Father God, when the focus of our world so quickly turns away from the emotions, the promises and the challenges of Holy Week and Easter;

Forgive us when we are swept along and let go of the treasures of these past days of devotion. When we allow the concerns of the moment to take precedence over the things of eternity.

Forgive us for losing our focus. When we become down-hearted when our faith falters – when we draw back from You.

Forgive us for allowing our vision to become narrow and our trust to become limited.

Patient God, as You forgive us, we ask that You help us always:

to look to You and to put our trust in You  
to have such vision that we might see the direction in which You are leading us  
to have the commitment to stay close to You, moment by moment and step by step,  
as we walk in faith and live in Your service

These prayers we bring in Jesus' name and we continue to pray in his words as we say **The Lord's Prayer** together:

**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**

**Reading:    Isaiah 52 7-12**

New International Version

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

<sup>8</sup> Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

<sup>9</sup> Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

<sup>11</sup> Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the LORD's house.

<sup>12</sup> But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

<sup>19</sup> 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!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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!" <sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> 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 stand alone in the presence**

Charles Hutchinson Gabriel

1. I stand amazed in the presence  
Of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me,  
A sinner, condemned, unclean.

2. He took my sins and my sorrows,  
He made them His very own;  
He bore the burden to Calvary,  
And suffered and died alone.

**O how marvellous! O how wonderful!  
And my song shall ever be:  
O how marvellous! O how wonderful!  
Is my Saviour's love for me!**

**O how marvellous...**

3. When with the ransomed in glory  
His face I at last shall see,  
'Twill be my joy through the ages  
To sing of His love for me.

**O how marvellous...**

**Prayers of Intercession:**

Knowing that the risen Christ is here among us, let us pray in His name for the Church and for the world.

Father, we pray for Your blessing on every group of Christians worshipping today all over the world; and we pray for all who doubt Your truth. We pray that our hearts may be set ablaze with love and that we may walk, as children of light.

Silence

### **My Lord and my God!**

Father, we pray for all the areas of Your world which are torn apart by hatred and violence, famine, disease or religious differences. We pray for an end to war and a deeper commitment to peace.

Silence

### **My Lord and my God!**

Father, we pray for those who face family rejection if they become Christians and for all families divided by beliefs or persecuted for their faith.

We pray for the children of our church that they may grow up strong in the faith with good role models to guide them.

Silence

### **My Lord and my God!**

Father, we pray for those who wake up to the prospect of another day filled with pain; for those who long for someone to spend time with them, enjoying their company and we pray for the insight that notices needs.

Silence

### **My Lord and my God!**

Father, we pray for those who mourn and we pray for those they love and miss, commending all who have died to the everlasting arms of the God of love, in whom there is life in all its fullness.

Silence

### **My Lord and my God!**

Father, with joy in our hearts we thank You for the new life opened up to us through Jesus our Redeemer.

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

**Amen**

**Hymn:**      **Victor's crown**      Darlene Zschech

1. You are always fighting for us  
Heaven's angels all around  
My delight is found in knowing  
That You wear the Victor's crown  
You're my help and my defender

You're my Saviour and my friend  
By Your grace I live and breathe to  
worship You

2. At the mention of Your greatness  
In Your Name I will bow down  
In Your presence fear is silent  
For You wear the Victor's crown  
Let Your glory fill this temple  
Let Your power overflow  
By Your grace I live and breathe to  
worship You to worship You

**Hallelujah**  
**You have overcome**  
**You have overcome**  
**Hallelujah**  
**Jesus You have overcome the world**

3. You are ever interceding  
As the lost become the found  
You can never be defeated  
For You wear the Victor's crown  
You are Jesus the Messiah  
You're the Hope of all the world  
By Your grace I live and breathe  
to worship You.

**Hallelujah...**

Every high thing must come down  
Every stronghold shall be broken  
You wear the Victor's crown  
You overcome! You overcome!

At the cross the work was finished  
You were buried in the ground  
But the grave could not contain You  
For You wear the Victor's crown

**Hallelujah...**

Jesus You have overcome the world  
Every high thing must come down  
Every stronghold shall be broken  
You wear the Victor's crown  
You overcome! You overcome!

### **Message:**

**John Ch 20 vs 27: Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands, and reach out your hand and put it into my side"...**

There's a saying, '**Actions speak louder than words!**' and I think we see the perfect example of this here, because Thomas refused to believe the other disciples who had seen the risen Jesus a week earlier, until he actually saw Jesus for himself.

