

Welcome one and all to the morning worship of Tyndale Baptist Church - from the heart of its life, though separated from its building. As the season of Easter - Eastertide - continues in this challenging, difficult world; and as our lives, on into another week of restriction, must be lived through irritation, increasing concern, boredom and uncertainty about the future, once again we enter the rhythm of Christian worship - in the season of Easter .

It is a new, strange world - and in that world we look to know Jesus in new ways

The opening song comes from Taize, sung delightfully by a choir of young people from all round the world:

'In resurrectione tua'

Call to Worship

In this new world hope rises in our hearts as we gather united in spirit in the season of Easter - in *our* new world the new world inspired by the risen Jesus fills our vision for this time; ours is a world of restriction and the closing down of everything; the new world of the risen Christ is free and open to all the glories of God. We commit to living in both new worlds by faith as we worship

'Christ the Lord is risen today'

Opening Prayer

Lord God, never have we turned to you so urgently as we do now; words such as faithfulness, constancy and righteousness have tripped easily off our tongues down the years as we have sought to worship you in good times, as people all around have lived lives of freedom and prosperity and we have shared in the goodness and growth and sought to remain true to you when, in truth, we have been living quite comfortably - we may sometimes have struggled to believe in such times, but now those words and others are needed like never before - great is your faithfulness, endless is your constancy, deep is your righteousness - we worship the very ground of all that is, as everything around us grows less sure and less secure with every passing day -

A tiny thing reduces us to what we have always been and reminds us that we depend on you in every moment; all our systems and securities fail and we remember that we have nowhere else to turn but to you; all our hopes and dreams hang by a thread and we are faced with eternal truths once more -
God who was, who is and who is to come.

Lord God, though it is hard, thank you for this reminder of who you are. Rock of ages, though we are frail, thank you that you have come to us in Christ and lifted us. Lord of the universe, though many fall, thank you that your love is sure and your undergirding arms are secure..

Now, we ask, lift us once again, hold us and lead us through - not just us, but the world that you loved so much you gave your only son - in His name, Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Spirit's power - the Holy Spirit - we worship you.

Lord's Prayer:

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 forever. Amen

Knowing Jesus in a new way - Known in doubt

'Once again' - Matt Redman

Readings: Isaiah 43:1-13 John 20:19-29

The Grace is said: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.*

Address Known in doubt

Doubting Thomas - you've probably known someone like that - a skeptic, a doom-monger - someone who's always pouring scorn on things - a pessimist, not an optimist -

Always seeing the world through one-dimensional, boring, fact-fuddled eyes - never satisfied with just believing; always wanting proof; always rolling their eyes and arching their brows at the new, the exciting, the unlikely.

When I was growing up I had a friend whose Dad had a stock phrase, that always but always used to wind his son, my friend, up something rotten - who hasn't had a Dad like that? Now I find quite frequently that I can *be* a Dad like that..

Anyway, this friend's Dad's phrase was 'get your facts'. Whenever - and it was often - my friend used to get into an argument with his Dad, his Dad would always have the last word by saying 'get your facts' - enough to dismiss the often passionate, idealistic opinions of his son, my friend, out of hand -

'Get your facts' - a real doubting Thomas if ever there was one. I guess our world has been a 'doubting Thomas' these last years, as it has gradually poured more and more scorn on religion, the Bible, the Church Six days of creation? 'Get your facts'; Walking on the water? 'Get your facts'; an empty tomb? 'Get your facts' - and gradually the facts have built up and up - Big Bangs, evolution, the fossil record; abusive priests and corrupted churches -

Religion's a sham; believers are hypocritical; the church is rich; the Bible's gobbledegook - 'get your facts' There is no God - get your facts..- the attitude of a doubting Thomas world.

A bit unfair on Thomas, though, I've always thought. He's a well-nigh essential figure in the Easter appearance stories - emphasised by John to undermine all those skeptics in the early years of the church who, actually, far from *not* believing that Jesus appeared alive, were all-too ready to believe

that Jesus appeared as a kind of ghostly apparition, walking through walls and turning up behind closed doors like some kind of 1st century Marvel superhero, but who couldn't for a minute believe that the Jesus who appeared was all-of-a-piece with the Galilean who died on a cross, marked hands and pierced side and all.

