



#14: My Lord and my God! Redeeming Thomas

Bible Reading: John 20:19-31

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People

This series is taking us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**.

PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

If this is your first session after Easter, consider how to give it a celebratory feel, perhaps with some Easter treats for refreshments!

Please be aware that this session might give rise to some sensitive issues. Prayerfully ensure that the group respects the confidentiality of its members.

In your own preparation, as well as reading [John 20](#), it might be useful re-visit the accounts of the Resurrection in the other gospels for comparison: [Matthew 28](#), [Mark 16](#), and [Luke 24](#).

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

Think back over Easter and Holy Week. *How was it for you? What were the highlights of the celebrations? Is there anything in particular about Easter that lifts your spirits?*

Read all of [John chapter 20](#). See yourself in the garden, then in the upper room. *Do you find you identify more with Mary, Thomas, Peter, or one of the remaining disciples? What are your emotions or questions as the story unfolds?*

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Risen Lord Jesus,
be known to us as we gather together
and as we share in reading the news of your Resurrection.
May your Word inspire us.
Forgive us our fragile faith.
Help us to be honest about our disappointments, our doubts, our fears.
Breathe into us your life-giving Spirit;
Fill us with your peace, so that we might live out the joy of your presence with us. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore

In small groups (of 2-4 people), share particular occasions when you have enjoyed being with friends and family. *Have you experienced any of these over the Easter period?*

Are there times when you need your own quiet space, or prefer to be alone?

Are there times when you have been disappointed to have missed out?

If you feel comfortable to share, describe your feelings, within in the safety of the group.

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

John is the only gospel writer who records the story of Thomas. He was one of the group of twelve disciples who had been close to Jesus, journeying with him and learning from him for three years. John refers to Thomas on two other occasions: [John 11:7-16](#) and [John 14:5-6](#). *What do these two passages tell us about Thomas' personality and his relationship with Jesus?*

After deserting Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples had dispersed. After the trauma of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion, they regrouped in a house (traditionally believed to have been where they had celebrated the Passover on Maundy Thursday). There they received news of the Resurrection from Mary Magdalene. Peter and John confirmed that the body was no longer in the tomb... only the wrappings. On the evening of that first Easter Sunday (the first day of the week) the followers were together behind locked doors, fearing further action from the Jewish authorities. Jesus came amongst them, speaking to them about forgiveness. He breathed his peace upon them. Thomas was elsewhere on that occasion. When Thomas re-joined his friends, he questioned what they had experienced and demanded physical proof.

Read together the Bible passage: [John 20: 19-31](#)

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

Why do you think Thomas was not with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to the group? Does his absence surprise you?

*Do you think Thomas's **doubts** were reasonable? How would you have reacted in his position?*

Would being with his friends help Thomas come to terms with his doubts? When we experience bereavement, doubts or crises of faith, are we able to turn to our church community for support?

*Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to invite Thomas to **touch** his hands and side? (This corresponds with [Luke 24:36-43](#) which expresses some of the doubts or 'unbelieving' of the others.)*

Read the encounter with Mary Magdalene: [John 20:11-18](#). What are the similarities and the differences between the encounters with Mary and Thomas?

*In both accounts, the **senses** play a part in coming to believe. What senses were used? Why do you think John emphasises this in the resurrection appearances? How do we use our senses in worship?*

*Which aspects of the **Resurrection** do you find strange? How central is the Resurrection to your faith?*

*What is significant about Thomas's exclamation: '**My Lord and My God**'? How does this link to our overarching **Covenant** theme, or resonate with our [Covenant Prayer](#)? What does it mean to you?*

*Should we always refer to Thomas as '**Doubting Thomas**', or are doing him a disservice?*

PRAYING TOGETHER

Sing or read: 'Christ is risen while earth slumbers' (*Singing the Faith*, 296), or another Easter hymn of your choice. Pray for the needs of your group, your church, and the wider world. And include **The Lord's Prayer**. You might like to use the following prayer (by [John Cox](#), *The Week That Changed The World*, 2012, Kevin Mayhew):

Great and all-loving God,

We praise you for Easter when you raised your Son Jesus to new life.

Grant us the ears to hear the message of resurrection.

Grant us the eyes to see his risen presence,

Grant us the voices to tell the good news to all,

Grant us the feet to follow in the way of our risen, living Lord. **Amen.**

COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

Many scholars think that [John 20:30-31](#) was the original ending to the gospel. Read [chapter 21](#) (often called John's 'Epilogue') and consider what it adds to our understanding of the Resurrection. *Does this chapter reveal more about Jesus' love for his disciples, and for us, his followers today?*

Junior Good Soil, issue #14

JESUS IS RISEN... and Thomas gets to see him!

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches.

It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas!



PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

Today, we will be thinking about one of Jesus's disciples – **Thomas**. He was one of the twelve who were with Jesus through his ministry, and shared in his supper before he died. When Jesus was arrested, Thomas and others deserted Jesus and ran away. When he died, they would feel so many emotions of hurt and guilt and grief. So after his death, still afraid for their own lives, they locked themselves away in hiding.

But on the first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead, and he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Peter and John also saw the empty tomb. In the evening, when they were discussing these things, Jesus appeared in a locked room among the disciples, and invited them to see and touch him. But Thomas wasn't there!

QUIET TIME – a prayer (for use at the start of the session)

Dear God, help us to believe the wonderful good news of Easter: that death is not the end, your love has won, and Jesus is the true king of all. Be present with us as we meet together, help us to worship you, and to know your love for ever. In the name of Jesus, our risen Lord. **Amen.**

TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... John chapter 20

Read the story from a Bible of your choice, or from the *International Children's Bible: John 20:19-31*. Or for younger children, try the *Usborne Children's Bible*, page 139 (and maybe some of the pages before).

WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

What do the children make of the story of Thomas? Does it make sense that he would have doubts? How would he feel about his friends seeing Jesus before him? Was he really doubting, or just sulking?! How would you feel if that was you? How did he feel the second week? How did he express his faith at the end? Jesus is alive, and can never die again! His power and love cannot ever be destroyed. He lives, not just like a spirit in heaven, but with a solid body, with a new life that's stronger than death. He invited the disciples to see him and touch him, including the wounds he still had from his crucifixion. He is the true King, ruling with God, and bringing in God's kingdom, even though things can often still look bad here on earth. All of this can be very hard to understand. And of course we may have doubts about it. At times too, we can feel disappointed when God does not seem to answer our prayers, or when things go wrong.

LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wounds with his finger, to make sure he was real! One idea is to make a picture using coloured paints, inviting the children to **dip their fingers** into the different colours and place dots on the picture. It could be a **colourful Easter cross**, an **Easter garden**. Or a **reverse-cross**, by covering part of the paper with the shape of a cross, and painting all around it, before removing the cross. You could explore the meaning of **faith** by **planting a seed** – not seeing the finished plant at first, but trusting it will grow as we water and nurture it. *God gives every seed the power of life, and yet at first it looks rather small and dead! What can we learn from this?*

Or, ask the children to **draw around their hands** on coloured card. In the centre of each hand, show Jesus' wounds of love with a **little red heart**. Write words on each hand to represent their **doubts** (on one hand), and their **prayers of faith** (on the other). Know that Jesus loves us in our trusting and our doubting!

PRAISE AND WORSHIP – ideas for hymns and songs (can be used whenever you wish)

Sing your favourite Easter songs and hymns!