

Please pray with me:

Gracious Lord, we gather in your presence to celebrate your teaching. Our minds and hearts centre on you as we listen for your word. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be pleasing to you our everlasting God of eternal love. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Thank you for this opportunity to share worship with you. God has touched me and "tugged" me toward this role for some time. Some have suggested that I should follow a career in ministry. I sometimes think that had this path become more apparent some years ago that a goal of ministry may not have been out of the question. However, while I certainly enjoy these opportunities to share worship with others, I'm not ready to take the step to pursue it on a full time basis. To speak a few times a year supports and encourages my personal growth in my Christian life. It's because of this journey that I'm on that I leave the door open for whatever comes in the future. I pray that God continues to guide me in my quest for answers.

This is the first Sunday after Easter. Last Sunday we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. The sanctuary was full of a sense of gladness in our hearts. We sang with more gusto, we welcomed guests that wished to be part of the celebration and we listened more attentively to the message given. Easter Sunday is not just an ordinary day of worship. It's a time of renewal, a time to begin afresh our faith that Jesus is alive and with us in all we do. Easter Sunday could be every Sunday as we declare "Jesus is Risen" and we have a newness like springtime in our hearts. Easter Sunday leaves us with an emotion of happiness and celebration.

Lent takes us through a time of going deeper into our faith as we remember the last days of Jesus' life. We spend forty days remembering the journey that Jesus travelled in the final days of his life in a human form on earth. We often will give up something we would normally enjoy for that forty day period to aid in our quest for understanding the meaning of the Lenten season. These forty days offer a chance for inner reflection of faith and beliefs.

In the midst of these more positive steps in our journey comes Good Friday. This, of course, is not a day of celebration but rather a day of mourning. We reach the point that Jesus says "It is finished." We grieve over the fact that everything that had been prophesied came true and Jesus had died on the cross. Another emotion to fit into this turbulent time in our journey to Easter through our walk with God.

Today I want to look at the feeling of doubt that was felt through this intense time in the life of Jesus. The gospel lesson is about the disciple Thomas having doubts that Jesus is risen. There are other places that doubt creeps into the thoughts of those close to Jesus in those last days.

The dictionary offers this meaning of the word doubt: a status between belief and disbelief, a feeling of uncertainty, an undecided state of mind, a distrust or lack of sureness of an alleged fact, an action, a motive, or a decision. Several times through the Easter season the feeling of doubt arose among Jesus followers.

Mary Magdalene had been an active follower of Jesus. She had travelled with the disciples and had contributed to the needs of the group. She was an example of thankful living not leading a complicated life but being direct and genuine in her faith in Jesus. Rather than try to understand everything, she was eager to believe. She was present at the crucifixion and was going to anoint Jesus body with oil on the Sunday morning. However, on reaching the tomb she found that Jesus body was not there. It was to Mary Magdalene that Jesus first appeared. He called her name "Mary". He spoke to her and she

immediately ran off to tell the disciples.

They were the first people that Mary shared this exciting news with but they had not witnessed this event as Mary had so they had doubts. They were stuck in that state between belief and disbelief on whether to believe the event that Mary was describing.

Later we see the disciples gathered in a room with the doors locked. Reading now from the book of Luke 20:36-39:

“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see me; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

The disciples didn't react with a sense of this is what they had been expecting, but more with a sense of doubt. They were finding this hard to believe. They were doubting.

A more widely talked about example of doubt is, of course, the story of doubting Thomas. The dictionary goes on to describe a “doubting Thomas” as an incredulous or skeptical person. The disciple Thomas was certainly that. We're not told why it was that Thomas wasn't with the others at the time they gathered. In the gospel lesson taken from John 20: 24-28 read earlier:

“Now Thomas, 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 nail marks in his hands, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.” 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 in my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

We've all been in Thomas' position I'm sure. Someone has likely said to you that you missed a great concert or game etc. last night. You should have been there. We're then compelled to accept their description of the event and believe that we missed something special. In the case of the disciples, the other eleven were describing an incredible happening but Thomas refused to believe. He would only believe if he was able to see and touch Jesus.

Thomas was a doubter. He was the one of the disciples that needed reasons to believe. He would respond to Jesus with doubt and look for his questions to be answered. Thomas didn't follow Jesus just because he blindly accepted his faith. He inquisitiveness led him to be a thinker. It was Thomas who responded to Jesus with a question as we look at the passage in John 14:1-7. These are the words of Jesus as we read

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place with you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

This is another time when Thomas wanted to believe but needed more teaching before he could understand. He was very loyal to Jesus and was intent on following his ways. He simply needed that additional reassurance Jesus would offer. Thomas wouldn't accept things on the surface but wished to dig deeper until he fully grasped the meaning.

Once Thomas got past his doubts and was able to believe fully he was quick to display his faith in Jesus. The gospel lesson this morning ends with Thomas' response once he saw Jesus. Reading now from John 20: 28-29:

“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.”

