

What will YOU do with Jesus?

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **gold** or **white** cloth or scarf to signify that we are in these wonderful days following Easter.*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Acknowledgement of Country

From mountain to sea, from sand to red soil we walk the songlines of the Wadi Wadi people. We give thanks for the way they have held this land in their hearts and acknowledge their elders past and present.



Call To Worship –

Our call to worship today is from Psalm 16, one of David's psalms where he speaks honestly about the struggles he faces and reflects on how he has seen God's faithfulness again and again.

Psalm 16 A Miktam of David.

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the LORD, 'You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you.'

As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.
You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Listening for God's Voice

Bible Reading: John 20:19-29

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.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, '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.'

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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.' ²⁷Then 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.' ²⁸Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Reflection

As I was pondering this week's readings I came across this which I thought you might appreciate too. It's from Brianna McClean,

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-letter-to-doubting-thomas/>

Dear Thomas,

Nicknames are often cruel, and yours is no exception. I want to apologise for my part in the name calling, and extend my apology on behalf of the Church at large. You, Didymus, were one of the original twelve. Just like the other apostles, you walked alongside Jesus. Just like the other apostles, you listened to his preaching and participated in his miraculous ministry. And, just like the other apostles, you were sent out by the risen Christ to begin his Church. Yet, while the other apostles got cool nicknames like 'the Rock' or 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', you got stuck with 'Doubting Thomas'.

I am sympathetic to the situation which led to this unfortunate nickname. Just in case you've forgotten, let me remind you. The man you had (literally) followed for the last three years had just been killed. You're not a fool, you know how death works. Once Jesus was dead, it was game over. A few days later, you go out for a few hours and when you come back, your friends appear to have gone mad. They tell you that Jesus has come to them. They've seen him, alive. So you say, 'prove it'. You say that unless you see the nail marks in his hands and the wounds in his side, you will not believe that Jesus has really risen from the dead.

Now, Thomas, I know what I'm supposed to say. I'm supposed to say, 'Thomas, Jesus told you that he was going to rise from the dead'. I'm supposed to say, 'Thomas, you saw Jesus do amazing things. You should have believed!'. But, just between you and me, that's not what I say. I say, 'fair enough'.

I respect your rationality, your need for evidence. I think you understood what a life-changing claim your friends were making. People don't rise from the dead. If Jesus rose from the dead, that's world-shifting news. That's a broken law of nature. If Jesus rose from the dead, nothing could ever be the same again. It would mean death wasn't the end. The logical position to take is sceptical until proven otherwise. And, you had it proven otherwise.

Jesus refused to let you remain 'Doubting' Thomas. He wanted you as Believing Thomas, Trusting Thomas, Knowing Thomas. Jesus appeared to your group of friends again, with you in the room this time. He walked right up to you, knowing your heart was full of scepticism, and said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe".^[11]

Your response, Thomas, is why I think your nickname is so unfair. If you had refused Jesus' offer, your nickname would be fitting. If you had said, 'Jesus, dead people stay dead. That's how the universe works, and I'm not willing to have that belief challenged', then you would be rightly called 'Doubting' Thomas. But, that's not what you said. When Jesus gave evidence that he was the risen Christ, you believed. When Jesus commanded you, 'Stop doubting and believe' you cried out, 'My Lord and my God!'. That's faith, Thomas. You looked at the evidence before you and believed.

What happened next is my favourite part of your story. Jesus said to you, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'.^[12] You see, although I feel sympathy for you, I'm also jealous of you. Thomas, you have seen Jesus. Your doubt was corrected by your senses, some good old fashioned empirical evidence. My doubt is less easily dissolved. I can't touch the risen Christ. The good news is, Jesus knew that. He knew, and knows, that I must believe even though I do not see. He promises that to be a 'blessed' situation. It doesn't always feel 'blessed', it feels hard. How I long to swap places with you, Thomas. In my moments of existential terror, how I long to reach out and touch the risen Christ. And yet, Jesus has the same words for me as he did for you.

