

# My Lord and my God

## Planning

### Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Easter 2 Year A  
Acts 2.14a,22-32, Psalm 16,  
1 Peter 1.3-9, **John 20.19-31**

### Theme Who is this?

Nine weeks in which we explore how the Easter readings reveal different faces of Jesus. Read more about the theme on page 4 and in *Month by month* on the [WEB](#).

### Week 3 of 9

#### My Lord and my God John 20.19-31

Thomas feels left out when the other disciples have seen the risen Jesus. Jesus appears again and Thomas recognises him as 'My Lord and my God'.

This week's reading provides an opportunity to:

- celebrate the resurrection of Jesus
- explore the resurrection of Jesus through the story of Thomas' encounter
- reflect on the relationship between belief and faith.

A Bible Study on this reading, suitable for midweek groups, is available on the [WEB](#).

[ROOTS](#) [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com)

### Week by week

Bible notes  
Prayers  
PostScript: up-to-the-minute comment  
Bible Study  
Children's Sheet  
Further resources  
Drama sketches  
Sermon notes on a different Bible reading  
Links to other materials for this week's readings

Hyperlinks, full details of books and footnotes are in *Further resources* on the [WEB](#).

## Gather

### Prepare the space

To reflect Thomas' need to see and touch in order to believe, create a display with objects that are very visual or that rely on touch: some vivid photographs, a piece of Braille writing, touch-screen tablet computers or phones, some clay and children's putty that can be shaped.

### Gathering words

Jesus appeared to the disciples in a locked room. Thomas, who was not present, says later that he will only believe Jesus is alive if he sees for himself. Out of love for Thomas, the risen Jesus visits the disciples and Thomas does believe because he has seen for himself.

## Open the Word

### Bible notes

#### New Testament Acts 2.14a,22-32

It is hard, now, to remember what an outrage the death of Jesus on a cross would have been: it was indeed a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. In fact, this part of the story, which is second nature to us, would have been a 'deal breaker' for the first-century audience. It was essential that the early Christians found ways to comprehend what happened – both for themselves and for those to whom they were trying to commend the Christian faith.

This passage encapsulates one way of talking about the death of Jesus: think of it in the light of the triumph of the resurrection. This sermon is not about sin, sacrifice and substitution, but vindication and the power of God. Jesus was attested to you by his deeds of power, and then by God raising him up, freeing him from death (vv.22 and 24). This whole process was 'according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (v.23); it was not some horrific disaster but the pathway to reveal the resurrection of the Messiah (v.31), something envisioned long ago in the Book of Psalms. In this way, the death of Jesus is held securely within the narrative of the resurrection.

### Gospel John 20.19-31

For Thomas, the trauma of witnessing the death of Jesus overshadows everything else. Perhaps the strike of the nails and the thrust of the spear have been flashing back endlessly in his troubled mind since Good Friday. Not surprising, then, that these horrors feature in his angry reply to the other disciples: 'Unless I see...I will not believe' (v.25) – a refusal to disconnect from what had happened. Perhaps the joy of the other disciples strikes Thomas as a flight into manic elation – an attempt to escape reality. He cannot accept that they have indeed seen the wounds (v.20) and have been breathed on by Jesus to commission them for ministry (vv.22-23). To him, they are encouraging each other in some weird 'cloud nine' experience that he cannot share (and would not want to).

Jesus is fully aware of Thomas' lonely struggle and he speaks to Thomas directly. There are many paintings showing the moment when Thomas touches the wounds of Christ, but John's text is silent about this – what we have is Thomas' confession, almost an early creed, 'My Lord and my God.' The Evangelist then creates a trajectory from the experience of the ten disciples, through the difficulties of Thomas, to the situation of all later disciples: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' and 'these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God'. Whether you are confident and joyful in the calling God has given you, or angry and in pain, the risen Christ comes and says, 'Peace be with you.'

