

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the W̱SÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting injustice and asking God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *He is Lord (repeat*

*252*

Call to Worship

All things of God, all the heavens,

**Worship and praise your Maker.**

Sun, moon and stars; wind, rain and thunder,

**Worship and praise your Maker.**

Mountains and forests, streams and waterfalls,

**Worship and praise your Maker.**

Creatures beneath the seas, birds throughout the skies,  
all that leaps or crawls, all who walk or worry or wonder,

**Let us worship and praise our Maker together.**

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Holy One, we come giving thanks for all the wonder in your creation, the great theatre of your glory. We praise you for the detailed perfection revealed in a baby's tiny fingers, for the wisdom and growth that comes with age, for the strength to serve you, for your glory seen in pussy willows greeting the spring, and in each rock face worn by wind and water. These details lift our hearts to praise you. So let the details of the story the Risen Christ lift our hearts this day, that we too may discover him in our midst, making all things new with the springtime of your Spirit.

In raising Jesus from the dead, you showed us your power to defeat all that brings fear and sorrow to our lives O God. Yet when things go wrong, we confess we are sometimes uncertain how to find him. Like Thomas, we are unsure if we can trust the promise of

resurrection. Forgive us when we struggle with doubt about your presence with us. Breathe your Spirit upon us and bring us the peace Christ promised. Amen

Friends, the risen Christ is in our midst, speaking words of peace and forgiveness to us this day. Do not doubt these gifts are for you. Be at peace with yourself and with one another.

➤ *Jesus is risen from the grave (verses 1, 4, 5 & 7) 254*

† Prayer for Understanding

**Wondrous God, may your Spirit guide us as we read, listen and seek to understand your Word for our lives. We pray in the name of our risen Lord. Amen**

Scripture

**Acts 2: 14a, 22-32** [NT 119]

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them:

"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

For David says concerning him, *'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*

"Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, *'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'*

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

**Psalm 16** [responsive/displayed]

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

**I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."**

As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

**Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.**

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

**The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.**

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;

**in the night also my heart instructs me.**

I keep the LORD always before me;

**the Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.**

**Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.**

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.

**You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

**1 Peter 1: 3-9** [NT 232]

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** [NT 115]

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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

### Message

After Mary Magdalene witnesses the risen Jesus, the disciples find themselves gathered, in a kind of limbo, not knowing where to go or what to do next. They are just waiting and wondering. Suddenly, Jesus appears to them and offers them a word of peace.

We see the apostles bewildered and struggling to make sense of the news of the resurrection of Jesus. In both appearances recorded in the passage from John that Anne read for us it is

noticeable that they are together in a locked room. Despite the personal manifestation to all but Thomas they are still afraid a week after Jesus first appears to them.

Here we see the disciples in a familiar light – confused, scared, and warily meeting in private behind closed doors. Mary related to them the events in the garden that morning. They heard that Jesus had been raised but have not yet accessed the power of that risen life. When Jesus appears and greets them, he shows them the physical evidence of his crucifixion. They are overjoyed! They are commissioned by Jesus – sent out as he was sent – enlivened by the Holy Spirit and given authority to declare the forgiveness of sins. Yet they are still huddled together when Jesus appears again a week later.

For some reason Thomas is absent on the first occasion of the resurrected Jesus coming to his disciples – Thomas has not seen Jesus with his own eyes. He is quite understandably sceptical and demands physical proof when the others tell him of their encounter. Thomas is like a patron saint for those of us who are trying to live a critical faith. He is not satisfied with other people's accounts: he wants to know by experience!

Who can blame him? Thomas says, *unless I see . . . I will not believe*. Which of us would not react as Thomas did? You need only to think of someone you have lost who was dear to you, and imagine hearing reports that they are actually alive after all – would you believe it? I think Thomas speaks for all of us when he asks for some tangible proof. We like to have our facts straight – it's only responsible, after all, in an age of reason and the proliferation of fake news to support our claims with substantiated evidence.