In my moments of doubt, I love to remind myself of the two-fold response Jesus gave you:

1. Compassion

Jesus gave you evidence. He didn't shame you or expect some great act of superhuman faith. He presented you his body, once dead but now alive. He allowed you to touch it, to test this gospel hypothesis. I thank God that he offers me evidence too. He created us to be rational creatures. And so, he has given us intellectually satisfying evidence that Jesus really lived, died and was raised from the dead. The eyewitness accounts of your friends, Thomas, are some of the most reliable historical documents we have. No other religion is based on a historically verifiable event. That God would reveal himself in such a way is an act of compassion.

2. Command

Thomas, Jesus loved you when you were a doubter but he didn't want to leave you as one. Once you saw the evidence, he commanded you to have faith. Ultimately, no amount of evidence could convince you to follow Jesus as Lord. Evidence must go hand in hand with faith. On days of doubt, I dig through the evidence; looking for answers. I always find intellectual satisfaction. But, often, the anxious voice of doubt remains loud in my ears. This is when I need to hear Jesus' voice, 'stop doubting and believe'. Doubt is not just an intellectual issue, it's a spiritual issue. If I know there is good evidence, then I must convert that evidence into faith.

Thomas, my experience with doubt is often scary, but always humbling. Was that your experience too? Perhaps you should have been called 'Humble Thomas', for what apostle knew the weakness of human intellect better than you? Or, maybe 'Brave Thomas', because faith in the face of doubt takes courage. My final submission for your consideration is, 'Obedient Thomas', because when Jesus commanded you to believe, you did.

You had a moment of doubt but a lifetime, an everlasting lifetime, of faith. One day, we will stand with every Christian who has ever doubted, and worship the risen King Jesus together. We will see his face and finally be completely assured. We will look at one another and say, 'Why did we ever doubt?'

^[1] [John 20:17](#)

^[2] [John 20:29](#)

Brianna is a freelance writer and lover of all things literary and theological. Raised in the Blue Mountains and surrounded by Christian family, she came to faith within the Presbyterian church. She loves exploring God's creation – from Indonesia to Switzerland – and has also completed an internship with London City Mission. Brianna now lives in Sydney and studies Philosophy and Ancient Greek at the University of Sydney. She attends Anchor Church, Sydney.

Responding

Wondrous Creator, you inhabit this world
not shying from it's suffering and shame
walking in the gardens and on hard pavement
you are with us in our fearful and darkest hours.
We fragile humans pretend not to see the pain
we run from the uncomfortable situations
yet you are there in the midst of war and conflict
you never deny that you love all of your creation.
Peter was wracked with fear and denied you
yet your love was bigger than his great failure
forgiveness and restoration are your gifts to us
and we all need that in great measure today.
Thomas couldn't believe that hope
was possible without seeing it for himself,
yet your love was encompassed all his doubts
giving us confidence to come to you with our doubts.
Mary was caught in her grief and despair
yet you came and spoke her name
and Lord, we each need to hear you
speak our names this day.
Help us to walk in the dark and scary places
give us strength to witness to your abiding love
make us compassionate and full of faith
so we might bring your love to a troubled world. Amen.
(Adapted from; Carol J Gallagher, Facebook post)

Offering

How would you like to respond to God's word today? Has something stirred in your heart? Is there something you are thankful for and you want to somehow express that? How will you do that today, tomorrow, next week?

Loving God, Jehovah Jireh, the one who provides everything we need and more, we come, your grateful people wanting to somehow express our thankfulness. Would you take the gifts we bring, would you take our plans and intentions, our thinking and our praying and use everything as a way of sharing your love. Amen.

Sending

We hear the familiar words "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" A new beginning, a new day. Where have you encountered God in the journey through Lent? As we have asked questions and pondered answers? What have you discovered or rediscovered? May you go into this week knowing that the One who brought creation into being is your Peace, your Healer, your Redeemer, your Strength and your Breath, your Vision and your Rest. And may you hear the whisper when someone else needs you to be that voice of God, bringing those same gifts to friend, family and stranger.

The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you,
The Lord turn his face towards you, and give you peace. Amen.

Marion Haigh
16.4.23