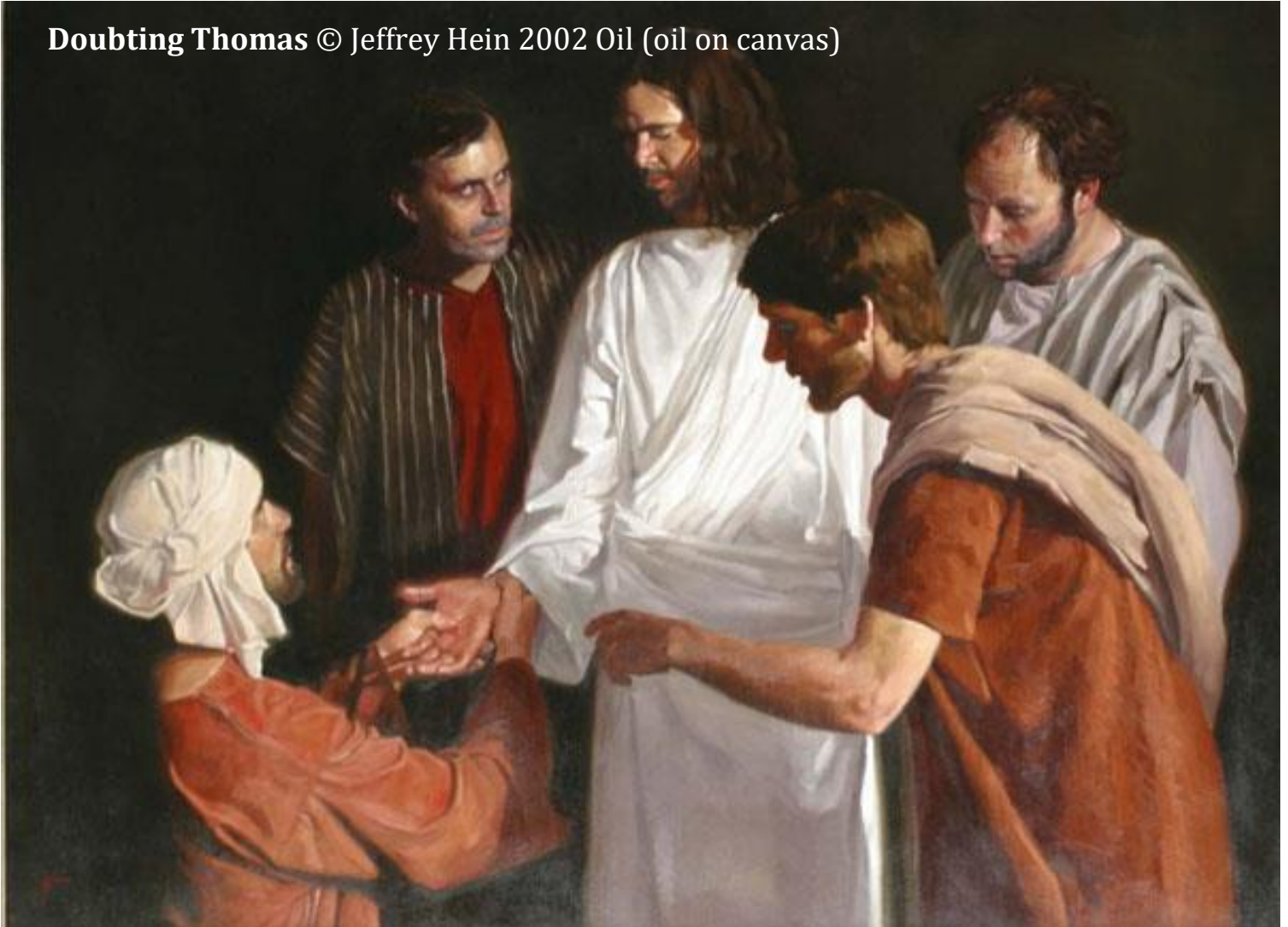


Sunday 23 July 2023

St Thomas the Apostle

Doubting Thomas © Jeffrey Hein 2002 Oil (oil on canvas)



Thomas is mentioned among the number of the Apostles in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke but it is in John's gospel that his significance is revealed. Firstly, he is heard encouraging the other disciples to go to Judæa with Jesus; then, not knowing what Jesus meant when he talked about where he was to go elicited the answer that Jesus was himself the Way. But probably most famously he was the Apostle notably unconvinced by reports of the resurrection of Jesus, causing Jesus to show him the marks in his hands and feet and side. Thomas then proclaims the words that have been described as the great climax to John's gospel by saying to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!'