The following Sunday Jesus offers Thomas that proof, but the sight of Jesus is enough, and he believes, uttering the words, *my Lord and my God*. Jesus does not rebuke him, but simply leaves them all with this blessing and challenge in one: *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*.

What falls into this category for you? There is much that we have not seen and yet believe in this world. We rely on the proof of others, the knowledge they have, for our faith. For example, I use a computer quite comfortably. I can tell you the basics about what part is what and use it as a tool to communicate and accomplish tasks. But can I explain to you how on earth when I type something and press send, my message is instantly delivered anywhere in the world? Not a chance! I can't see or understand it, yet I believe it!

Thomas' response leads Jesus to acknowledge the faith of those who believe without visual or physical evidence – the situation for each one of us today! We can believe in the science that makes planes fly, cameras capture images for eternity, phones transmit our

voices wirelessly around the world, because we trust people that we will never meet to know, to understand, to prove, to invent, on our behalf. But for the intangible, we are forever skeptics. We believe in love perhaps – we just often fail to believe that we can be worthy of the love that others offer and fail to believe that it is important for us to boundlessly give our love to others. We've heard about grace, but we still don't believe that God wants to give it to us for free, that we can't somehow earn it, and we certainly don't like it when God goes around giving it freely to everyone else. We believe that Jesus lived and died and rose, but that doesn't necessarily convince us that what he taught is important enough to actually try to follow.

The early Christians of that first century – those who first heard John's gospel, and many generations after them, must have treasured the story of Thomas – enjoyed hearing how he would not believe Jesus was alive until he saw and touched for himself. They must have loved the story, not because it made Thomas look silly – I don't think it does that at all – it highlights the remarkable thing that had happened to those believers who came to faith in the generations after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – they had never seen Jesus, yet belief had come to them.

They listened to witnesses, to personal testimony, and as they listened the brilliant truth which exceeded all explanation took hold of their hearts and they believed. The witness of other believers was corroborated by the power of the Holy Spirit within them. These people who had never seen Jesus – people just like you and me – delighted in the story of Thomas because it touched their own story; especially those potent words... *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*

What will it take for you to believe? What kind of proof are you looking for? What will convince you and convict you so much of who Jesus was, how he lived, and how he loved, that you'll actually want to follow him, actually be willing to sacrifice for him, that you'll seek to live as he lived and love as he loved? Thomas wanted proof, and Jesus was able to give it to him. But *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.*

Blessed are those who trust without evidence. Is that naïve do you think? Maybe today it is harder for us to trust – to take things on faith – because we are so good at finding tangible – or at least scientific – proof for so many things. We can prove so much with our God-given minds – why not prove God? Prove Jesus? What do you believe without proof? Can you prove someone's love for you or yours for them? We try, but in the end, we must simply trust.

The final two verses sum up the reason that John has written his gospel record – to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ – but not only that, also that *through believing, we may have life in Christ's name*. Our belief in the resurrection of Jesus depends on us trusting the reliability of the witnesses in the New Testament and the witness of Christians in every age who have experienced the risen Christ. We have followed Jesus from life to death and back again. We have heard him teach and preach. We have listened to stories of his healing, and his miracles. We have heard him call us to do likewise again and again. We have heard about God's incredible love for us. The testimony is in. Now is our moment to deliberate and decide.

Do we believe because we see, or do we see because we believe? According to St. Augustine, *faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe*.

Don't be discouraged by the smug criticisms of those who claim that the spiritual world is not real – those who foolishly deny that God exists – those without faith. Dare to confess Jesus as Lord thankfully, even though you don't have more than the barest inkling of the answers to your own searching questions. Frederick Beuchner writes that, doubt is the *ants in the pants* of faith – it keeps faith awake and moving. If we have no questions we have no faith, and many who have no faith are blind to the answers.

To say we believe and yet do nothing would be the most baffling reaction of all. We are called to believe and to act – to believe and to serve – to believe and to love – to believe and to forgive – to believe and to be sent forth.

