

1st hymn (by C Wesley, T: Blaenwern by William Rowlands 1869-1937)

- 1) Love divine all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling, all Thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesu Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art,
visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.
- 2) Come Almighty to deliver, let us all Thy grace receive;
Suddenly return and never, never more Thy temples leave:
Thee we would be always blessing, serve Thee as the hosts above,
pray, and praise Thee without ceasing, glory in Thy perfect love.
- 3) Finish then Thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be,
let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee:
changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

Prayer:

Dear Father,

We are grateful for this privilege of coming to you with our worship and our prayers, knowing that you receive us because we come in the name of your Son who won us this access. Today we ask for your Spirit to lead us in this time together and let your word enter and keep us.

For we ask this in the name of Jesus your Son. Amen.

2nd hymn by N von Zinzendorf 1700-60 (T Fulda by William Gardiner 1770-1853)

- 1) Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress,
midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.
- 2) Bold shall I stand in that great day, for who shall my accuser be?
Fully absolved through Thee I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
- 3) Jesus, be endless praise to Thee, whose boundless mercy hath for me
for me a full atonement made, and everlasting ransom paid.
- 4) Ah! give to all Thy servants Lord, with power to speak Thy gracious word,
that all who to Thy wounds will flee may find eternal life in Thee.
- 5) O let the dead now hear Thy voice! now bid Thy banished ones rejoice;
their beauty this, their glorious dress, Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness!

Reading

- Psalm 31:1-8
- John 20:24-29

Prayer of Intercession

Dear Heavenly Father,

We are conscious of so many blessings you have given us, particularly in this land where we have the privilege of worshipping you without earning penalty or inhibition from our authorities - how blessed indeed we are. We pray today for those with the responsibility of leading us, of decision-making in our parliaments. Give them discernment and wisdom as they debate the issues raised, and clear minds as they take responsibility on our behalf. Save them from presumption, as indeed we pray the same thing for ourselves.

We see troubles across the world, your world, and are comforted that it is your world, and that you have a plan for this world which cannot be destroyed by evil, and that whether we can see it or not, you are bringing this world to its appointed end, according to your anointed Son in whom your will will indeed be fulfilled. We pray again for Ukraine, grateful for those of that land who believe in you and seek your will. Strengthen them against their invasive neighbour, and let your will be executed despite their invader, and we ask in the latter case that you frustrate their plans, and bring them to nought. The Middle East remains a constant trouble spot, as has been the case for most of recorded history. We receive many contradictory messages and have no way of confirming them with certainty, but ask as we have before that your will be done, and your plan be fulfilled there in your appointed way!

We ask these our prayers in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Lord. Amen.

3rd Hymn (T Jackson Thomas Jackson 1715-81)

- 1) Let Him to whom we now belong His sovereign right assert,
and take up every thankful song and every thankful heart.
- 2) He justly claims us for His own, who bought us with a price;
the Christian lives to Christ alone, to Christ alone he dies.
- 3) And while our hearts are bowed to Thee thine easy yoke we prove,
and own it perfect liberty to serve the Lord we love.
- 4) Jesus thine own at last receive, fulfil our hearts desire,
and let us to Thy glory live and in Thy cause expire.
- 5) Our souls and bodies we resign; with joy we render Thee
our all no longer ours but Thine to all eternity.

Message: Seeing the truth

Today's reading from John is a narrative that appears to be primarily relating to Thomas.

The other disciples had seen Jesus a week earlier, on the first day of the week in which He had appeared to Mary following the Crucifixion. Astonished as they were, they had been *thoroughly* convinced that this man was indeed Jesus, and that He had overcome the history-long bondage of humanity to the chains of death – this had to be a totally new era in history.

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They had been overjoyed, as Jesus had foretold in John 16:19:

“..A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me.... Truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.”

They had not really believed him when He had told them *3 times* what would happen to him, and this included his resurrection. Now they *did* – the unspeakably wonderful had happened!

And of course they were full of it, and told Thomas. But he would not believe it – why did he disbelieve them? We really don’t know.

Here are some possibilities.

- He was a pessimist (some claim this of him.)
- He was too much of a realist – remember in John 11 Jesus was planning to visit Lazarus who had died in Bethany, only 2 miles from Jerusalem. That was *dangerous* – the Jews would get him! (they were trying to take him and kill him, everyone knew that.) Thomas had said “Let us go with him that we may die with him.” I don’t call that pessimism – if it *was* likely, he was prepared to die along with Jesus. That’s more like courage isn’t it? But realists don’t believe in resurrection. They probably don’t believe in ghosts either. They know that death is very final!
- So had he been so disappointed – his hopes so dashed – that he was just not prepared to *risk* being disappointed again? (I have always favoured *this* explanation – i.e. that he was a man both of conviction and courage, but he had lost hope.)

