



Thinking about Thomas

We Gather

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle. It would be appropriate to find a white cloth or scarf to signify the Easter season. Start by lighting the candle. The candle helps to centre us. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Introduction

Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed!

We continue to gather in our homes, conscious of our brothers and sisters all over the world doing the same. Some are gathering around computer and television screens to worship “online”, some will gather with their Bibles and prayer books, some will simply stop for a moment.

And so we take this moment, this time, we set everything else of our “doing” aside, and we still our hearts and minds, seeking the breath of the Holy Spirit as She breathes new life into our lives.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, [God the Creator], breathed life into this Land and her Peoples.

From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders,
past and present, and we pray for the future of their communities.
May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler, This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.

Call to Worship

Psalm 16 says this:

¹¹ You show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Prayer

Living God, we come with empty hands and full hearts.

Our world still reels from the disruption of illness.

Our lives are still adjusting to new routines and new ways of living.

Calm our minds, still our hearts, draw us into your peace-filled presence.

As we remember the stories of your risen Son, appearing to his disciples, and sending them into the world, so strengthen and renew our resolve to follow Christ into the world we serve, for it is in Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Sing - *Lord Of The Dance (TIS 242)* - *this song never fails to make me smile!*
Watch a contemporary version here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0neq_axOslk

Prayer of Praise

What are you thankful for?

Take some time to offer your thanks and praise to God.

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus,
here are your disciples -
your wounded hands and feet
in the world today are ours.

At times we have been the frightened ones,
staying at a distance,
worried about our safety or our reputations.
But you come close to us,
bring peace and challenge,
unlocking our potential
and setting us free.

At times we have been the doubting ones,
when creeds conflict
or certainty has evaded us.
But you come close
and allow us to speak our minds,
accepting us
and setting us free.

At times we have been the confused ones,
feeling far from you
with questions that don't have answers.
So, we listen for your voice.

Silence

Words of Assurance

The risen Christ says to us:
"Peace be with you.
As the Father sent me,
so I am sending you."

***Through our fear,
through our doubt,
through our confusion
may we continue Jesus' work
as we travel many roads,
liberated and united
by the love of the Resurrected One. Amen.***

We Listen for God's Voice

A video of the reading and reflection can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/408751960/2fe5ae6fd4>

Reading: John 20:19-31

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

Dear God, open our hearts and minds to you and your presence.

Help us to trust you with our lives.

May we know your joyful presence in all of our lives. Amen.

Seasons of The Spirit

So where was Thomas?

Everyone else is locked in a room - afraid.

So *where* was Thomas?

Was he out getting food?

Was he attending to his family?

Was he just needing some air and so had gone for a walk? I can imagine it getting very stuffy in a room full of people, all still somewhere between grief, shock and possibility.

Perhaps he had already returned to the routines of his life, sharing in his community the events of the past days as he had experienced them.

Wherever he was, he was not locked in a room with the others.

We'll never know where Thomas was - he simply wasn't there when Jesus appears in a locked room, when Jesus "bursts" back into the disciples' lives.

And I think Thomas has been given a rough deal over the centuries.

After all, in coming amongst his disciples, Jesus shows *them* his wounds - why shouldn't Thomas ask for the same thing?

FOMO, the "fear of missing out", is a very real thing in today's world. Part of the way we counter it is to remain connected to our devices - we don't have to take someone else's word for something that has happened because we simply "google" it and watch the video for ourselves. That sense of having all the information I could ever need in the palm of my hand (on my phone) is very much part of our culture today.

However, that doesn't take account of the number of fake or adulterated videos existing in the world of social media. Just because I have access to information at the tap or swipe of my finger, doesn't mean I can be sure it is accurate.

Which raises the very real challenge for us about *who* we believe and for what?

Worldwide we have seen the challenge to the way information is conveyed to us.

We have seen elections tainted by the news corporations sharing information or reporting on events with a particular bias and we know that newspapers, television and radio all can often report events in a way that reflects the perspective of their owners.

So how do we even bring ourselves to the task of determining whether what we are hearing is true or half-true or completely made up?

It reminds me of when I was small, my two older brothers used to play tricks on me all the time, telling me all sorts of things and then laughing at me when I believed them! I got very suspicious, very young!

So I think it is a bit rough to give Thomas a hard time for not immediately believing the tales of his friends. Remember, back in chapter 11 of John's gospel, Thomas is the one who, upon hearing the news of Lazarus' death, speaks up and declares that they should all go to Jerusalem to die with Jesus (11:16). This is someone who is fired up and prepared to face those who are hostile to Jesus head on.

So I want to challenge the often laid criticism of Thomas as a "doubter" as if that is a bad thing.

First of all, I think we have been sold a furphy in thinking that the opposite of doubt is belief. I don't think that is true at all. I don't think doubt and belief are opposites, I think they sit with one another in the messiness of what is our understanding of faith.

I think we can fundamentally believe something to be true and still doubt the detail.

Faith fills in the gaps, doesn't it?

I don't have to know why Mary didn't recognise Jesus in the garden, or where Thomas was for him to miss out. Faith tells me there is enough in this story for me to believe in the truth of the proclamation, "Christ is risen"!

Second, I don't think it is such a bad thing to want to have information confirmed before we swallow it whole - especially in today's world. There is a television series called *The Newsroom*, written by the same people who wrote *The West Wing*. It depicts the national newsroom of a major broadcaster in the US. One of the unbreakable rules for the journalists is that any breaking news, scoop or exclusive has to be confirmed by two more independent sources before it will be broadcast. And several times in the series we see the terrible consequences for short-circuiting that rule.

We know that many of our news sources will print or run a story with less than all the information. When we are researching any topic, particularly for publication, we know that we need to read more than one source before we accept its findings.

