

Beyond All Doubt



Canonbie United & Liddesdale 27th April 2014

Order of Service

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Call to worship Confusion

We come from land of confusion
Where wrong is called right
Where lies are called truth
We come to the source of righteousness
We come to the source of truth
We gather in the presence of God
Come let us worship him

Hymn

CH4 129 The Lord Is King

The Lord is King ! lift up thy voice
Let earth and, all the heavens, rejoice
From. world to world the joy shall ring,
'The Lord Omnipotent is King !'

The Lord is King! who then shall dare
Resist His will, distrust His care,
Or murmur at His wise decrees,
Or doubt His royal promises ?

The Lord is King! child of the dust
The Judge of all the earth is just
Holy and true are all His ways
Let every creature speak His praise.

Come, make your wants, your burdens known,
He will present them at the throne
For he is at the Father's side
The man of love, the crucified.

One Lord, one empire, all secures;
He reigns, and life and death are yours :
Through earth and heaven one song shall ring.
The Lord Omnipotent is king!

Approach

Jesus Is Lord

Jesus is Lord! - Creation's voice proclaims it.
Cry it loud from the rooftops, sing it clear from the peaks
Jesus is Lord - our voices proclaim it!
Father, in your presence we identify ourselves as followers of your son
And our only boast is that he died for us
And was raised to new life at your command
Jesus is Lord! Thomas proclaimed it.
Standing face to soul with the fact of his glory
Like him we have known times of doubt
We have been faced with the needs of others
And not believed they are our neighbours
We have been faced with poverty and homelessness
And doubted that you would give us strength in a fight for justice.
Forgive us, Lord.
Jesus is Lord! Peter proclaimed it
Standing eye to eye in blazing light of his glory.
Like him we have known times of denial.
We have been faced with the scepticism of the age
And stayed silent for fear of seeming strange.
We have been faced with the injustice of our society
And have not spoken forcefully with your voice.
Forgive us, Lord.
Forgive us our times of silence when speech was needed
Forgive us our times of fearful paralysis when action was needed
Forgive us Lord for the faults special to us which we lay before you in silence....

Fill us with courage to proclaim your word of justice
Fill us with strength to to the work in the world you set us to do
Fill us with joy to carry your love to all we meet.
Jesus is Lord - let us all proclaim it!
Let us cry it loud from the rooftops and sing it from the peaks
Let is give our lives focus and direction
So that we may act as he acted, speak as he spoke
As easily as we share together now the words that he taught us, saying

Address

Your Thomas

Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be ...your Moses.

Let me meet you on the water, Lord,
Just once.
It wouldn't have to be on White Rock Lake.
Just on a puddle after the annual Dallas rain
And I would surely be...your Peter.

Let me meet you on the road, Lord,
Just once.
You wouldn't have to blind me on North Central Expressway.
Just a few bright lights on the way to chapel
And I would surely be...your Paul.

Let me meet you, Lord,
Just once.
Anywhere. Anytime.
Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes
Must I always be...your Thomas?

Address

WWJD

Do you know what these letters mean? (WWJD). They stand for “What Would Jesus Do”.

But how do we know what Jesus would do? We know what he did because we can read about him in the Bible, but how do we know what he would do if he were here today?

The thing is, Jesus is here today. We can get to know him through prayer and spending time with other Christians

Hymn

CH4 432 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 seeking
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"

Reading(s): 1Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

John 20:19-31

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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 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.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

Intercession

We Are God's

Lord, trusting in you:

May we do your will.

Loving Father,

Through Christ your Son we have become your sons and daughters.

We pray for the church, that we might live up to our calling as your children;

By loving and accepting one another;

By living in faithfulness to you;

By serving you in the world.

We pray for those

Baptised into your church from within this community:

That they may follow you all their lives;

That we, by our words, prayers and example,

May show them the love and joy of faith.

Lord, trusting in you:

Loving Father,

Through Christ your Son we have become your sons and daughters.

We pray for those of your children who are treated as less than human:

They are oppressed and exploited;

They are imprisoned for their beliefs;

They are discriminated against;

They are used to make money that makes others rich and is used to fight wars.

Lord, trusting in you:

We pray for those with power and influence

That they may seek dignity and freedom,

Justice and the opportunity for happiness

For their fellow human beings.

Lord, trusting in you:

Loving Father,

Through Christ your Son we have become your sons and daughters.
We pray for those of our brothers and sisters who are suffering or in any kind of
distress:

For the hungry and the malnourished
For the ill and the dying;
For the anxious and depressed;
For those filled with guilt or regret;
For those handicapped in mind or body.

Lord, trusting in you:

For the homeless and for refugees
Unwanted in their own lands,
Desperate enough to risk their lives in unsanitary cargo boats ;
We pray, Lord, that your Spirit may guide
Those who seek to help, to heal and to comfort.

Lord, trusting in you:

Loving Father,
Through Christ your Son we have become your sons and daughters.
At baptism we are called to follow Christ
In the church and out into the world.

We pray for ourselves

Lord, trusting in you:

For we are tossed by temptation and doubt about what you want us to do.
We pray that in obedience to you
We may discover the right tasks for us
And serve you with heart and soul and mind.
We pray that in joy we may work together
For the coming of your kingdom of love.

Lord, trusting in you:

Offering

Rock Of Faith

We stand upon the rock of faith

We give you thanks

We thank you for the confidence that we have in your love

We thank you for the gift of your Son

The bedrock of our faith

We thank you for all the joys of life

For home and shelter

For food and family

For song and laughter

For companionship and comfort

These offerings we bring in joyful thanksgiving

And we bring ourselves to be stones in your building

Bless them and bless us

Rededicate them and rededicate us

To your work in the world

To the building up of your church

To the bringing in of your kingdom

Hymn

CH4 565 My Life Flows On In Endless Song

My life flows on in endless song,
above earth's lamentation.

I hear the clear, though faroff hymn
that hails a new creation.

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
while to that Rock I'm clinging.*

*Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?*

Through all the tumult and the strife,

I hear that music ringing.

It finds an echo in my soul.

How can I keep from singing?

What though my joys and comforts die?

I know my Savior liveth.

What though the darkness gather round?

Songs in the night he giveth.

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
a fountain ever springing!

All things are mine since I am his!

How can I keep from singing?

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.” (John 20:27)

There's a chap called John Ewing Roberts who tells a story that his grandmother told him about a man in west Kentucky around 1900. He never touched a drop of “Demon Rum” except for one memorable occasion. He got roaring drunk, stole a horse and buggy, and raced down the main street of Arlington, Kentucky, all the while singing at the top of his lungs the song, “There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight!” For the rest of his life he was known as “Hot Time.” One brief aberration and the guy got a nickname that hung round him for the rest of his life. How fair is that? And if that's not fair, think of poor old Thomas. Pretty much all we hear about the poor guy is this bit from John, and for this one incident he gets centuries of being called “Doubting Thomas”. Bad Thomas. Faithless Thomas. I was reading a book a while back that suggested that John included this story in his Gospel simply to discredit the Gospel of Thomas; a gnostic Gospel that was going great guns in the late 1st Century. Certainly the Church has handed on to us that nickname - “Doubting Thomas”.

Hang on a minute, though! Jesus invites Thomas to touch him, to see for himself that he's real, then says “blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believe”; and we're supposed to imagine Jesus muttering under his breath “Ah, Thomas. If you'd just believed without seeing you'd have been blessed too.” But that's not what's going on here. First of all, there is no ‘but’ here. Jesus doesn't compare Thomas with all those other folk. And what of all the other apostles? They've seen the risen Christ too. They've sat and watched him eat, they've seen his wound - the same wounds Thomas wants to see. They've felt his breath on their skins. They've got every bit as much reason to believe as Thomas does after Jesus has invited him to touch him. If this passage is a criticism of Thomas - of his doubt, of his weakness, of his faithlessness - then why don't we put the other apostles in the same box? They have seen and they have believed.

It's time to forget that nickname - "Doubting Thomas". I offer you another - "Blessed Thomas". Look how Jesus responds to Thomas's questioning and uncertain response to the news of the Resurrection. Does he belittle him? No. Does he cast him out as an "unbeliever"? No. Does he take him to task for his lack of belief? No. He offers his hands and his side to Thomas. He meets him in his doubts. He meets him in his uncertainty. He meets him when he finds it hard to believe. This is a touching and beautiful moment - it is a touch of loving concern from Christ to someone whose hurt and pain won't let him grasp the truth that is unfolding around him. It is a touch of love - not condemnation. It is a blessing.

