



Sunday 25th April 2021

We meet at The Salvation Army Hall Sunday 10.00 am



We have made the hall as Covid-Safe as we can; intensive cleaning, ventilation, spaced seating, temperature checks, masks, hand sanitiser. We cannot sing or greet each other – but we are together for worship.

Also Sunday worship on is on  YouTube

The easiest way to find the link to the YouTube meeting each Sunday is to find the link on the Corps web page. Type.....

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/ramsgate and select **Church on YouTube**

AND at 11.15 on ZOOM

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/8651865167>

Ramsgate ZOOM 8651865167

AND DVDs of the service are available for those who would like them



What's happening next week at Ramsgate Salvation Army?

Sunday 25 th 10.00 am	Worship at the Ramsgate hall
Sunday 25 th 11.15 am	ZOOM fellowship
Sunday 25 th 12 noon	ZOOM Youth Group
Sunday 25 th 4.30 pm	ZOOM Children's Church Kids Club (up to 11 years)
Monday to Friday (6.30am-9am)	Breakfast Drop-in (street homeless only) (Heather away Monday to Thursday)
Tuesday 27 th 7pm	No Bible study (Carl at licensing service for Revd Paul Worledge as Priest in Charge of St George's church, Ramsgate)
Wednesday 28 th 7pm	Bible Study
Friday 23 rd (10am - 12 noon)	Food Bank (Food Bank now only on Fridays)



There is a full day of activities on Fortress Radio.

<https://www.fortressradio.online/listen-now.html>

And don't forget Songs of Praise Sunday at 13.15pm



Maggie is available with the constant prayer line where you can call or text for prayer. You can contact her on 07840 753 603
Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line.



Birthdays

Maggie Crump	24-April
Kathleen Warner	25-April
Mavis Blyth	26 April



Golden Wedding Anniversary Greetings for
Chris and Mike on 1st May

Prayers please for

Sheila Parfitt, for **Jean Mayton**, for **Chris**, a friend of Gay.

We continue to pray for **Grant** and **Al** and **David** and **John** McCairn all waiting for medical treatment. For Tracy's dad **Ivan** and her family . **Paul** , son of Hazel, for **Archie**, Lisa and Scott.

For all who are suffering from **long covid** (or post-covid). This is a sadly forgotten – large – group of people who are suffering from many health issues – having never fully recovered from the primary disease. We pray for healing and understanding and caring support from employers.



LOCAL ELECTIONS 6th May

Pray before you vote:

1. Ask God to give you a desire to get out and vote even if you don't feel like it. "The good influence of godly citizens causes a city to

prosper, but the moral decay of the wicked drives it downhill” (Proverbs 11:11 TLB). We often have the mentality, especially in local elections, that voting isn’t really very important or that our vote is just one of many and couldn’t possibly make a difference; however, it is especially important for Christians to express the heart and life of Jesus Christ through their votes! Don’t think that it doesn’t matter, because it does!

Be sure your voice is heard – don’t stay home!

Ask God to open your eyes. It is important to stay focused and to stay aligned with what God is showing you to do: “Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you’ve got, be resolute...” (1 Corinthians 16:13 MSG).

Ask God to help you be Christlike to anyone you come into contact with no matter their political party or preference. “...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...” (Philippians 2:13-15 NASB).

Ask God for the strength to pray for those who are running for office that you don’t agree with. Ask Him to help you not to criticize and judge, but to love, and to replace anger with kindness. “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28 NASB).

Thank the Lord for freedom and for the opportunity to live in a nation where you have a voice in electing officials and voting on issues that affect our lives and our culture. “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1 NASB). We should never take this privilege and responsibility lightly, but continually give thanks for our freedom to have a say in our government.



Cadet Marie Karickova talks to Lieut-Colonel Jonathan Roberts about her life and calling

MARIE Karickova and her husband, David, are set to be commissioned in July as the first Roma officers in the UKI Territory. It will be the next step in a journey that brought them from the Czech Republic to the UK, then into an experience of Jesus Christ, Salvation Army soldiership and a calling to officer service.

Growing up in a Roma family brought many challenges, as Marie explains.

'I am one of six children, and my parents were hard-working people. They didn't have any kind of education because the conditions where they grew up didn't allow them to go to school. So it was quite hard for me as they were not able to help me with my homework.'