It is not unreasonable to want confirmation, particularly if it is a bit unusual!

And to be fair to Thomas, the first time Jesus appears to the disciples, he breathes on them and sends them into the world, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v.21). But a week later, the disciples are still in a room with the doors shut.

It took a whole week before Thomas’ questions were answered.

But when they were, we have his extraordinary declaration of faith:

“My Lord and my God” (v.28).

Thomas is the first to name God in the risen Christ - My Lord and my God!

Thomas gets it!

And Jesus doesn’t chide him for being slow, Jesus speaks words of encouragement to all of us who will never have the benefit of putting our fingers on Jesus’ wounds, “Blessed are *you* who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (v.29).

As we continue to ponder on the meaning of Christ’s resurrection for us, don’t be hard on yourself if it takes some time to wrap your mind and heart around it - the disciples didn’t really understand what it meant for them until after Pentecost (50 days later) and then they took years figuring out how to explain it to the world, writing their stories and letters to each other as they worked out what it meant to live in this new way.

And I think we are still trying to work it out - because it is the task of every disciple in every generation to figure out what Christ’s resurrection means for them and for their community, and then to work to make it real in their own circumstances.

Sometimes we have managed that better than others.

Finally, I just want to say a word about an aspect of this story that is sometimes described as John’s version of “pentecost”. When Jesus first appears to the disciples, he breathes on them and says, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’ (vv22-23)

What does Jesus mean?

First, he conveys the gift - the gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath of Life, the advocate and comforter that Jesus spoke to them about before his death.

And then he gives the command - If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

The word translated here as “if”, could also be rendered as “when” or “as”. It is a good example of where Greek grammar doesn’t always translate directly into English.

So it becomes more a statement of what we may or may not do, and more like the command and promise:

When you forgive someone, we are all set free.

When we don’t, we are all bound.

As disciples of Christ, with God’s breath breathing through our very being, if we choose to remain bound in the brokenness of the world around us, then the world remains bound; but when we offer forgiveness, we offer the freedom of Christ’s life to the world.

May we be people who offer the freedom of forgiveness to the world.

Listen: Listen to the Words of the Risen Christ (2016 © RESOUNDworship, Joel Payne)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhMI4UVjV4E&feature=youtu.be&t=5>

We Respond

Prayer for Others

Spend some time thinking about the people around you: who have you noticed this week, who is struggling, who has been a friend for you?

- *family*
- *friends*
- *neighbours*
- *people who are ill or struggling or lonely*
- *is there anyone you could make a point of contacting this week - pray for them*

Give thanks for health workers, researchers, government officials - working to provide care, healing and organisation. Pray for them - for strength and compassion.

Give thanks for the many essential workers who work to keep our society functioning - teachers, child care workers, grocery workers, truck drivers, garbage collectors, postmen and women. Pray for them - for persistence and courage.

Pray for people who have lost their work - business owners, employees, casual workers, the self-employed.

Pray for our leaders - for wisdom and courage.

Pray for people in other parts of the world where medical facilities are less able to provide care to people who are ill.

Pray for the church - that we will learn to be the church even when we are unable to gather. May we be light and life in our communities.

As we settle into a new way of being, pray for patience and a deep sense of peace.

God of Life - speak to us in new ways, nudge us into new ways of being.

Without our regular groups and routines, help us to use our time wisely.

May we take time, to listen to you more deeply.

O God, in whom is life and fullness of joy,
hear our prayer and guide us.

God, we rejoice to hear of your living, life-giving presence and care, even when we do not see or touch you. You who made us know us and welcome us as we are, including how we fear, don't trust, doubt. We give to your merciful care the doubts and questions we have.

Meet us where we are and where we hide.

O God, in whom is life and fullness of joy,
hear our prayer and guide us.

We are not alone in our fears and doubts.

For those who are suffering from hunger and thirst, lack of shelter, in want of safety and belonging – help us receive them with compassion, care, and works to alleviate their suffering and to know your living hope.

O God, in whom is life and fullness of joy,
hear our prayer and guide us.

For those facing illness or death for themselves, loved ones, or neighbours, may your merciful presence and care be known, including through offerings of our presence, phone calls, deeds, words, and silence.

O God, in whom is life and fullness of joy,
hear our prayer and guide us.

Your creation testifies to your abundant provision and creativity throughout the seasons of birth, life, death, and new birth. Teach us to delight in and be good stewards of this heritage you have entrusted to us.

O God, in whom is life and fullness of joy,
hear our prayer and guide us.

We lift up our gratitude for your gifts of our lives, your presence and faithful love, O God.
Amen.

Seasons of The Spirit

Offering

In responding to what we have read and how we have heard God speak to us, we commit ourselves to breathing life in the world around us.

If you make a regular financial contribution to the Kiama-Jamberoo Congregation, consider putting that amount aside now and keeping it safe.

God of life, in whose presence is the fullness of joy, we offer and entrust to you these portions of our labours, talents, and time. May you receive and use them and us to provide life, hope, and joy to those in need in our world, to your glory. Amen.

Seasons of The Spirit

Notices

Keep an eye on the website, facebook page and the e-news for updates.

If you hear of or notice anyone needing a bit of extra support, please let Kath, Janice, or one of the Elders or Pastoral Partners know.

We Go

Sending and Blessing

God is with us, scattered though we may be.

As we enter a new week, we go in Christ's name,
trusting God who is always in our midst.

We go rejoicing that God teaches us and makes known to us the ways of life.

We go, sent to share the joy-filled news of God's power over death most fully known in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Beloved of God, go, knowing that you are not alone,
that Christ speaks to us today as he did to his disciples:
"Peace be with you".

Adapted from Seasons of The Spirit

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen indeed!

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