And it's a blessing that we need to recognise. Because we all have our times of doubt. We all have those times when we question the teachings of the Church, or we wonder what God's up to. We all have times in our lives when the love of God seems a very distant idea. Some years ago I visited a friend, a staunch and committed member of the Church, who was dying of cancer. This once-bustling woman had grown thin and gaunt and she said that what she was going through was making her question what she believed, was challenging her faith. Of course it was. Should I have criticised her for that? Would you? Would Christ? We, at least many of us, have times when we look around at all the hurt and the suffering in the world, all the war and the starvation and the sickness, and we wonder "How could God let that happen?" Should we criticise folk for that? Would you? Would Christ?

How did Christ respond to Thomas's questions, to his doubt, to his uncertainties? "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side". He met him in his uncertainties, he met him in his doubts, he met him with his questions and he showed him love and care and compassion. He blessed him.

We do not live in a world of certainties where we can be without doubt. We do not live in a world where everything is so cut and dried that we can be without questions. We do not live in a world of blacks and whites, without shades of grey, without uncertainties. That's what life is like. And we're kidding ourselves on if we think that life will not challenge what we think. That's why there is no such thing as "unquestioning faith". Every day of our lives things happen to us and around us, and some of things will challenge us to question - what do we really believe? What do we really think? What do we really judge to be true?

We are all Thomas sometimes. We all live in a world that challenges us to reflect on what we believe to be true and to question it. Sometimes finding that we have our doubts and our questions. Do we think God doesn't know that? Do we think that God wants us to gather in his presence and pretend otherwise? There is no such thing as unquestioning faith, and let me tell you why.

Faith, ultimately, is trust. It isn't certainty. If I say that I have faith in my wife, but then hire a private detective to follow her so that I may be beyond doubt, what sort of faith is that? If I lent you £50 and said I trusted you to pay it back, but asked you to hand over your car keys so that I could be certain, what sort of trust would that be? If I say that I have faith in God then shut my ears and stop my ears to anything that might make me question or doubt, what kind of faith is that?

Faith, ultimately is trust. It isn't certainty. It doesn't mean being beyond all doubt. It means trusting God with our doubts and our questions. It means trusting God with our uncertainties and our worries. It means trusting God to meet us in our doubts and in our uncertainties. It means trusting God to meet us in our questioning and our worries. It means trusting the God who, in Christ, met Thomas in his doubts and said "Here. Put your fingers here".

We are human beings. We can't know everything and we don't know what challenges tomorrow will bring. We don't have all the answers and we never will this side of eternity. We do the best with what we have, we try to understand things as best we can and sometimes we get things wrong - we make the wrong call. We do not live in a world that is beyond all doubt. That's the way we are. That's the way Thomas was. And God, in Christ, met him in this world - the world in which we cannot be beyond all doubt; he met him as he was and said "Here. Put your fingers here"

Faith is not being without doubt. Faith is living with doubt; living with uncertainty; living with questions. It is living in trust. Trust not in an abstract idea, or a religious doctrine, or a set of beliefs; trust in a God who met the doubts and the uncertainties and the questions of a human being like you or me, wrapped him in love, care and compassion and said, "Here. Put your fingers here". It's love that builds trust. Whatever my doubts, whatever my questions,

whatever uncertainties this I know. God loves me; no questions, no doubts or uncertainties can change that.

Lord, sometimes we make the wrong call, as Thomas did. Yet you still love us. When the questioning uncertainties of others led them to make the wrong call, may we love them as your son loved Thomas

Hymn

CH4 737 Will Your Anchor Hold

WILL your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?
*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
When the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow?

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill -your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil?

Will your eyes behold through the-morning light
The city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?

Benediction

Know Only

Know only that God goes with you

And go to walk with him

Know only that God surrounds you

And go rejoicing

Know only that God loves you

And go to share that love

May the breath of God the Father be ever at your backs

May the teachings of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, be ever in your minds

May the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ever in your hearts

Amen