Dare to celebrate the risen Christ, and the more you dare, the more you will find that in a remarkable way you will be lifted up by the resurrection – lifted beyond the superficial to the lofty and profound joys which Jesus called the state of blessedness. Our task is no small one, but the reward is great: that through believing, we may have life – real life – blessed and abundant life – life worth living, in the name of Christ. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*. Blessed are you. **Amen**

➤ *This is the threefold truth*

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Offering and Prayer     *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*     306

The Risen Christ invited Thomas to touch the wounds in his hands and his side. When we give our gifts in Jesus' name, we can touch the wounds of the world with his healing power. Give, knowing you are making a difference for Christ's sake.

**Giver of every good and perfect gift, open wide the empty tomb, and fill us with new hope. Open wide the door of our hearts, that we may receive your blessing on these offerings. May all that we give support the healing work of Christ in the world. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of new Life, the Risen Christ spoke words of peace to his friends. Thank you for strengthening our faith and offering us that peace as we live in you day by day. We are grateful that you give us courage to face our fears and struggles, patience to endure moments when the way ahead is not clear, and resilience to meet changing realities. Make us a source of peace and resilience for Christ's sake.

Loving God, we pray for the many places of brokenness in our world. We think especially of those weighed down by economic pressures. We pray for people and communities at odds over policies and opinions, and those who feel their concerns are going unheard. We pray for the earth itself under the impact of human activity and for those working to protect its future. Grant the earth and all its peoples your gifts of hope and healing.

Faithful God, we pray for those who struggle with their experience of the church. Open them to your love and grace so that any pain the church has caused will be healed. Guide us with your Spirit of wisdom to know how to live out our faith in ways that create pathways for others to find you, not barriers. We pray for our congregation, for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and for the Church of Jesus Christ in every country and culture. In these days of challenge and criticism, strengthen our trust in you and our concern for others. Give us ears to hear the correction we need in any challenge, with hearts opened by the grace of the Risen Christ.

We also pray for ourselves, our family and friends, our community and country. We lay before you in silence all the people and concerns on our hearts and minds today...

We are grateful that we can place all our worries and our hopes into your hands, O God, knowing that you will hear us and respond with love and mercy. Hear us now as we offer the words Jesus taught... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***



## Blessing

On this Sunday focused on Thomas and the Risen Jesus, remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith. Any doubt we feel is an invitation to reach out to God and explore our questions with curiosity. God will be faithful. So may God's wisdom enfold you – Christ's kindness accompany you – and the Spirit guide you to encounter God's love wherever you go. Amen

➤ *Jump with joy*

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## **Mission Moment – Sunday, April 16**

**Supported by gifts to Presbyterians Sharing, the PCC's New Beginnings program facilitates a renewal process that helps congregations discern God's call for their future and create a plan to move forward.** With the help of the program, the rural congregation of St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth, in southwestern Ontario successfully brought their church community closer together and found new ways to reach out to their neighbours, such as through a partnership with a local charity called Harvest Bowl, which collects vegetables that would otherwise be thrown away and repurposes the ingredients to create dry soup mixes for distribution to food banks and shelters.

**Sunday, April 16 (Earth Week)** We lift up in prayer the voices of Indigenous and racialized people, as well as the voices of people in the global south, all of whom are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis.

**Monday, April 17** We pray for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan as its first in-person General Assembly since the beginning of the pandemic commences in the face of the country's uncertain future.

**Tuesday, April 18** We pray for Zomba Theological University in Malawi and for Vice Chancellor, the Rev. Dr. Takuze Chitsulo, as the university hosts a research conference and stakeholders consultative meeting this week.

**Wednesday, April 19 (Earth Week)** We give thanks for the work of For the Love of Creation, a national faith-based coalition for climate justice.

**Thursday, April 20 (Earth Week)** We pray for God's wisdom to guide decision makers to respond to the climate crisis in ways that reflect justice, equity and sustainability.

**Friday, April 21 (Earth Week)** We pray for healing for the Earth's biodiverse ecosystems that are under threat of habitat destruction, pollution and overexploitation.

**Saturday, April 22 (Earth Day)** Creator, we pray for the Earth our home, and for all life on Earth. Help us to be good stewards of the gifts you have entrusted to us.