'It was Czechoslovakia at that time, a communist country. Roma people were discriminated against and I was quite often beaten by teachers. My parents went to the school to sort it out, but it didn't help. Even so, my childhood was quite happy. My parents always tried to balance things out.'

Marie left school at 16 and after a few months found work as a general helper in a hospital. She later married David, whom she had met at school. In 2002 they moved to the UK with their son and daughter.

'Our son is married with two children and lives in Margate,' says Marie. 'He

recently finished university and is working. Our daughter lives with us at William Booth College. She is studying at university and her goal is to be a police officer.'

When the family arrived in the UK 19 years ago they quickly linked up with a church in Margate.

'My brother was already in Britain, and we were staying with him. We went with him to the church, and at the service there was a challenge and an invitation to be blessed. We went forward and accepted Jesus. Looking back, God had been speaking to me quite a bit, even during our last year in the Czech Republic. We were going through a very hard time with our son experiencing discrimination at school.'

'The thing that we really felt in the church was love – that there was no difference between us and everyone else. I remember feeling scared, because we had never been hugged by people from a different community. I have to say that in the years we have been in Britain we have not felt any kind of discrimination – not from the community, neighbours or the church.'

They continued attending the church for six years, but everything was in English so they weren't always able to understand. During that time Marie's nephew married the daughter of

Margate corps officers Majors David and Kathryn Blowers, and so began Marie and David's connection with the Army.

'We were invited to a Salvation Army home group. Because my husband is a good musician he started helping with worship at the Czech corps, the Armáda Spásy (Salvation Army). It was important for us to decide whether to stay in the church or join The Salvation Army.'

'David and Kathryn contacted the church leaders, who agreed to bless us and send us to the Army to serve the Czech community. We tried to be a blessing in whatever way was necessary. Because of that there are now four different Czech or Slovak corps in Kent.'

Marie's call to officership came when a preacher who was visiting the corps prayed with her.

'In that prayer he said that I would become a godly woman and an example for Roma women and the whole Roma community,' she recalls. 'I had to wrestle with it for quite a time, to accept that was the way it should be. But then I realised, it was not a man calling me, but God, the one who is living in me.'

'It took a bit longer for David to accept the call from God. We were invited to a two-day seminar at William Booth College about exploring our spiritual gifts. God spoke to him there.'

Marie and David became territorial envoys for a year in order to gain more experience. They were then accepted for training. Their time at college has been fulfilling, despite difficulties due to some family members becoming seriously ill. Marie's brother was diagnosed with leukaemia and she was able to donate stem cells. Her sister passed away last year and her father is receiving treatment for cancer.

'The college is kind of an oasis for us,' Marie says. 'We feel God's peace, and we are very much supported here.'

After commissioning, Marie and David will be appointed as associate officers at Gravesend.

'Our appointments are to the older established corps and the new Roma ministry. They share the same building and it works very well. Even in the town the two communities are blending. We feel that we will be used as a bridge between them.'

'I think we will never be completely ready, but we trust in the Lord because we know that, with his help, we can do it.'

Thoughts from Major John

Integrity

‘Become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life’. Philippians 2. 14-16.

It is rather depressing that much of our news headlines at the present time are dominated by words like ‘sleaze’ and ‘greed’, referring to events in politics, business, and sport.

I often pray that we might be a Salvation Army of transparent integrity, in our use of public money, in the safeguarding of young people and the vulnerable, and in our own personal lives and living

General Arnold Brown some years ago wrote that if our movement was going to last, ‘then our byword and our hallmark must be integrity.’

Writing in *The War Cry*, Richard Munn wrote, ‘The essence of integrity is utter honesty. The word literally means “not a fraction”. In other words, there is wholeness between who we are and what we profess. It means we are for real. It answers the question, “What do you do when no one is looking?” There is a perfect match between our words and our deeds. In the language of the street, we “walk the talk.”’

His words reflect the line in our song book which says, ‘Our deeds must ever match our creed. (680v4)

Richard Munn concludes “Into this uncertain moral climate every Christian has an opening to be a refreshing agent of the gospel” and states “It is only by the grace of God that such integrity can be attained.”

It seems very akin to me to Christian holiness and holy living. I conclude with a favourite verse from the song book which we could make our prayer.(497v1)

I want, dear Lord, a heart that’s true and clean,
A sunlit heart, with not a cloud between,

A heart like thine, a heart divine,
A heart as white as snow;
On me, dear Lord, a heart like this bestow.
Amen.