He wasn't prepared to accept what the others were saying. For Thomas, the only way he could believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive again, was quite simple: he needed to see it for himself.

There's not much information written about Thomas, in fact, many theologians consider him to be a bit of a pessimist and we can see a perfect example of this in an earlier chapter of John 11 vs.16, when Jesus proposed going to Bethany, a mere 2 miles from Jerusalem, in order to restore Lazarus back to life. The disciples, were aware how dangerous it was for Jesus to be so close to those who wished to capture and possibly kill Jesus as they were based in Jerusalem. Yet it is Thomas who speaks out saying, "Let us all go then, that we may die with him!"

Here we see Thomas doubting whether Jesus would escape with his life. But we also see his loyalty and love because he went with Jesus to that dangerous place. How sad and dejected he must have been witnessing the execution of Jesus on Good Friday, because he firmly believed that Jesus was the one true Messiah who would deliver the nation of Israel. Now however, all he sought was solitude. He needed to be on his own to cope with his grieving heart.

To some extent, I can sympathise with Thomas as I also needed solitude, despite being surrounded by loving family and friends, when my mother died at the early age of 53.

During my nursing career I came face to face with all sorts of suffering and grief. Patients and their relatives react in many different ways when coping with the loss of a loved one, yet most, if not all of them, requested time and space to be alone with their thoughts and emotions.

As a nurse tutor, I always ensured we had a teaching session on how to break bad news and support those suffering from the grief of a lost loved one. A major theme for this session was to emphasise that '**Actions speak louder than words**', because it was so easy to 'talk the talk, and deliver the theory of coping with grief, but much harder to 'walk the walk', and deal practically with these situations. We would use role play so that the students got as near as possible to a real life grieving experience to cope with and I'd be able to emphasise the need for patients and relatives to be given time and space to begin, or continue with, their grieving process. On many occasions I have witnessed mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, all seeking solitude because they found suffering and the associated grief so difficult to deal with.

And so Thomas, like many of us today, sought the company of his own time and space on the day that Jesus first appeared to the disciples in the upper room.

We can only imagine how Thomas must have felt after this remarkable event, with the disciples utterly convinced that Jesus was alive again. They had physically seen him, Jesus had spoken to them and breathed the Holy Spirit onto them.

Did Thomas feel excluded and no longer part of the close family group dynamic? Perhaps he felt jealous, or annoyed or frustrated with himself for not being there, or disappointed. Who knows!

Who knows indeed, except to say that the response from Thomas is true to form, his pessimism will not allow him to believe. Self-doubt is evident as he utters, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my hand in his side, I will not believe"

The word 'Unbelievable' is quite an emotive word which gets used very frequently in our everyday language. Of course, the great contemporary exponent of using this word is none other than, "I don't believe it!" Victor Meldrew from the BBC comedy series 'One foot in the grave'.

Many things today seem 'unbelievable'. I recall a long time ago, attending the funeral service at Gateshead Crematorium of a neighbour who lived opposite us in Bewick Road. He and ourselves were the only non-Jewish residents in the street and he was a very good neighbour and a highly respected friend to them. As we were entering the Crematorium, another chap who also did the odd jobs for the Jews suddenly declared, "I don't believe it, I just do not believe it!" because walking up the drive of the Crematorium was this solitary Jewish man. When he caught up with us, he refused to come in but just wanted to pay his respects. This was unheard of within the Jewish community and certainly was viewed by many who weren't there as being 'unbelievable'.

"I don't believe it", words which just slip off the tongue with great ease today and Thomas uses those same words to testify to his own troubled heart, demanding to see the evidence for himself before he would believe.

And Thomas was given that very evidence, because a week later, Jesus returned and challenged Thomas to test the evidence for himself. At this moment we see Thomas almost lost for words, as all he can say is, "My Lord and my God!"

Often when we are confronted with almost 'unbelievable' evidence we are lost for words, or we cannot find the suitable words to describe our emotions.

I remember once going on a Christian holiday to Dunoon in Scotland, and during the holiday I went on a trip to climb a high peak in Gourock, across the river Clyde from Dunoon. When I finally reached the top of this peak, I was not only breathless but speechless because of the panoramic view I could see!

To the north was Loch Lomond and the western highlands. To the south were the isles of Arran and Bute. To the west was the shores of the Clyde and the hills of Ben Bhreac. To the east was the Lothian peaks. No matter where I looked I had a fantastic view and all I could think was to thank God for making this beautiful creation.

