



# The Church of Scotland

## Weekly Worship

11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

### **Taking part in today's service are: -**

Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

Carla Ingram, Arbroath

Rev Stella Campbell, Skene Parish Church, Aberdeenshire

Rev Gregor McIntyre, Faifley Parish Church, Clydebank

With music from Cumbernauld Old, Ellon Parish Church and Resound Worship.

### **Introduction – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly**

Hi everybody. And welcome to our worship.

I wonder if you can see what I'm doing right now. The sun's streaming in our window and I'm letting it illuminate this side of me, while this side remains in the shadow. I wonder if sometimes it feels like that to you, in terms of light and dark and faith and doubt, sometimes it's as if the light shines, other times as if it doesn't illuminate the way you want it to. Well, we're going to be thinking about Thomas and the other disciples in our worship today. And I hope that through that reflection we might come to understand a little more of just what's going on when there is both faith and doubt, light and something of a shadow.

Thank you in advance to all the contributors and all those who have put the service together.

Let us worship God.

### **Bible Reading**

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." After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent Me, I am sending you." And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now, Thomas also known as Didymus, one of the 12 was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We've 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."

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." 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."

Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus told Him, "Because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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 – How often we like Thomas**

How often we, like Thomas,  
need proof before we trust.  
Lord Jesus, friend of doubters,  
come, speak your truth to us.  
We long to feel your presence,  
and gain new faith from you,  
to find, without our seeing,  
the blessing Thomas knew.

You always stand among us,  
no doors can lock you out.  
Your presence reassures us  
though we still live with doubt.  
As present-day disciples,  
whose lives by sin are flawed,  
we want to come believing,  
and cry: "My Lord, my God!"

### **Prayer of Approach – Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair**

Lord God, we can scarce imagine what those disciples went through in the hours that followed the Passover meal. And as they thought back on their desertion at the time of arrest, and Peter, no doubt troubled beyond measure by his denial. And perhaps on the Saturday those first disciples thought back to the day of when Jesus had come to them on the beach and called them to be His followers. And maybe they thought about that and how they had failed when He needed them most. And yet, Lord, we read in John's gospel that You came to them on the evening of Your resurrection. You appeared among them, You breathed on them, and You offered them Your peace. Ah, to imagine that moment, the truth is we can because You come to us Lord, though we too are faltering and flawed and have failed You. And You say to us, "Peace, be with you." You breathe Your Spirit upon us, and You say, "Peace be with you."



Lord, we rejoice in Your mercy, in Your forgiving love, and we're to rejoice to know Your peace. Let us live in all the days to come with that peace deep within our hearts, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

### **All Age Talk – Carla Ingram, Arbroath**

When the disciple Thomas was a young boy he might have said more than once. "If you can't prove it, I won't believe it." And as he became a young man, he might still have insisted. "I doubt if it's true, if I can't see it for myself." Thomas always seemed to doubt before he would believe. Thomas was a good man and he was always loyal to Jesus and His followers. But for some reason, Thomas was not present when all the other disciples saw Jesus after His resurrection. The disciples kept telling Thomas what happened. The disciples were so excited about seeing Jesus alive, they talked of nothing else. The women saw the empty tomb, said one disciple, and was the Disciple Thomas convinced? No, he wasn't, "I won't believe it unless I seen the nail wounds in His hands and I've put my fingers into them and placed my hand into His side."

### **Song**

Have mercy on me  
Have mercy on me  
O Lord, have mercy  
O Lord, have mercy

Oh help my unbelief  
Oh help my unbelief  
O Lord, have mercy  
O Lord, have mercy

Have mercy on us  
Have mercy on us  
O Lord, have mercy  
O Lord, have mercy

Have mercy on me  
Have mercy on me  
O Lord, have mercy  
O Lord, have mercy

Eight days later the disciples were again huddled together in a room, and this time Thomas was with them. They were still afraid the priest might come and arrest them, so they made sure the door was locked. Suddenly Jesus was with them, "Peace, be with you," He greeted them. Jesus saw Thomas, but knew Thomas didn't believe He was alive. "Maybe this will help you believe," Jesus said. "See the nail prints in My hands, feel them. Now put your hand in the wound in My side. Thomas, please don't doubt any longer, believe." Thomas fell on his knees, with tears streaming down his face, he said, "You are my Lord and my God."



Jesus must've been disappointed when Thomas didn't believe Him at first. Jesus said to Thomas, "You believe because you have seen me, but blessed are those who have not seen Me and yet have believed." Jesus didn't scold Thomas for not believing. Jesus knew Thomas wasn't just stubborn, he honestly wanted to know if Jesus was alive. Thomas' doubt led to questions, and when he searched for answers, he no longer doubted.

The Bible tells us that those who seek Jesus will find him. We don't need to doubt Jesus is alive today. We know He lives from the words in the Bible and from other believers and Christians who share what Jesus means to them.