I would think that Thomas response “My Lord and my God” was not given in a mere conversational tone but rather in an exclamatory fashion “MY LORD AND MY GOD.”

I have doubted like Thomas and I expect there will be times in the future that will cause me to doubt and ask questions again. Perhaps some of you can say that you too have doubted like Thomas. There are the big questions that may creep into one's thoughts like does God exist, is the Bible true, will Jesus come back during my time on earth, etc. Then there are more personal questions people may ask themselves such as why is there sickness in my family, why do we struggle in life, where is God through my suffering, etc. I believe most, if not all us, can remember a time when we found ourselves asking these questions, perhaps not of others than at least in our own minds.

These questions or doubts must not be considered a weakness or a sign of not believing. Doubt encourages us to rethink our lives. These questions should be considered signs that our journey with God continues on a learning curve. Doubting, pondering and questioning causes us to go deeper into ourselves to find the answers. Doubt doesn't cause us to change our minds but rather to sharpen our minds and clarify our thoughts. The end result is that our relationship with God is strengthened.

Thomas had his doubts but did see Jesus and could touch him and feel him in human form. Jesus appeared to him and showed him his nail scarred hands and pierced side. Thomas' doubts were alleviated and he immediately understood. He exclaimed “My Lord and my God.”

How do we do that? Jesus isn't here to touch or talk to in his human form. Why wouldn't we doubt? Why wouldn't we need more details to be able to firmly believe without having doubt? We're not alone in our occasional questioning. We read throughout the Bible of people who had doubts. Some of these people are Abraham when God told him that he would be a father at old age; Sarah when she heard she would be a mother at old age; Moses when God told him to return to Egypt to lead the people; the Israelites whenever they faced difficulties in the desert; Gideon when he was told he would be a judge and a leader; Zechariah when told he would be a father at old age and; of course, Thomas when he was told that Jesus had risen from the dead.

If you experience doubt, take encouragement from Thomas. He allowed Jesus to bring him to belief and to leave his doubt behind. Be strengthened reading of others who have doubted the word of God. If we let it happen, our Lord God will allow us to discern the answers to our doubts and will show us the way to belief.

We must find Jesus in our everyday walk through life. He isn't here to touch but he is here surrounding us with his love. Those attending the sunrise service last Sunday felt Jesus' presence in the sun breaking over the horizon and beginning to warm another day. The light and warmth from the sun are sure signs that Jesus is with us.

The smile on a baby's face, as he looks up into his parent's eyes, is a sure sign that we are in Jesus' presence. The miracle in the birth of a child is a beautiful gift that brings warmth to our hearts and smiles to our faces. Grandparents are basking in Jesus' love as this child grows up and hugs them with an exclamation of "I love you Grandma".

I feel a close connection to Jesus while worshipping in song. The power of the music puts me in a feeling of inner peace. The music refreshes the beliefs I have and renews my desire to follow Jesus as he leads the way for me.

Some find Jesus as spring comes upon us and they have a chance to begin their passion of gardening. They feel his hands upon them as they walk through the garden they have carefully planted and watch the first tender shoots poke through the surface. They feel blessed when the flowers are mature and in their full beauty.

For others a strong connection to Jesus is found as they read the Bible daily and reflect on the passages. As they close the Bible and begin to pray it's Jesus embrace they feel in the stillness of their hearts.

Jesus' tenderness can be felt as you hold the hand of a loved one lying in a hospital bed. He is there through happy times in our lives and there to comfort as we share difficult times with our friends and family.

The beauty of God's creation can be seen in the sunset at the end of each day. The abundance of colour and beauty showing as the sun dips under the horizon can be seen as a warm embrace from Jesus comforting us at the end of another day.

In preparing this message I thought perhaps I'd ask people to share ways that they see Jesus. I brought this flip chart to record peoples' comments. As exciting as this exercise might be, I think that the list could go on forever. We don't have enough time to write all that is in our hearts and minds on this flip chart and very likely not enough paper to capture it all. Each one of us sees Jesus in different ways in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Quite likely, the list would be extensive and perhaps never ending, for those who believe in the power of Christ Jesus in our lives.

Just for a moment, close your eyes. Now picture the blank flip chart page in your mind and picture yourself walking up to it. Take up the marker in your hand and think about the first thing that you would write on the paper. Where do you see Jesus in your life? *PAUSE* Open your eyes now.

God invites us to see his hand in everything around us. If there is a doubt in our mind about something we should meet that doubt head on. We're called upon to ponder that doubt, seek out the truth, and come to a belief that helps us follow Jesus.

Let me read again those important verses from the gospel reading today:

Then Jesus told them, "Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We have not physically touched Jesus but we have certainly seen him. He can be seen everyday in many ways. As we open ourselves to Jesus we can feel his love. We can ask the questions that need to be asked to strengthen our belief and to get past any doubt that may creep into our mind.

If we do this, then every morning can be Easter morning and we, like Thomas, can believe. Like Thomas we can say in our hearts "My Lord and my God." Amen.