So for this or some other reason, Thomas now protests strongly that he is not going to believe too easily. He would require *positive proof* that this impossibility had happened. (People in *this* day and age often require proof of something that is “inherently unlikely” and we don’t censure them do we?)

It is highly likely that they had told him Jesus had “shown them his hands and his side.” Luke tells us that when He appeared among them after accompanying the two on the road to Emmaus, He knew they were battling to believe it. He said “handle me and see; a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have.” And he asked for some fish to eat. Spirits don’t eat either, do they? And Luke says “while they still *disbelieved for joy*, and wondered...”, it was then that he asked for food. So they couldn’t really believe it, but they *had* to believe it! (You see the Jews did not really believe in resurrection – at least not until the Last Day. That is why Martha had struggled at the tomb of Lazarus. But the *Resurrection and the Life* had come amongst them!)

Eight days later Thomas was with the other disciples when Jesus appeared – locked doors appearing to be no barrier. Again he said “Peace be with you.” (Was this because they had been terrified of the Jews, so therefore behind locked doors? So they were *not* at peace. It had been a common greeting from Him when they were scared. Remember when He appeared to them walking on the sea?) Or was it of *greater* significance than that now? He had said “watch and pray that you might not enter into temptation.” (Was it now as if He were saying “You have been accused, scared of your own death, known great sorrow?) It is

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now *over* – your time of great joy has come. It could be like an equivalent of “It is finished.” Could it this time have signified the beginning, rather than the end, of something great. Could it have meant “The New Covenant has begun.”

On this occasion He gave most of his time to *Thomas*. It was as if He knew *every word that Thomas had uttered*! He repeated the same proofs that Thomas had demanded. But after all this Thomas did not do what he had said he would need to do to be convinced.

Thomas was bowled over! His resistance had gone. Suddenly Thomas knew *everything* he needed to know. He knew what every human needs to know. He knew *more* than he had known before. He saw with a startling clarity just *who* this was – not just his long-time teacher and colleague, alive again. He knew that this man was *divinity incarnate*, the long promised *Messiah*, the Lord of heaven and earth, *his true God*. And there broke out from this man a personal confession that was the greatest anyone can make – it was the pinnacle of John’s whole gospel –

“My Lord and My God!”

The narrative of the old Apostle essentially finished at this point.

And John states this belief was the reason for which he was writing – the reason for his gospel, which was added to those synoptic gospels already known in Israel.

Oh, Jesus made the point that others in future would not get the chance Thomas was given – they would have to believe the *preached Word*. Thomas was given a special opportunity (wasn’t Jesus so very kind?) But of course the Holy Spirit was to be poured out, and He would teach “all flesh” what they needed to know – He would guide believers into “all the truth”. It would not be the cleverness of man’s mind that would govern the truth - the Spirit of Truth would infallibly bear witness to Jesus.

“He will take what is mine and declare it to you”. (Jn 16:14) (None of the “modern aggressive atheists” seem to have the *slightest* understanding about the Holy Spirit. Of course how could they understand?)

And there was an epilogue, chapter 24, possibly intended to correct some misunderstandings that were extant about Peter.

So this truth was not a normal human conclusion to the meaning of this great mystery. It was all a gift of God - a revelation! All the greatest truths of the Christian gospel are revelations of God to a humanity that could have concluded the amazing truth by no other means. All the great truths that have been realised by humanity have been through the Holy Spirit of God making the truth clear to us. He is the “Spirit of truth” and no human ability, even by those of great intellect including a Ph.D., can enable a human being to grasp what God is doing and has done.

So Thomas believed what his colleagues had seen and believed. But it was never because he carried out his requirement according to his decision. He didn't need to. God had convinced him beyond any human ability or action. The truth of God is only ever made clear to human persons by God the Holy Spirit himself. All of Christian truth can only be known when God makes it clear, and it can be *instantaneous* sometimes. And such is the way of God that He loves to do it.

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4th Hymn by Caroline Noel (T Camberwell John Brierly 1932-)

- 1) At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now:
'Tis the father's pleasure we should call Him Lord,
who was from the beginning was the mighty Word.
- 2) Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom He came,
faithfully He bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death He passed.
- 3) In your hearts enthrone Him, there let Him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown Him as your Captain in temptation's hour,
let His will enfold you in its light and power
- 4) Brothers this Lord Jesus shall return again
with His Father's glory with His angel train,
for all wreaths of empire meet upon His brow,
and our hearts confess Him King of Glory now.

Benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all. Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA