Home Service Sheet for Sunday 8th May 2022 (Revd Terry Hepworth)

Call To Worship:        Psalm100

Opening Prayer

God of all mercies, we come before you now with hearts overflowing with gratitude for the works you have done in our lives. We offer to you this day once more our lives. We know they are not what they should be and ask that you might pour out your mercy into our lives so that we might be cleansed and grow more into the likeness of Jesus . Accept the worship of our hearts we pray as we once more commit ourselves unto you. In Jesus name we pray Amen

Hymn                God forgave my sin by Carol Owens
<https://youtu.be/QJ3eklr3fc0>

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name
I've been born again in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to

He said, "Freely, freely you have received
Freely, freely give
Go in my name, and because you believe
Others will know that I live"

All power is given' in Jesus' name
In earth and Heaven in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His power as He told me to

He said, "Freely, freely you have received
Freely, freely give
Go in my name, and because you believe
Others will know that I live"

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 that 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.

Bible Reading        John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection:            Thomas, a man of doubt or a man of faith?

Do you like people to be honest with you? In other words, are you the sort of person who likes other people to say what they mean and not to beat about the bush, or would you prefer people simply to tell you what you want to hear? You would think with Christians what they said is what they really felt. If I was to ask you today, does ‘God always answer prayer?’, most of you would say ‘yes’. You would say ‘yes’, because that is the faith response. It’s what we want to believe because it’s what the Bible tells us, but let’s be honest with ourselves - how many truly believe that every time we come to God in prayer he grants us our requests?

Now, of course, God is not Father Christmas, giving out presents to his children. Sometimes prayers are answered, and other times it appears they are not. Well not in a way we would understand. That is the truthful response. Or if I was to ask, ‘have you ever doubted God, or his love or his goodness or whatever?’ Many Christians would give the answer that they feel other people would expect them to come out with. Today I am going to introduce to you just one person I have found who is honest, and is not bothered what others think of him. He tells the truth as he sees it, and he does not care. Well he does care, but he is honest with his cares.

His name is Thomas, and to Thomas the Cross was only what he had expected. When Jesus had proposed going to Bethany, after the news of Lazarus' illness had come, Thomas' reaction had been: "Let us also go, that we may die with him". Thomas never lacked courage, but he was a natural pessimist. There can never be any doubt that he loved Jesus. He loved him enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him when the other disciples were hesitant and afraid. What he had expected had happened, and when it came, you might have heard him say I told you so. On the night when Jesus appeared to his disciples, Thomas was absent. Many people have tried to explain the absence but we can never really know.

We are not told why he was absent on Easter Sunday. Maybe he had gone off by himself to grieve the death of his Lord. Maybe, after all that had happened, he just felt ‘what’s the point?’ It’s all been a big let-down. I saw this coming, I knew what would happen - who would listen to me? Whatever the reason, Thomas is not there, and he is now suffering for what had happened to his Lord. Thomas had to face his suffering and his sorrow alone. So it happened that, when Jesus came back again, Thomas was not there; and the news that he had come back seemed to him far too good to be true, and he refused to believe it.

You could say that Thomas was belligerent in his pessimism. He said that he would never believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he had seen and handled the print of the nails in his hands and thrust his hand into the wound the spear had made in Jesus' side. Strange isn’t it?  Thomas is told that Jesus is alive, and I think that Thomas wants to believe, but something in his nature prevents him, and so another week elapses. Jesus came back again; and this time Thomas was there. And Jesus knew Thomas' heart. He repeated Thomas' own words, and invited him to make the test that he had demanded. Thomas' heart ran out in love and devotion, and all he could say was: "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, as one translation says, "Thomas, you needed the eyes of sight to make you believe; but the days will come when men will see with the eye of faith and believe." You know, I think that the character of Thomas stands out clear before us. First of all, he made the mistake of withdrawing from the Christian fellowship when he needed his brothers and sisters most. He sought loneliness rather than togetherness, and because he was not there with his fellow Christians he missed the first coming of Jesus. However much of a mistake or fault Thomas, and many of us, make, Thomas had two great virtues.

Firstly, he absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There is an uncompromising honesty about him. He would never still his doubts by pretending that they did not exist. He was not the kind of man who would rattle off a creed without understanding what it was all about. Thomas had to be sure. and he was quite right. I believe that there is more ultimate faith in the person who insists on being sure than in the person who glibly repeats things which they have never thought out, and which they may not really believe. I respect the faith of a person who simply says I believe because it’s in the Bible. But I respect the person even more who says I believe because it is in the Bible and I have examined it and I know it to be true.

Thomas' other great virtue was that when he was sure, he went the whole way. "My Lord and my God!" said he. There was no halfway house for Thomas. He was not airing his doubts just for the sake of mental acrobatics; he doubted in order to become sure; and when he did, his surrender to certainty was complete. When someone fights their way through their doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, they have reached a position of certainty that the person who unthinkingly accepts things can never reach.

My friends, there is so much we can learn from Thomas. He is a man often linked with the word doubting, but I want to strip that title off him. Thomas was a man of great courage, great faith and a heart that would see him go on to accomplish great things for Jesus. If history is to be believed, Thomas travelled to India where he founded the church there. We can learn a lot from a man who is simply known as ‘doubting Thomas’. Maybe we should rename him ‘Thomas the brave’, ‘Thomas the faithful’, or ‘Thomas, a man true at heart’! Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord help us to be honest with ourselves and admit that there are times when we are not sure. There are times when we doubt, and there are certainly times when we wonder about things. In our uncertainty, Father, help us to look to you who dwells close in our hearts by your Spirit. Help us to put our trust in you when our hearts are in the turmoil of doubt and help us to read your word and to pray with hearts full of faith and trust in you, who will never let us down. Help us, Father, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Benediction

Heavenly Father, bless us and keep us this day and all days. Surround us with your love and strength and be for us all that we need. This we pray in Jesus’ Name, amen.