****

**Worship Sheet for Sunday 11th April 2020 compiled John Green**

**of Berkley Street Methodist Church, St Neots.**

**Call** **to Worship**

*We come from a world confused about truth.
We come with our own uncertainties.
Let us bring the darkness of human understanding
into the presence of God, who is light.
Let us bring the story of our search for truth
and share in fellowship the things we have heard and seen and touched.*

***Amen.***

**HYMN****: *StF 175 - Light of the World https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBKzCpkXJR4***

**PRAYERS OF PRAISE, THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

*Thanks be to the God who embraces us even in our times of greatest doubt.****When our thinking is clouded and our spirit bewildered, God holds sacred space for us.*** *Thanks be to the Son who accepts our questions without judgement.****He who was questioned by pauper and priest alike remains a touching place for us.*** *Thanks be to the Holy Spirit who guides us to answers in our day.****The one who breathes God’s understanding into us opens a safe place for us. Amen.***

**HYMN: *StF 410 - Lord your Church on Earth https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e77x9gVYW2A***

**1st Reading: John 20.19-31**

**2nd Reading: 1 John 1 - Chpt 2.2**

**3rd Reading: Acts 4. 32-35**

**SERMON**

****“I don’t believe it” was a well-known catchphrase made popular by a well-known actor [Victor Meldrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Meldrew) ([Richard Wilson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Wilson_%28Scottish_actor%29)) in the [BBC’s television](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_television) [situation comedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situation_comedy) series “One Foot in the Grave” where the main part was played by [Richard Wilson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Wilson_%28Scottish_actor%29). Apparently by another as well, Any guesses? Dermott Morgan of Father Ted fame.

The story of ‘doubting Thomas’ is often seen as a negative one – the disciple who wouldn’t believe without seeing the risen Jesus – and yet he is someone who just wanted to see the evidence for himself. It would have been easy for Thomas to go along with his friends who had already seen Jesus, but Thomas wanted to experience it to believe. The meeting with Jesus provides him with the chance to test the truth for himself.

Doubting, questioning, and searching is a vital process of coming to an owned, mature faith, it is vital to our spiritual development. It is when we bring together the story of Thomas, disciples, and steadfastness of the early church we begin to discover opportunities and inspiration which will enable us through our own testing of truth come to a firmer belief. Thomas’ experience suggests that believers are not so gullible as to accept it without question. To his credit, he is not so naive as to go with the majority. He wants to know for himself that he really can trust what the rest now believe. Thomas comes to that moment of personal testing and doubt, by being confronted with his own honest uncertainties, the chance to discuss these with them, all of which provided for him the willingness to reconsider his initial conclusions that when he eventually sees Jesus for himself finds there was no need to touch Jesus. But it was more than that, because it suggests that testing the truth of Jesus enabled him not only to work through his doubts but also to understand what it was to mean in terms of discipleship. That having reconciled his doubts he now moves forward with greater inner conviction that rings true to the ‘greater love’ of Jesus as demonstrated in the wounds he incurred on the cross. It is also a reminder to us that he continues to carry and share with us in the way we treat his planet and sometimes interact with one another. In the process the disciples not only declare their solidarity to Jesus but also one another despite their earlier difficulties. These hallmarks of faith are drawn out in the letter of John.

The account in John’s gospel also reveals to us the experience of the earliest disciples, it reflects the painful struggles of the evangelist’s audience from the local synagogue. Here truth is being contested. Some – maybe most – in the synagogue considered any claim that Jesus reveals God’s truth is disqualified by his shameful crucifixion. A story that starts with the evidence of a woman is, to them, is hardly robust enough to rescind their conclusions. The steadfastness of the early church is further exemplified from our reading in Acts when they held all things in common reinforcing Jesus’ own principal of sharing and loving one another.

These “hallmarks of faith” are also brought out in the letter of John. Light, life, sin and forgiveness are not abstract words they speak of a living vibrant faith extending beyond exalted ideas and fine words. Their reality is tested by their impact on the common life of the individual and consequently it’s community. All revealed to them through the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ’.

This is nothing less than the light of God. A light of reconciliation for all and whose hallmark is enshrined in divine truth and love. The opening passage sets the tone, with its emphasis on ‘doing what is true’ (v.6). Fellowship with God translates into fellowship with each other when people are reconciled by the overflowing grace of ‘the atoning sacrifice’ of ‘Jesus Christ.

So often we make doubt seem so negative. But it need not be. Yes, doubt can leave us feeling anxious even fearful but with courage even if we do not gain the answers that we are looking for we can more positively move forward. When I doubt the safety of some electrical equipment, I have it checked. It is Thomas’s doubting what the other disciples said about seeing Jesus alive. It mattered so much that he needed to know for himself. If Easter faith really matters, doubt is essential. Through our doubts we are sensitive to what is going on around us, the injustices which exist and sometimes either the false or mis information distributed to cover up these same injustices.