### My Lord and my God

#### Who is this? Week 3

Both these narratives deal with the difficulty of comprehending the death of Jesus. Peter fights against the impression that the crucifixion was an unforeseen disaster and a prophetic failure. Thomas wrestles with the irreducible facts of physical injury and death. For both, the answer lies in the resurrection. In Acts, the resurrection is a vindication from God, foreseen many centuries before and therefore an integral part of God's plan. In John, the resurrection is a personal encounter, challenging and transformative.

**Q** How can we work at finding the most appropriate way of describing the death and resurrection of Jesus for a particular audience?

**Q** How do we tell the story of Jesus for those who have been traumatised by their experience of life?

## Sermon ideas

- Don't forget *PostScript* on the [WEB](#).
- The Red Queen tells Alice (in *Wonderland*) that she should practise believing impossible things. Faith is not just a package that we receive. It requires effort for it to develop. Through Thomas' questioning he comes to believe, and through belief, to have faith.
- On two out of the four occasions that Thomas is named by John, he is seeking further information. In John 14.5 he asks about the way to the Father's house; here he asks for evidence of the resurrection. Through Thomas' questioning, Jesus is able to reveal deeper truths. Jesus does not rebuke Thomas but rather offers him peace. Through Thomas' encounter with Jesus, he realises that he has no need of physical proof of the resurrection.
- Excluded from the experience of the others, Thomas does not believe that they have seen Jesus. The Lancashire comedian, Peter Kay, has a sketch about a fizzy drink, 'Rola Cola', bought by mothers who think their family will believe that it is *Coca-Cola™*. Children, Kay suggests, are not fooled. When Jesus appears to Thomas, it makes possible a great leap of faith. The encounter enables him to believe in Jesus: 'My Lord and my God.'
- There are echoes in this resurrection story of the encounter with the blind man in John 9. Seeing and believing subtly link and interplay. Seeing may be believing, but believing can also be seeing.
- John does not record how the disciples recognised Jesus, nor does he clearly describe Jesus' resurrection body. Jesus seems to be able to enter through a closed door, yet the fact that he invites Thomas to touch him in such a graphic way seems to indicate a physical presence. This is a paradox that it is difficult to explain away, but if we are able to believe that a man can rise from death, can we not also believe in a form that does not fit into our experience or understanding?
- Thomas' use of the personal pronoun indicates a personal relationship. He



does more than believe; he has faith, evidenced in that personal relationship, and offers a submission to Jesus by accepting his lordship.

- Jesus begins each encounter with the words, 'Peace be with you.' More than a simple greeting, this is an offer of something very special. The fearful disciples receive their peace in recognising that Jesus has risen, when they receive his Spirit, and when he is acknowledged as Lord.

## All ages together

See p.41 for an idea to engage very young children during worship.

### Present the reading

This presentation invites listeners to participate imaginatively. The reader invites the congregation to close their eyes and imagine they are in a small locked room with a group of people. They are all scared and they have pushed a heavy chest against the door as an extra precaution. The reader then starts to read, incorporating further instructions.

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. (*Open your eyes and look with wonder at your surroundings.*)

He 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. (*Turn to your neighbour and tell them how you are feeling.*)

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.' (*Close your eyes and think about this.*) This is the first part of the story.

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. (*Put your head in hands.*) The other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' (*Put your hands on your hips and shake your head.*) But Thomas 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. (*Close your eyes, recalling the first scene.*) Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' (*Open your eyes, look at your surroundings, then tell your neighbour how you are feeling.*)

Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. (*Look closely at your hands and run your fingers over the palms imagine the nail holes.*) Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' (*Close your eyes and think about this for a few moments.*)

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.'

### Explore the reading

In his resurrection stories, John is not worried that some accounts contradict others. When Jesus meets Mary at the tomb he tells her not to touch him, and yet when he appears to Thomas, he invites him to touch. It is a very significant story. Each of the miracles or signs in John's Gospel is distinctive, offered with a clear purpose. We can probably identify with Thomas, and his response, conditioned by his feelings. He was not there; he has missed out on an experience everyone else is rejoicing about. That is alienating and excluding. Jesus repeats his visit to the disciples in the room (a repetition unique in John) and the experience is overpowering: Thomas worships Jesus. The story is very special: Jesus comes just for Thomas, demonstrating his love for him. We spend a lot of time as Christians listening to what other people tell us, about God, about Jesus, about faith. Sometimes, just sometimes, we might feel the presence of Jesus close, special; uniquely just for us. Will we respond in worship and say, 'My Lord and my God'?