### **Sermon – Rev Stella Campbell, Skene Parish Church, Aberdeenshire**

There are a few times in life when I've definitely missed out what was happening around about me. My neighbours in South Queensferry were amazed the night I slept through their caravan going on fire and the fire brigade turning up. Thankfully no one was injured, but it was a source of ribbing for many months afterwards. And just last week, a whole herd of cows escaped from a local farmer's yard and ended up outside the manse here about 10 o'clock at night. I was totally oblivious of the hunt that was going on and the rescue of the beasts until the next day when I walked down the road and saw the evidence of a bovine invasion.

Of course, Thomas wasn't asleep in the corner of the room when Jesus appeared, actually we don't know where he was. Apart from Judas all the other disciples appear to be gathered, together in one room as evening falls. But Thomas' absence leads to a remarkable episode in John's gospel, which acts as a bridge or invitation to each and every one of us. And we're gonna take a moment now to reflect upon it starting with what happened on that first Sunday evening.

The disciples are locked away, but Jesus finds them, and the very first thing He says to them is, "Peace be with you." The Prince of Peace has secured victory over sin and death, suffering and evil, and has reconciled humanity to God, brought peace where there was none. So it's fitting that peace is the first word spoken. But I wonder on a more pragmatic note if Jesus chooses these words in order to evoke a memory in the disciples. It was only a few days earlier in the upper room when Jesus spoke of gifting peace to these same group of followers. Is He using this language to reassure them now of who He is? That certainly chimes with what happens next, as Jesus shows them His hands and His side, the scars of crucifixion become evidence that this man before them is the same Jesus who died on the cross, whom they had taken down and buried in the tomb. On hearing Him speak and seeing His wounds the transformation in the disciples is remarkable. They were overjoyed. A fulfilment of Jesus' promise that their sorrow would not last. They must have been so excited and full of conversation about what had happened. It immediately makes me feel sorry for Thomas.

We've all been in situations where folks are talking about an event we weren't at and we feel left out because you had to be there. It's like when you've never seen an episode of "Line of Duty" and you've got no idea who H is, or why that's even a thing, but your Facebook and Twitter feeds are full of it. Thomas must've been thoroughly fed up in those days which follow Jesus appearing to the first group of disciples. And we can see his frustration pour out in his response to their testimony. "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." Stubborn, adamant Thomas digs his heels in. And down through the ages he's taken a lot of flack for that. But what else do we know about him?

He's most fleshed out in John's gospel, and we hear him speak a few times before this incident. When Jesus finally decides to go see Mary and Martha after Lazarus' death, Thomas declares that the rest of them should all go with him and die. Pessimistic, maybe. Deeply loyal, absolutely. When Jesus talks at the last supper of them knowing the way, Thomas is the one who blurts out, "Lord

we don't know where you're going. So how can we know the way?" Is he being obtuse? Well, that's one viewpoint. But I would prefer to think that Thomas wasn't afraid to say he needed help to understand what Jesus was hinting at. And I'm pretty sure that some of the other disciples were equally confused by Jesus' words, but we're not quite so courageous to admit it. Thomas strikes me as honest, straightforward, committed. In the week when the others are full of Jesus being alive and Thomas is refusing to believe them, he chooses not to walk away. He stays. Maybe he's got nowhere else to go. But I admire his willingness to dwell in that place of confusion and uncertainty, frustration and exclusion.

How many of us find ourselves dwelling in that very place in this last year, wondering where God is? Refusing to believe things will get better, losing hope, refusing the encouragement of others because we need something more, something real for us, something that shifts our hearts and minds, something that's not second-hand or a mere platitude. And how many of us having found ourselves stuck, even when, perhaps, surrounded by friend and family have chosen to hang on in there. It must have been such a long week for Thomas, but at the end of it, his prayers and his requests are answered.

Technology in sport has come a long way over the years from Hawk-Eye to VAR, action replay is now possible, not simply for armchair critics, but also for much officials. The TMO, the Third March Official in rugby is often called upon to determine if a try has been properly grounded or if a pass was forward. And in many ways the technology allows the referee to step back in time to see the offence for the first time from a different angle, slowed down to replay the phases and to make a determination for good or ill.

As we move through John chapter 20 it's like we go back in time for an action replay. It's Sunday evening again, the disciples are behind closed doors again, but this time Thomas is with them. Jesus appears again and says, "Peace, be with you," again. And then He gives Thomas the firsthand experience he's craving. It's no more than what the other disciples got, and we often forget that. They'd heard from Mary that Jesus was risen and they'd chosen not to believe her. Peter and John had seen the empty tomb and yet it wasn't until they all saw Jesus Himself that they became overjoyed. That was the turning point for them believing that Jesus was alive. Thomas is asking for and is granted no more than the others got, and yet his response goes far beyond theirs. On seeing Jesus and being offered the evidence he asked for, Thomas declares, "My Lord and my God." Of all the confessions in John's gospel, John the Baptist, the Samaritan village, Martha, this is the climax, the destination of the author. Someone finally expressing what John had said in the very beginning. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is Himself God, is in the closest relationship with the Father has made Him known. Thomas gets it. He may have missed out, but suddenly he catches up and goes further than



everyone else. And that comes because he was willing to hold out for that confirmation, that evidence, that encounter with Jesus.