Time to Smile

A store manager overheard a sales assistant saying to a customer: 'No, we haven't had some for some time now, and it doesn't look as if we will be getting any soon'.

Alarmed, the manager rushed over to the customer and said: 'That isn't quite true, of course we'll have some soon. In fact, I placed an order in for it a couple of weeks ago.'

Then the manager pulled the sales assistant to one side and growled: 'Never say we don't have something. If we haven't got it, say we ordered it and it will be here any day. Understand? Now what was it she wanted?'

'Rain', said the assistant.

Two friends were recounting their dreams.

'I dreamed I was on holiday', said one man fondly. It was just me and my fishing rod and this beautiful lake. What a dream.'

'I had a dream too,' recalled the other. 'I dreamed that I had been given two tickets for the cup final at Wembley Stadium and I was having a great time at the match. I was having the time of my life.'

'Hey' cried his friend feeling hurt, 'You dreamed you had two tickets for the final and you didn't call me?'

'I did' said the other. 'But your wife said you'd gone fishing.'

A mill owner decided to send his son to a top public school. The lad spoke with a very broad Yorkshire accent and so it was arranged that he would live with the local rector and his family so as to improve his English. A few months later the boy's father called at the rectory to see how his son was getting on. The door was answered by the Rector who greeted him with the words: 'E Lad, am I glad to see thee.'

Quiz

1. Which architect Norman led the group that designed London's 'Gherkin'?
2. What describes the bending of light as it passes from one medium to another?
3. What was the favourite subject of the artist George Stubbs?
4. Which river is nearest to Balmoral Castle?
5. Who wrote the novel 'The History of Mr Polly'?

Hobbies and Leisure

1. The Sealed Knot Society re-enacts what?
2. What colour are hotels in Monopoly?
3. Which organisation is the largest landowner in Britain?
4. Where did karaoke singing originate?
5. What might a numismatist collect along with coins?

Anagram What is the only English anagram of INTRODUCE?

Quiz

1. Foster 2. Refraction 3. Horses 4. River Dee 5. H.G. Wells

Hobbies and Leisure

1. Battles of the English Civil War 2. Red 3. National Trust 4. Japan 5. Medals
Anagram The only English anagram of INTRODUCE is REDUCTION.

Two Ways to Live

Albert Einstein said, 'There are *only two ways to live your life*. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.'

Jesus himself said that – ultimately – there are only two ways to live: there are two paths; there are two gates; there are two destinations and there are two groups of people (see Matthew 7:13–14).

How are you living?.

SUNDAY WORSHIP 25th April 2021

Like drops of water running together,
we have come here to wait for you.
Like the disciples in the locked room,
we are longing for you.
We have heard stories that you are alive.
we are hoping to meet you.

Like drops of water running together,
we have come here to wait for you.
We are waiting to meet you,
but some of us aren't sure that we will.
Some of us have lost our hope.
Some of us are sceptical.
Some of us need you to be real so much.

Like drops of water running together,
we have come here to wait for you.
Lord, meet us here, greet us with your peace,
bring us together like drops of water into a flood,
into a blessing

Recording

John 20 : 19-23 Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹ 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!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

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.

Song Number 26

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided;
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)

Do you remember this most famous of clips?

I am Spartacus

No, I am Spartacus

No, I am Spartacus



I wonder if we can do the same thing.?

I say I want the one who is expressing doubt to stand up

I doubt

I doubt, I doubt

How many will stand?

1,2,5,10 all of us.

How strangely comforting, Lord,
That so many of your servants
Have doubted you.

So,
If I cannot always see the sense
of your Word;
If I do not always feel confident
about my faith;
If I wonder where your love is
in the face of pain and death;
I am not the first.

A great company of saints and martyrs
Has felt this way before me.

Now, in your presence,
They see face to face
And know as they are known.

Teach me, like them,
Not so much to fear doubt
As to see it
As a sign of the mystery of life
And a door to discovery.

Song number 30

1 He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labours increase,
To added afflictions he addeth his mercy,
To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.

2 When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

3 His love has no limits, his grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Annie Johnson Flint (1866–1932)

Read John 20: 19-31

Drama: Handsome Thomas

Thomas enters the office of a Solicitor, who beckons him to a seat.

Solicitor

And how can I help you, Mr... er...?

Thomas

I want to take legal proceedings against the Church.

Solicitor

(sighs) Not another. (He gets out a notepad.) What is the reason for your... er...?

Thomas

Slander. And libel. On numerous counts.

Solicitor

I see. Do tell all.

Thomas

It's like this. I've been a believer for years. From the very beginning, you could say. But like many others I've had moments of – introspection. Questioning.

Solicitor

Doubt?

Thomas

(agitated) If you insist! But no more than any other believer!

Solicitor

(nods understandingly) Of course, we all have our moments of... (he clears his throat) but... what precisely is your grievance with the church?

Thomas

Due to this single instance of perfectly reasonable – er – reflection, at a point I may add of high tension when many wouldn't even have bothered to ask questions, the Church has saddled me with a name which is inaccurate and deeply hurtful!

Solicitor

And the name to which you refer... ?

Thomas

(reluctantly) Doubting Thomas.

The Solicitor looks at him, surprised, then closes his notebook.

Solicitor

I don't think I'm going to be able to help you. I'm very sorry.

Thomas

(desperately) Why on earth not?

Solicitor

(laughs) Well, honestly! You are Doubting Thomas! I might as well try to rebrand the Blessed Virgin Mary!

Thomas

But it's not fair!

Solicitor

It's not exactly unfair. You said that you wouldn't believe Jesus had been raised from the dead – a central tenet of your faith – until you'd felt the holes in his hands.

Thomas

Sure, I said that! But I didn't, just for the record! I never needed to actually feel the holes in his hands.

Solicitor

Nevertheless, you said it.

Thomas

Only because I wasn't there! The others were all there, they all saw him – do you think they'd have believed it otherwise?

Solicitor

(shrugs) You were in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm sorry, that happens, and dirt tends to stick.

Thomas

Does it? So how come the other disciples get off so lightly? Why does Peter get to be 'the rock' when he could have been 'Cock Crow Pete'? What about John, always wanting to know who was going to be the most important in heaven, why does he get to refer to himself as 'the one Jesus loved' when he should be 'self-important John'? And Mary Magdalene, thinking Jesus was the gardener! How about 'Mary Mary quite contrary how does your gar...'

Solicitor

(interrupting) I get the point. I'm afraid yours is the flaw that seems to have gone down in history. What else are we supposed to call you? Do you have any other names?

Thomas

Well, there's Didymus, but only my Mother calls me Didymus. And... er... Judas Thomas, but Judas hasn't been quite such a hot name recently. *(pause)* I was thinking of... Handsome Thomas.

The solicitor laughs.

Thomas

(angrily) I deserve it, don't I? For having been so badly treated all these years? It's not like I was a bad disciple! Quite the opposite! When Jesus decided to go back to Judea where they'd tried to stone him once before, who was it who said 'let us also go that we might die with him'? It was me! Can't I be Thomas the Martyr?

Solicitor

Already taken, sorry.

Thomas

When I saw Jesus I exclaimed 'my Lord and my God', so some call me Thomas the believer – can't I make that name, you know, more official?

Solicitor

It's just not catchy, is it?

Thomas

But look, I did nothing wrong! I believed, I was brave, I followed Jesus and when

he returned, sure I had a slight lapse but once I dealt with my disbelief I was a brilliant disciple!

Solicitor

Yes, I...

Thomas

I ought to be a role model! I'm a saint, aren't I?

Solicitor

I know that, but...

Thomas

I deserve a name that Christians can look at and see as an example, an encouragement, something that encapsulates who they are!

Solicitor

You're absolutely right. *(He scribbles something on his notebook then tears out the page and hands it to Thomas.)* I wonder if this name might be just the thing to act as a lasting encouragement to the Church with all its difficulties and tribulations. With this name you could be their greatest figure of hope.

The Solicitor exits and Thomas beams in his direction.

Thomas

Really? Thanks! Thank you so much! That's fantastic! *(He reads the note, then looks up again in surprise.)* Hang on, this says 'Doubting Thomas'! That's what I... *He falters, then walks away thoughtfully.*

Now in the sketch Thomas was angry that his name had become associated with something so negative.

But is doubting wrong, it is bad, do you worry about your doubts?

Do you have more questions than answers?

Questions

about God?

and how God works?

and our universe, and how it works?

And how do faith and science intersect?

And what's my place in the universe?

Maybe your questions are less philosophical – much more visceral

Why bad things happen to good people?

Why do children suffer?

Why you have pleaded with God – but there is never an answer?

If God is all loving and all powerful; - what on earth is Covid all about?

Why have the ones I love so much been affected?

Lots more questions

Does that make you a doubting Thomas?

You can see yourself in his story. You've got that blend of cautious curiosity. You wrestle with the Big Questions. And you're slow to believe. Not because you don't want to believe. But maybe there have been so many times in your life when you have trusted someone or something and you have been let down and hurt. You don't want that to happen again – and so you are cautious – you don't take risks

You need to see it for yourself before you believe.

Or maybe this is you? Someone who is pretty sure about things.

You don't understand Doubting Thomas. And you don't understand the Doubting Thomases you sometimes meet in church. Maybe you think their doubts are a sign of weak faith. Or even worse, they're sinning because they're questioning God. Maybe you'd never say it out loud, but you sometimes wonder if Thomas wasn't almost as bad as Judas. Because by his doubts, Thomas betrayed Jesus all over again.

You may know this song well. I think you can tell which mind Herbert Booth was in when he wrote it?

Song Number 449

Why are you doubting and fearing?
Why are you still under sin?
Have you not found that his grace doth abound?
He's mighty to save; let him in.

*Jesus is strong to deliver,
Mighty to save! Mighty to save!
Jesus is strong to deliver,
Jesus is mighty to save.*

2 Say, are you weak, are you helpless,
Trying again and again?
This may be true, but it's not what you do,
'Tis he who is mighty to save.

Herbert H. Booth (1862-1926) alt

Why are you doubting and fearing?, Why are you still under sin?
Just believe – that's all you have to do. Stop doubting – believe!

Wherever you at right now—whether you're a Doubting Thomas, someone never bothered by doubt, or somewhere in between—the story today has so much to teach you.

My hope and prayer is that if you're a Doubting Thomas, this lesson will grow your faith.

And also help you see how valuable you are to Jesus, and to the church.

And for everyone else—my hope and prayer is that learning Thomas' story better will stretch you. And help you see the value of the Doubting Thomases among us.

Congregational Prayer for Doubters

You call us to be people of faith,
yet we are often people with doubts.
We doubt that love can grow again in relationships

where anger and bitterness reign supreme.
You know the strength of love and the power of prayer:
help us to be faithful lovers.

We doubt that peace can come in Israel and Palestine;
where hatred and racism are so powerful.
You know that peace is growing there:
help us to be faithful peacemakers.

We doubt that the hungry can be fed in countries that are experiencing drought,
and that children will continue to perish.
You know that there is enough food in the world;
help us to be generous and faithful.

You specialize in impossibilities;
you walked on water, you heal the nations,
you forgive sins, you set the captive free,
you set us free from our captivities.

This morning we pray for people here who are filled with doubts,
who wonder whether you exist and whether you are listening to our prayers,
who wonder what this whole community is about.
We pray for people who doubt the purpose of life,
who wonder whether to end it all,
who face feelings of meaningless and despair.

Even when we have that sinking feeling,
give us the wisdom to turn to you.
Jesus, we want to believe, help our unbelief!
Finally, we ask for good news for people in our community,
people who are sick, or who are grieving,
who need your help in practical ways--
empower us to show that love.

Give us faith, small as a mustard seed,
so that we can be your faithful people,
believing in your power to save,
believing in your power to reign supreme,
believing that we can share this good news
with everyone we meet.

We ask all this in Jesus' name, Amen.

So let's start at John 20.24: Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. The risen Jesus had visited the other disciples on Easter night. But Thomas wasn't present.

Can you understand that?

Would you have been there?

When Jesus died, would you have felt betrayed by him. Left behind. I'm sure that's how Thomas felt.

So we don't know exactly where Thomas was, but its possible he was probably sitting alone somewhere feeling very numb. Staring at the ruins of his life. He'd left everything behind to follow Jesus, and he'd be regretting it. He was probably just wondering how he'd put his life back together again.

Moving into v25, we hear that the other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

Here is a valuable lesson – how do we teat people who are struggling? Who don't think the way we do – feel the things we feel?

There are many in the corps who really want to believe, to have faith, to change – but is hard

The other disciples didn't just write Thomas off. They didn't say, Well, you know—Thomas isn't one of us now. Is he really that important?

They went out and looked for Thomas. And when they found him, they told him the good news. Everything was going to be okay! Jesus was alive, and they'd seen him.

Song Number 862

In loving-kindness Jesus came,
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame

Through grace he lifted me.
From sinking sand he lifted me;
With tender hand he lifted me;
From shades of night to plains of light,
O praise his name, he lifted me!

Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932)

The other disciples didn't just write Thomas off. They didn't say, Well, you know—Thomas isn't one of us now. Is he really that important? They went out and looked for Thomas. And when they found him, they told him the good news. Everything was going to be okay! Jesus was alive, and they'd seen him.

But Thomas replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

I can think of plenty of reasons why Thomas would say that.

Sometimes those of us who are wired like Thomas—with that dangerous blend of curiosity and caution—when we've experienced enough trauma and disillusionment; we will move from doubt to skepticism and eventually into downright cynicism.

Thomas had probably moved to that place

Many people end up there sometimes. Some of us probably go there more than we'd ever admit.

But listen to what happens beginning in v26. After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them.

So this time Thomas was with them. Think about that. We call this man Doubting Thomas. We judge his lack of faith. But this man waited for a whole week for Jesus to appear again up, even though he said he didn't really believe that Jesus was alive at all!

We cannot accuse Thomas of not having faith! He couldn't believe Jesus was alive again. But he waited with the others to see him, anyway.

More importantly, however, perhaps we've actually misunderstood the nature of faith altogether, assuming that the "more" faith we have, the fewer questions we'll ask. But the Bible offers a different picture of faith, one in which faith and doubt are woven much closer together than we might imagine. Faith, after all, isn't knowledge but instead "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews: 11:1)

Someone has written:

Doubt sees the obstacles.
Faith sees the way!
Doubt sees the darkest night,
Faith sees the day!
Doubt dreads to take a step.
Faith soars on high!
Doubt questions, "Who believes?"
Faith answers, "I!"

Thomas let his curiosity get the best of his caution. So Thomas wasn't just faithful. He was very brave, too.

And then it says: Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." If you look back at v19, the beginning of our story today, you'll see this is exactly what Jesus did for the other disciples. They were hiding behind locked doors. Jesus still found a way inside, and spoke a word of peace to them. Basically he was telling them not to be afraid.

So Thomas got the same experience the rest of the disciples did.

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side." This is what Thomas said he needed to do to believe. He needed to examine Jesus' wounds for himself. To trace them with his fingers. To

touch them. And so Jesus was ready to give Thomas whatever experience he needed to overcome his doubts.

Jesus also told Thomas: “No more disbelief. Believe!”

In John’s Gospel, belief isn’t just something you do with your mind.

It doesn’t mean you just accept a bunch of facts.

Have you ever had a parent, a spouse, or a friend tell you, I believe in you? What they mean is they love you. And they know you love them. And they have confidence in you, because of the relationship. In John’s Gospel, that’s what it means to believe in Jesus. It’s about loving Jesus and trusting Jesus.

So here’s some good news for everyone who feels like doubting Thomas today

You don’t have to have any of the other Big Questions figured out.

The only thing you have to be certain about is that you love Jesus, and Jesus loves you.

Thomas said he wouldn’t believe Jesus was actually alive again until he saw him, and touched his wounds with his own hands. So what did Thomas do when Jesus actually offered wounded his hands and side for Thomas to touch?

Thomas responded to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

Notice what we’re not told happened. We’re never told he actually touched Jesus’ wounds. Maybe it was enough for Thomas that Jesus was willing to do whatever Thomas needed to believe.

Of course, we’re also not told that Thomas didn’t touch Jesus’ wounds. Maybe he did. I kind of like to think John left it open on purpose.

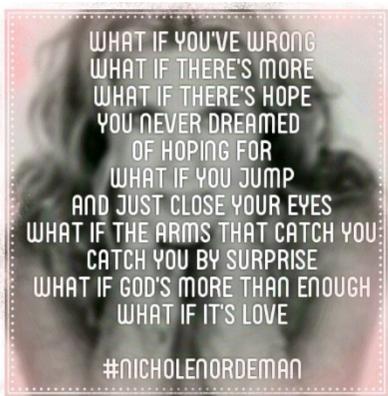
So we’d know that different people come to faith in different ways. And Jesus is open to adapt to our needs. And we the church should also be open to what people need.