## Prayers

The text of these prayers is on the [WEB](#).

### Call to worship

The disciples rejoiced when they saw their Lord.  
We come before our God this morning  
with rejoicing in our hearts.  
Putting aside all our cares,  
we focus on the one who is risen from the dead.  
Christ is risen indeed, hallelujah!

### Gathering prayer

Risen Lord, we gather as members of your family in...  
Like your disciples, we are all so very different:  
we have different personalities,  
different friends and families,  
but you gather us here, Lord,  
and we ask you to make us one  
as we join together in our praise and worship.  
**Amen.**

### A prayer of approach

Jesus says:  
'Where two or three are gathered in my name,  
I am there among them.'  
The disciples came together in the upper room  
when they were afraid.  
And you, Lord Jesus, were there.  
They came together again when they had cause to rejoice.  
And you, Lord Jesus, were there.  
Thank you that however we might be feeling this morning,  
you are here with us.  
Open our hearts and minds to see you, Lord.  
**Amen.**

### A prayer of confession

Lord, if we are honest we have to confess  
that, like Thomas, we sometimes  
find it hard to believe in you.  
And we ask for proof.  
We may be ashamed about that  
and try to keep it to ourselves.  
We even keep our feelings from you.  
We pray today for honesty in our relationships,  
not only with you, but with each other.  
That we will be able to echo the words of Thomas:  
'My Lord and my God.'  
**Amen.**

### A prayer of thanksgiving

'Blessed are those who have not seen  
and yet have come to believe.'  
Thank you, Lord, that you are so patient with us  
when we can be so impatient.  
You never force us to believe,  
but you rejoice when we do.  
Thank you, Lord, that you can break down our barriers  
and set us free to love and worship you.  
**Amen.**

### Prayers of intercession

We live in a world where many doubt.  
We pray today for those who doubt because  
no one has ever shown them the love of Jesus.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**

We pray for those who doubt because  
the circumstances of their lives  
just don't hold any sign of a God of love.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**

We pray for those who doubt because  
they have been hurt or let down by others,  
or have never learned to trust.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**

We pray for those who doubt because  
war or natural disaster  
has destroyed them or those they love.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**

We pray for those who doubt because  
they are in the dark night of illness or grief.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**

Lord, we pray for all who doubt your love  
for whatever reason:  
shine your resurrection light in their lives.  
**Lord, have mercy on each one.**  
**Amen.**

### A personal prayer

Jesus said to Thomas:  
'Do not doubt but believe.'  
Thomas replied: 'My Lord and my God.'

Jesus says to me:  
'Do not doubt but believe.'  
I reply: 'My Lord and my God.'

Spend some time telling your Lord and God that you trust him  
with all your cares and concerns.  
Then relax into his presence and worship him.

### A way into prayer

Jesus said to him, 'If you are able! – All things can be done for  
the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried  
out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' (Mark 9.23-24)

Think about what might be obstacles to belief in your life. Ask  
God to make them clear and show you how to overcome them.

### A prayer for all ages together

Jesus came to the disciples.  
**Thank you, God, that they saw him.**

Jesus came to Thomas.  
**Thank you, God, that he touched him.**

Jesus comes to me.  
**Thank you, God,  
for everything you do for me.**  
**Amen.**

## Respond to the Word

Ideas to suit different interests, ages and learning preferences.  
The Children's Sheet [WEB](#) offers activities to do in worship & at home.