For them, Thomas - 'unless I see for myself, unless I *touch* myself I will not believe'

I will not believe - that's the cry of our age..I will not believe. No matter how much you religious sorts bang on about Jesus and God and the Bible and stuff,

In all the freedom of my prosperous Western world; *I will not believe*; In the face of all the misery of famine and poverty *'I will not believe'*; in the light of modern science and philosophy and social science and all those competing religions, *'I will not believe'*

But now, a new world - freedoms and prosperity are undermined by lockdowns and social distancing; famine and poverty once 'over there' are growing closer to 'over here' every day; irrationality pushes science and philosophy to the edge; the dividing line between religion and non-religion is crossed every day -

I will not believe has become, in such a world, 'I *will* believe' in more or less anything - some folk believe that the virus is spread by 5G mobile phone signals; some folk believe that dodgy quack solutions and potions can cure it; some folk believe that governments are making it all up to gain more control of their populations -

Today, in this new world, 'belief' is coming back into vogue. The temptation, for we Christians, is to rejoice..

At last! An opening for our faith! Perhaps if we shout louder and use more social media more effectively folk'll come flooding back to the Faith! It's not exactly the way we would want, but if the result is that people start to turn to God, good...

We'll worry about what to do with them all later - for now we'll try to resist saying 'We told you so' and get ready for a new age of belief....

Not so fast, I think. For one thing, doubting Thomas is, first of all, a gift for believers - that's us, by the way - never mind the rest.

His story is right bang in the middle of the Easter appearances and it's there to help us, I think, work out what true belief *is*

It's belief, first, in the whole Jesus - not just, as I was saying a ghostly appearance, or even, as was famously said by Bishop David Jenkins decades ago - a 'conjuring trick with bones';

It's the Jesus who died that is alive - the whole Jesus - the Galilean who lived and breathed and taught and healed his way round Palestine for three years, who died on a cross - who's alive again -

In the real world, a real human being really died - and really lives, whole and entire; so that we cannot just proclaim a spiritual message, but a physical one as well; we cannot just believe in a magicky God-above, but in an earthly God-of-here-and-now

Who has acted to save every part of us and our world and who in Christ died to save us and our world and in Christ lives to transform us and our world.

But second, it's belief and doubt together. Doubting Thomas doubted 'cos he couldn't quite see how his ordinary frail world could be transformed. Let's be frank, we doubt like that as well

Especially now, I suspect - Christian believers are not just irrational head-in-the-clouds types who hold on to some outlandish ideas in the face of all the evidence, like anti-vaxxers or 5G mast attackers or snake-oil peddlers and consumers -

That's what so much modern belief amounts to and frankly it has little to do with Christianity at all. And if the Faith should fill up with such folk after this coronavirus, well, let's just say God will have his work cut out...

Let's face it, we can't quite see how all this will be transformed, can we? We share in the frailties and fears and vulnerabilities, we share in the sense of loss, the bewilderment, the boredom, the frustrations -

We have enjoyed a good world along with many others; if we were religious *then* even more must we be religious *now* - but truly, madly, deeply religious,

Humanly religious, not spiritually religious; ordinarily religious, not other-worldly religious -

The only way forward into this new world is through not 'any belief will do', not 'belief despite the facts', not 'belief in six impossible things before breakfast',

But true belief, grounded in the real world; tinged with doubt and ringed with forgiveness and mingled with hope and love - belief in the real Jesus who really died and who really lives;

Hard to believe in a coronavirus world - but that's OK; harder still to believe in the new world that's emerging after the pandemic - but that's OK as well.

The new world is going to need believers - true believers - not just concerned with building up one more religion in a world that's overflowing with religion, not just interested in believing impossible things

But believing in the human world, believing that this world can be transformed; it's darkneses overcome and its lights made brighter - believing and living, which means loving and giving;

believing, most of all, in a God who made and who, in Christ, is mending the world - who have not seen, but have believed - who have come to know Jesus in new ways - and are ready to talk about him to and follow him among the people of a new world

In the words of Isaiah, *Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them declared this, and foretold to us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, 'It is true.'* You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for families who have lost loved ones, who have not been able to say a proper goodbye, who have not shared the comfort of touch, that a God of unfathomable love, as close to us as our nest heartbeat, might be known, we pray:

Lord, Hear our prayer

We pray for those who are enduring serious illness and for their loved ones who cannot be by their side, in the mix of frailty and loneliness, that a God who gives strength and whose Son is our friend might be discovered, we pray

Lord, Hear our prayer

We pray for doctors and nurses, care home workers, cleaners and ancillaries and the many workers who must work each day in stressful, risky and unsafe conditions. In the mix of fear and commitment, that a God whose love casts out fear might be encountered, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for officials and administrators who are struggling to do their best against mounting odds; in the mix of stress and determination, that a God whose light in Christ shines in the darkness might be seen, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for leaders who must decide and inspire and use words carefully and have their every utterance scrutinised and held to account - in the mix of openness and guardedness, that a God who knows the secret of every heart might be trusted, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