In some ways, Thomas' experience and declaration then form this bridge to us which Jesus hints at in what He says next. "Because you have seen Me you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." None of us, like Thomas, were in that locked room on the Easter Sunday evening. And some of us, like Thomas, may long for the kind of encounter the disciples had. Thomas got his request, his protest responded to pretty quickly. We, on the other hand, are called, as Paul puts it, to live by faith and not by sight. And perhaps Thomas' frustration resonates

with us because it's really not easy to live by faith rather than sight. Peter writes in his letter. "Though, you have not seen Him, you love Him. And even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

How is it that we can love Jesus and believe in Him when we've not had that first-hand, in-person experience? John concludes this episode by saying, it's because of the testimony of those first eyewitnesses, Mary, Peter, John, and Thomas, they reach out to us and tell us that Jesus is alive, and we can have life in His name. As a theologian, D.A. Carson puts it, "The most unyielding sceptic, Thomas, has bequeathed to us the most profound confession." Thomas reaches out to us to say, "It's true, Jesus is alive. I didn't believe it at first, but now I believe that not only is Jesus Lord, He's God."

We cannot share Thomas' sight of Jesus, but because of his experience, his missing out and Jesus' grace in coming to meet him in his place of unbelief, we can come to share in his faith. Knowing that the same Jesus who caught him up looks to catch us up too.

## Hymn

In the darkness we were waiting  
Without hope without light  
Till from heaven You came running  
There was mercy in Your eyes

To fulfil the law and prophets  
To a virgin came the Word  
From a throne of endless glory  
To a cradle in the dirt

Praise the Father Praise the Son  
Praise the Spirit three in one  
God of glory Majesty  
Praise forever to the King of Kings

To reveal the kingdom coming  
And to reconcile the lost



To redeem the whole creation  
You did not despise the cross

For even in Your suffering  
You saw to the other side  
Knowing this was our salvation  
Jesus for our sake You died

Praise the Father Praise the Son  
Praise the Spirit three in one

God of glory Majesty  
Praise forever to the King of Kings

And the morning that You rose  
All of heaven held its breath  
Till that stone was moved for good  
For the Lamb had conquered death

And the dead rose from their tombs  
And the angels stood in awe  
For the souls of all who'd come  
To the Father are restored

And the Church of Christ was born  
Then the Spirit lit the flame  
Now this gospel truth of old  
Shall not kneel shall not faint

By His blood and in His Name  
In His freedom I am free  
For the love of Jesus Christ  
Who has resurrected me

Praise the Father Praise the Son  
Praise the Spirit three in one  
God of glory Majesty  
Praise forever to the King of Kings

Praise the Father Praise the Son  
Praise the Spirit three in one  
God of glory Majesty  
Praise forever to the King of Kings



**Prayer of Intercession – Rev Gregor McIntyre, Faifley Parish Church, Clydebank**

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the message of Easter, for the reassurance it brings of the triumph over death, the proof it offers that love will always have the last word. And yet alongside that message, there is another that perhaps we do not hear so often, a challenge we can sometimes ignore, a call to action as well as to celebration. You have given us good news, teach us to share it. Lord Jesus, forgive us because we often forget that having experienced Your risen presence, we keep it to ourselves. Having met with You, we fail to introduce others to You in turn. Having received so much, we have shared so little. You have given us good news, teach us then how to share it. Lord Jesus we thank You for those who have fulfilled Your call, those who first made the gospel known to us, those who proclaim it to others, those who sow, nurture and bring to fruition

the seeds of faith. And of course we pray for all you have specially gifted to proclaim the good news. Preachers and evangelists, ministers and missionaries, teachers and writers may many meet You through their work and come to know You as their living Lord and Saviour, for You have given us good news, teach us how to share it.

But Lord Jesus, You call all of us to be Your witnesses, to tell others what we have experienced in our daily life, of Your love and making known what you have done for us, testifying to the ways in which You have changed our life.

Help us to do that faithfully, to play our part in your kingdom and in your purposes. And so through us, may others come to meet You and know You for themselves.

You have given us good news, teach us how to share it for Your glory's sake. Amen.





### **Hymn – Listen to the words**

Listen to the words  
of the risen Christ:  
*peace be with you.*

Come and see his hands  
and the wound in his side:  
*peace be with you.*

With the eyes of faith  
are you ready to see?  
*Peace be with you.*

Come with all your doubts  
for it's time to believe:  
*peace be with you,*  
*peace be with you.*

Let the breath of God now fill me;  
wholeness, fullness, life within me.  
Full forgiveness given freely,  
I receive as Jesus sends me.  
Listen to the words of the risen Christ  
Peace be with you  
Peace be with you

### **Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly**

Now go in peace.  
And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you all and remain with you today and forever more.  
Amen.