### Believe without seeing

It is not always necessary to see something to believe in it. Sometimes we can see the effect of something rather than the thing itself. Divide into groups to identify four 'things' people believe in without being able to see them. Is the 'thing' tangible in any way or is it an idea? Can we see its effects? Is it important who tells us about it? We can observe things blown by the wind; some bacteria make us ill, and though we can't see them, we believe the scientists who tell us about them – because they have seen them; we trust doctors who have conducted tests. What and how we believe depends on many different factors. Belief and faith in the resurrection is complex.

### Peace be with you

Hide 14 paper doves [WEB](#), each with one letter of the phrase 'Peace be with you' on it. Search for them and construct the phrase, using clues if necessary. The disciples were lost, hiding behind the locked door; Jesus found them and offered peace.

### What do we see?

What we see is affected by circumstances. Find some optical illusions to display by googling 'one picture two images'. Project some of these images and invite people to share what they can see. Discuss the way that perspective affects perception.

## A simple worship activity for all ages

Display a large cross, decorated for Easter (it could be the one created in last week's activity *Jesus rose for me!*, see p.37) and place beside it a basket full of fabric strips of different colours. Jesus invited Thomas to come and touch. Invite people to select a strip of fabric in a colour that represents how they are feeling, and to touch the cross before placing the strip on the floor, letting it radiate out from the base of the cross.

## When very young children are present

A chance to play with things that help us to explore seeing and believing.

**You will need:** lidded boxes with objects inside (e.g. a torch, a toy animal).

Use this simple paraphrase: Jesus died and had risen (*hold hands up and outwards*). He went to see his friends (*clasp hands in front as if shaking hands with yourself*). He showed them the scars on his hands (*hold out hands, palm upright*) but Thomas wasn't there (*shake head*). Thomas said: 'I won't believe unless I see Jesus' (*wag finger*). When Jesus came again later he let Thomas touch him (*touch the palm of one hand with finger from other hand*). Jesus said: 'Happy are those who believe without seeing me' (*smile*). Repeat so the children can join in.

Show the boxes to the children. Tell them what is inside each box, and ask them whether they believe you (e.g. 'there is a wild animal in this box'; 'there is a light in this box'). Reveal the contents, and invite them to play with the boxes and the objects.

## Using today's psalm

### Psalm 16

At times in this psalm there seem to be echoes of Psalm 23: refuge, portion and cup, good counsel, hope and joy – the same themes of confidence and trust are here. It's an intimate psalm, a prayer from an individual to God who is good above all other. The promise in verse 4 to refuse to worship other gods comes from a society with a whole panoply of their own deities to worship, but for us these lines can also be a reminder to keep focused on God, and not allow the pressures of life and possessions crowd him out of our lives.

**Singing together** Go to musical support in the left-hand menu of the [WEB](#) for how to use the psalms.

**Response line** Between the verses, everyone says or sings: 'O Lord, you are my portion and cup. There is a response action on the [WEB](#).'

**Versions of Psalm 16 include** 'O Lord, you are the centre of my life' (CFE, LAU, SG) and 'O Lord, you are my portion' (PAME).

## Hymns and songs

*Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.*  
A key to abbreviations is on the [WEB](#).

*All heaven declares*

*Be still and know that I am God*

Blessed Thomas, doubt no longer (NEH)

Breathe on me, breath of God

Christ has risen while earth slumbers (EOA, CH4, HGSP)

*Jesus, stand among us*

Jesus, the name high over all

Light's glitt'ring morn (AMNS, CP, HTC, ICF)

O Breath of life, come sweeping through

O God, our help in ages past

Such enchantment, sudden strangeness

*Whatever name or creed* (Stainer & Bell)

*Thuma mina* (CG, CH4, CHE, SG)

*The peace of the Lord be always with you* (STF)

*This joyful Eastertide, what need is there for grieving*

(BPW, HP, JP, STF)

We have come as the family of God (SG)

When Easter to the dark world came (HP, RS)

## Send out

### Live in faith

Invite people to note, as the week goes by, the things that they accept or believe in but don't fully understand.

### Pray

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.'  
Lord, as we go out today,  
may we live lives that are open to you,  
always looking for opportunities  
to write our own book of your miracles,  
and giving you the glory and honour in all we do.  
**Amen.**