Working through the doubts sometimes may involve a rethinking even accepting that we may have not seen things clearly, perhaps even a surrendering or readjustment in our thinking or way of life.

Whilst we cannot cover every eventuality, we can in part plan or prepare for what lies ahead. Perhaps like most things it is all about balance between anticipating what lays ahead and as far as possible smooth the path and then go into what I call “Freefall” that we leave ourselves sufficiently open to what emerges. Sometimes we can over plan whereby we miss out on what might emerge, we lose that sense of spontaneity or “Serendipity”, finding unexpected things in unexpected places. Perhaps wanting to cover every eventuality, which is impossible, may say something about us. Why do we need to be in control is it that we are fearful that we may lose control? Again, as with our breakout session which we will now be engaging, how do we test what is true? What is the right course of action? Truth is not always obvious, even when there is no intention to deceive or scaremonger. Truth is never one person’s claim. Truth is tested by questions, conversations, doubts. As it was by the first followers of Jesus, when one of them made the most astonishing claim and another was not so sure.

**Pause for Thought**

* How do we test what is true?
* How can you tell if something is ‘fake news’?
* Share within the group recent examples of fake news – or claims of fake news – that they have seen or heard. In the age of social media and fake news, what helps us to believe in something? Is it knowing where it comes from its reliability, authenticity and truthfulness, personal experience, physical evidence? Are there really such things as ‘alternative facts? What about different truths? Can ‘truth’ depend on your perspective or context? How can we check out or test competing claims?

* If someone asked, what is your ‘evidence’ for your faith? What would be your reply?
* What would you ask Jesus if you had the chance?
* Have you ever made a wrong statement or decision because you did not know all the facts, having otherwise been convinced you had ‘got it right’?

In a busy shopping precinct on a Saturday afternoon, a salesperson is delivering a sales pitch for a new cleaning product – the banter is smart, clever, and jovial. A small crowd has gathered and is engaging with the demonstration. At the other side of the plaza, a person is shouting in a harsh monotone, brandishing a book. Occasionally the person finds a page and bellows a few sentences. The book is a Bible. No one in the crowd stops to listen. If we think telling people the story of Jesus is important, and hopefully, we all do! Can we ‘deliver our pitch’ in a way that is more exciting and interesting and compelling than a cleaning product? How did you get hooked?

One thing we learn about Jesus from the Gospels is how good a storyteller he was, and how he captivated people’s attention. Crowds flocked to hear him. We can’t all be top, funny, compelling, witty speakers with all the banter. None of us is Jesus! But we know that we are all called to tell people the story of Jesus. And if we think that it is important to do so – and hopefully, we all do! – how can we ‘deliver our pitch’ in a way that is more exciting and interesting and compelling than a cleaning product?

**Thought for the week.**

Peace? What Peace! Most of us have probably had an experience of longing for peace but being constantly thwarted by ‘one thing after another’. (For a younger audience, Jill Murphy’s ‘Peace at Last’ might be a good way to explore such an experience! If you do not know or do not have the book, there are audio versions available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9U9y35kWBvM).) The disciples must have longed for peace, too. They were frightened and hiding in a room. They must have been overwhelmed and overjoyed when Jesus appeared declaring, ‘Peace be with you.’ But it was a strange ‘peace’ – it gave them ‘yet another thing’ to deal with: a conflict with Thomas over truth, and the problem of convincing people who had not ‘seen’. For those who know ‘Peace at Last’, will know wrestling with issues of truth does not always lead to an easy time, personal cost, anxious times, restless nights but this is where we may be called. Our issues or concerns may not be the same as the disciples but none the less concerning namely Covid 19 and the ricocheting effect it has created both individually and worldwide. But we can trust the words of Jesus “Low I am with you even until the end of the Age”. Amen.

**HYMN: *StF 398/H&P 326 - There’s a Spirit in the Air https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8r-AkLkxtU***

**I*ntercessory Prayers & Lord’s Prayer*** *Let us pray for a world in need of peace: peace between warring nations,
peace between conflicting political ideologies, peace between peoples of faith.
Let us pray for a world in need of love: love for people who have lost their self-respect,
love for friends who have become alienated, love for relatives who have lost their affection for each other. Let us pray for a world in need of hope: hope in the midst of despair when all seems lost, hope when evil seems to be winning, hope for a better future for everyone. Let us pray for a world in need of joy: joy when there is cause for celebration, joy where there is a reason to give thanks, joy as a means of sharing in the wonder of creation.* ***Amen.***

**HYMN *StF 400 - Wind of Dynamic Spirit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEtSsIpRTNQ***

***Grace:*** ***Amen.***

 *Father, your Son Jesus did not reject Thomas. Help us to value questions and questioners, and not to reject either when they are awkward; to discern what kind of evidence is appropriate and trustworthy in different situations; and to have the courage ourselves to be questioners and seekers of truth.****Amen.***