We pray for journalists who are committed to pursuing the truth and for the peddlers of fake news and conspiracy theories - in the mix of frustration and confusion, that a God of truth and righteousness might be recognised, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

For business-owners large and small who face a very uncertain future and employees who face unemployment - in the mix of anxiety and resignation, that a God of peace and purpose might be found, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

So many others - for us all, for there is no part of human life that is not touched by this virus and its response - in the mix of doubt and belief in a God whose grace reaches to every part of human life, we pray

Lord, **Hear our prayer**

'Now the green blade riseth'

Offering

As the weeks of the coronavirus response continue, the economic fall-out bites harder and harder, on business, families and individuals - and on government. At the same time there has been extraordinary generosity - millions of pounds in support of, for instance, Captain Tom Moore, large and small initiatives to support local hospitals, care homes and neighbours. The spirit of generosity is captured in the classic Christian stories of the Good Samaritan, and the Widow's Mite, to name but two. It is fundamental to the understanding of a God who has offered himself, who has *given*.

Such a spirit will be vital to the construction, hopefully, of a new world when the current crisis passes

So we give, by faith, of our hearts and of our lives, 'in these and all our gifts' - we give thankfully for all we have, and continue to, receive from God's generous hand - and look to the coming of God's Kingdom, in Christ's name

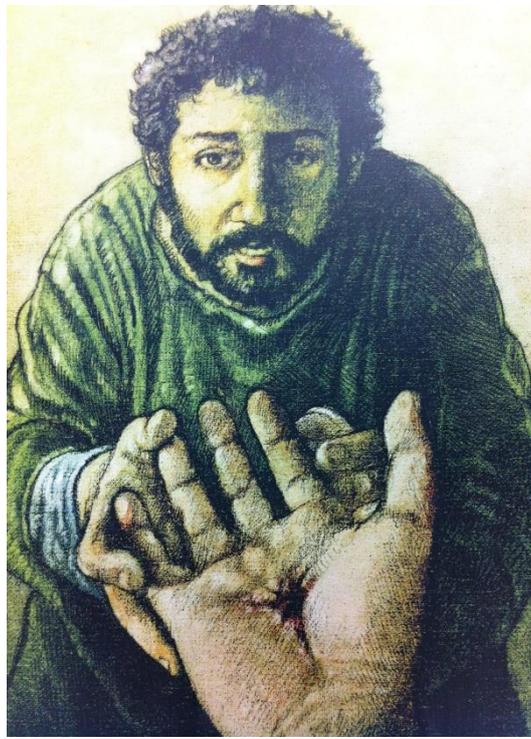
'It is well with my soul'

Blessing

The Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us today and remain with us always. Amen

Thank you for being a part of this service; thanks to Ian Holyer for putting it together, to Ian Waddington for organising the website and to Nick Parsons for distributing the material widely to all connected with Tyndale. thanks, too, to Rachel Molyneux for selecting and organising the music.

I wish you all very well for the coming week - and look forward to seeing some of you shortly when we enjoy coffee together though apart, thanks to the wonders of the internet!



On this Sunday in the season of Easter we remember how one night it was dark in Jerusalem when the disciples gathered in a room with the doors shut.

They were afraid that the soldiers would come and take them like they had taken Jesus. Someone said, "Peace be with you" They looked and it was he.

At first they thought it was a Ghost, then he talked with them. They saw his wounds. He ate a piece of fish and opened the scriptures as he had on the road to Emmaus. Finally he said again, "Peace be with you." And was gone.

Thomas had been away that night. When they told him the next day what had happened he did not believe them. He had doubt in his bones. "I won't believe until I can touch his wounds."

And why wouldn't he have some doubt? Their minds were stretching, stretching, stretching to be big enough to know Jesus in this new way.

Eight days passed. The disciples again gathered in the room with the doors shut. This time Thomas was there. A voice said, "Peace be with you."

It was he and this time he went right up to Thomas and held out his hand.

"Touch me" All Thomas could do was fall on his knees.

"My Lord and my God."

Jesus looked at him a long time. "Do you believe because you have seen?"

He then slowly looked around the whole circle and said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

I wonder what ways you feel like Thomas today?

I wonder what are the doubts that keep you searching for truth or make you uncertain of the way ahead.

I wonder where you find yourself in this story?