Sermon and prayers of intercession © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN [Take my life and let it be](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, with all your mind,

and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

**Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for St Thomas

Almighty and eternal God,
who, for the firmer foundation of our faith,
allowed your holy apostle Thomas
to doubt the resurrection of your Son
till word and sight convinced him:
grant to us, who have not seen, that we also may believe
and so confess Christ as our Lord and our God;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Prophet Habakkuk

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks

of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Habbakuk 2:1-4

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. *Ephesians 2:19-22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Thomas (who was called 'the Twin'), one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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.'

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.' 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.' 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 come to believe.' *John 20:24-29*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Most of us know our faith is sufficiently weak and that it holds back our discipleship. Many of us want a stronger faith, if only to stop ourselves feeling inferior, guilty, or merely exhausted by trying so hard. The story of ‘doubting’ Thomas today may therefore remind us of these feelings and add ‘salt to the wound’, but it should not do so. It’s actually a source of great comfort.

Our first comfort should be the way that Thomas starts the story with little faith but clearly grows toward a stronger faith as the story proceeds. If growth in faith was possible for Thomas, then it can be for us.

Our second comfort comes from noting how Thomas had lived with Jesus for three years and yet still failed to believe but, nevertheless, Jesus accepted him back.

And our third comfort comes from a little later. Thomas may have been told his faith was insufficient but, later and after today’s passage, Thomas was clearly blessed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and soon travelled to India where he helped form the *bar Toma*, the Church of Thomas, which is almost certainly the oldest Christian denomination in the world. Episodes of doubt do not have an eternal consequence.

It therefore becomes necessary to turn away from feelings of doubt and find a way to grow in faith. What does the passage say?

First, Thomas knows what is holding him back and is honest about it. He says, ‘I will not believe unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands ...’ we, too, can be honest and name the factor(s) that customise our own doubt and hold us back. It might be philosophical questions such as the nature of God, the existence of suffering, or more mundane such as ‘Why can’t I see God?’ But honesty before God is powerful. Stated differently, telling the truth to God means that we already have some faith in a spiritual being who is intelligent, caring, and knows if we are telling the truth. He is therefore bigger than we are.

Secondly, Thomas creates an opportunity for growth. From his very limited amount of faith, he says, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands ...’ It’s a test of sorts, but has been crafted from within a closely defined situation: his friends have seen something and he wants the same experience. We can do the same, perhaps saying something like, ‘My friend X— prayed and they recognised God. Lord, help me to perceive you too!’ The actual choice of words is never important; what is important is the honest desire for God and a willingness to encounter Him.

And, thirdly, Thomas’ faith grows when things around him change: he has a genuine encounter with Jesus. He sees something and responds. All of us see things and can respond but, if we are honest, we often prefer to pretend that nothing happened. It can seem safer and less threatening. *But things do happen*: for exam-

ple, research shows that an overwhelming majority of people have experienced moments in which they feel enormously close to God (we might call them 'an epiphany'). We can go on unchanged or, like Thomas, proclaim, 'My Lord and my God!' It's a choice.

All of us can grow in faith. All of us need to grow in faith. God wants to help all of us in that pursuit. To that end, one (of many) tried and trusted routes to growth starts with the honest desire to grow. It asks God to show Himself. It then responds.

We conclude with a prayer by the mystic and monk, Thomas Merton, which starts with unknowing and ends with confident faith. We can make it our own.

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
Amen

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Lord we pray for those who struggle with their faith and want it to grow. Help them to accept themselves and discover their own gifts.

Lord we believe; heal our unbelief.

All Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for those whose doubt is crippling and destructive. Help them to use their doubts as a way of growing into a mature, useful faith.

Lord we believe; heal our unbelief.

All Hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for those whose certainty in their faith harms others: extremists, fundamentalists, those for whom a strength of faith is a way of expressing self rather than God. Help them to find meaning in You rather than in themselves.

Lord we believe; heal our unbelief.

All Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for all of us as we grow in faith that You'll show us how to use it for the building up of Your Church.

Lord we believe; heal our unbelief.

All Hear our prayer.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

May the God of peace sanctify you: may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before him at the coming of our Lord Jesus with his saints.

The peace of the Lord be always with you:

All And also with you.

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below.

The Dismissal

May Christ who makes saints of sinners,
who has transformed those we remember today,
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**All In the name of Christ.
Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy
that we should always sing of your glory,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
For you are the hope of the nations,
the builder of the city that is to come.
Your love made visible in Jesus Christ
brings home the lost,
restores the sinner
and gives dignity to the despised.
In his face your light shines out,
flooding lives with goodness and truth,
gathering into one in your kingdom
a divided and broken humanity.
Therefore with all who can give voice in your creation
we glorify your name,
for ever praising you and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms

and bring us with St Thomas and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.