Some people can grasp Jesus in their hearts, without having to see anything.

Some people need to see something.

And some people actually need a hands-on experience—something that they can touch and feel and hold onto.

Just like we all learn differently. We all fall in love differently. We also all come to faith differently.



We are going to listen to a great song called What if – and I really pray it will speak to you – the contrast in each verse between the pressures in the world that stifle faith – and the miracle that comes when we say yes – I believe.

Finally, Jesus told Thomas: “Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who

don’t see and yet believe.”

Jesus was thinking of all the future generations of Christians when he said this. He was thinking about you and me. And giving us a blessing because we believe in him. Even though we didn’t see him working miraculous signs. We didn’t see him walking around after the resurrection. But we still believe.

He wasn’t rebuking Thomas. He was blessing us.

A challenge for Doubting Thomases, and a challenge for all of us

So this is the message

Firstly for all who are Doubting Thomases.

Here's my challenge to all you Doubting Thomases:

Be sceptical enough to doubt your doubts. I know you have a wonderful, vulnerable, and sometimes volatile mix of curiosity and caution. So be cautious not to be consumed by your doubts. And be curious in the direction of your doubts. Maybe there are some things you doubt because you haven't found satisfactory answers to your Big Questions yet. Don't be afraid to talk honestly about your doubts. Keep asking the Big Questions. But don't ever doubt Jesus' passionate love for you.

Don't doubt Him now
Don't lift your heart to sorrow
Though all around seems in such disarray
God's love is sure, sustaining through tomorrow
Dispelling doubt that only brings despair
Don't doubt Him now, don't doubt Him now.

Trust in God's love to turn your care to gladness
Prove for yourself the merits of His grace
Find in His strength the will to shake off sadness
Discover too the warmth of His embrace
Trust in God's love, don't doubt Him now.

Your faith in Him will gladden every morning
The days ahead will more His goodness show
Your heart with trust fulfils the Father's longings
And in return His love He will bestow
Have faith in Him, don't doubt Him now.

Len Ballentine

Now, here's something I want everyone to understand. Remember that Jesus handpicked Thomas to be his disciple. And Jesus knew Thomas was prone to wonder, to question, and to doubt when he chose him. And I believe Jesus still chooses Doubting Thomases.

Jesus chooses because they keep us honest.

They challenge us to stretch our thinking.

Because they're the ones who ask the Big Questions. They're not going to let us be superficial. We need them in the corps – because outside the world is full of people who also struggle with faith.

And Doubting Thomases—Stay with us. Keep us uncomfortable when we need to be uncomfortable. But let us embrace you. Let us love you just the way you are. And keep doing life with us.

Prayer

*“You believe because you have seen me.
Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway. John 20:29*

Jesus,
We dare to believe in the things we cannot see:
In your love for us
In your love for those around us
In the hope of eternity.
We dare to believe that another world is possible
That suffering can end
That we can play a part
In the kingdom to come.
We dare to believe in heaven on earth
In the light breaking through
In justice made new
In your love for us.

Song Number 358

Crown him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon his throne;
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own;
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of him who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Lord of life,

Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save;
His glories now we sing
Who died, and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring
And lives that death may die.

4 Crown him the Lord of love;
Behold his hands and side,
Those wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified;
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me;
Thy praise and glory shall not fail
Throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges (1800-1894) (verses 1, 3, 4), Godfrey Thring (1823-1903) (verse 2)

A Benediction

We find ourselves in the locked doors of ourselves
just as the disciples were behind closed doors.
We too are afraid, perhaps for a different reason than theirs.
But we too need the breath of the Holy Spirit to take away our fears
so that we can come out from behind these locked doors.
Lord, we are like Thomas with our questions and our doubts.
We sometimes need to see in order to believe,
we need you in order to have faith.

Lord, we too need the peace you bring
because our world is fraught with violence, and unrest.

Lord, just as Thomas confessed you are his Lord and his God,
we boldly claim for our lives.

Lord we thank you for the blessing you have given us,
the ones who believe without seeing.

Lord, may the doors of our churches be open to all
and that doubters be welcomed here.

Jesus appears to the disciples

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P E O N P B M J R S U E A D S H A
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breathed
doors
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Holy Spirit
locked
nail
receive
stood

believe
Didymus
doubting
forgive
house
Lord
overjoyed
seen
Thomas