My wife Gwyneth had a similar experience when we visited the volcanic mountains and caves on Lanzarote. Sometimes what God puts in front of our eyes is almost 'unbelievable', and we are reduced to very few words.

I wonder if you've ever thought why Jesus visited the disciples when he did, knowing that Thomas was absent? Have you ever wondered if he did this on purpose? And, if so, why?

I've thought about this and my conclusion is that I think Jesus may have done this in order to offer hope to everyone who had not seen the Him in risen form and this includes you and I. There is meaning in everything Jesus did and continues to do through His Spirit.

Today many people are excluding themselves from the Christian Church in Britain. Our Christian Faith is just one of many other faiths in our multi-cultural society. People are turning away from the stories of Jesus, refusing to believe the gospel messages, a fundamental one being the resurrection of Jesus and belief in the risen Christ. Many find this story too unbelievable, just like Thomas did.

So Jesus called back to confront Thomas. **"Thomas, do you believe because you can see me? Come, see my hands, come and touch me,"** said Jesus. **"How blessed are those who believe without seeing me"**. This includes you and I. This is what Jesus does when he comes into our lives. He calls us! He challenges us! He changes us! He changes, sorrow into joy, hate into love, despair into hope, fear into trust and weakness into strength. Amazing changes occur within us when we believe in the risen Lord Jesus.

Thomas we learn, had two great virtues: He refused to say he understood, when he didn't. And, when he was sure, he became fully committed to the cause. A few years after the early Christian church became established, Thomas was sent to India and there he served Jesus amongst a hostile and unwelcoming people, but he gave of his best because having counted the cost, weighing up the advantages and disadvantages and realising he may well lose his life, he committed wholeheartedly in complete obedience to serving the risen Jesus, who had returned on that very special evening to change his 'doubting' heart.

In conclusion then, what is our responsibility towards this remarkable passage of scripture? Quite simply, I believe we have to do two things in equal proportion:

Firstly we must **'talk the talk'** and **'walk the walk'**, testifying with words and actions, our personal journey with the risen Lord Jesus.

Secondly, we must try our best to protect and tell the stories of Jesus to the doubters amongst us, and bring them to the empty tomb. And then leave them at the empty tomb, so that Jesus can confront each one with the choice and the challenge to **believe the unbelievable!**

**Amen**

**Hymn: Crown Him with many crowns** Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring **StF 347 / H&P 255**

1. Crown him with many crowns,  
The Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns  
All music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing of him  
Who died for thee,  
And hail him as thy matchless King  
Through all eternity.

2. Crown him the Son of God,  
Before the worlds began,  
And ye who tread where he hath trod,  
Crown him the Son of Man;  
Who every grief hath known  
That wrings the human breast,  
And takes and bears them for His own,  
That all in him may rest.

3. Crown him the Lord of life,  
Who triumphed over the grave,  
And rose victorious in the strife  
For those he came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
Who died, and rose on high,  
Who died eternal life to bring,  
And lives that death may die.

4. Crown him the Lord of peace,  
Whose power a sceptre sways  
From pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
And all be prayer and praise.

His reign shall know no end,  
And round his piercèd feet  
Fair flowers of paradise extend  
Their fragrance ever sweet.

5. Crown him the Lord of love,  
Behold his hands and side,  
Those wounds, yet visible above,  
In beauty glorified.  
No angel in the sky  
Can fully bear that sight,  
But downward bends his burning eye  
At mysteries so bright.

6. Crown him the Lord of Heaven,  
Enthroned in worlds above,  
Crown him the King to whom is given  
The wondrous name of Love.  
Crown him with many crowns,  
As thrones before him fall;  
Crown him, ye kings, with many crowns,  
For he is King of all.

7. Crown him the Lord of years,  
The Potentate of time,  
Creator of the rolling spheres,  
Ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For thou hast died for me;  
Thy praise and glory shall not fail  
Throughout eternity.

**Blessing:**

We thank You Loving God for Your presence with us, despite being separated and unable to worship collectively with others.

Help us to bless each other through Your mighty Spirit and may our salvation through Jesus Your Son and Your unfailing love towards us, be with us forevermore. **Amen**

**And finally, a special prayer:**

The sad news of the passing of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh broke after this service was written and so we offer this prayer:

Dear Lord, we thank You for the life of the Duke of Edinburgh a man whose lifelong service to our country and to the Earth that You created has been an inspiration to people all over the world.

We mourn his passing and we pray that You will support and comfort our Queen, their children, grandchildren and all his family at this time of loss. **Amen**