

Sunday Worship for April 11th 2021 led by Charmaine Slade

Welcome

Hello and welcome today to Haverhill Methodist Church in the UK. However you are today, wherever you are, you are welcome here. Each week these days carries so many changes it's hard to keep up! One year on since the pandemic began we have all had to adapt so much and it's been a huge challenge yet here we are, with more signs of recovery all the time. Definitely a reason to be more positive. Thanks be to God.

Call to worship

Let's start with a prayer;

Dear Lord of all, we come to you in our various disguises, each in our own place, with our own thoughts, worries, our joys and we come with our arms turned to you for comfort, inspiration and hope. In that first week after your son was crucified we hear about how he first appeared to the apostles in that upper room. How would we react should you appear to us in that some way? Just like Thomas how would we know if it were true or an illusion?

We live in a world confused about truth. Fake news is the new normal.

And so we come with our own uncertainties. We bring the confusion of our narrow human understanding into the presence of you our God, the light and the truth.

As we search for and pray for your truth to become known by all, we stand together, arm in arm, your family emboldened by our faith today...

Amen

Song 1

Here is love vast as the ocean' by Phatfish

Here is love vast as the ocean
Loving kindness as the flood
When the prince of life our ransom
Shed for us his precious blood
Who his love will not remember
Who cant cease to sing his praise
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heavens eternal days

Grace takes my sin
Calls me friend
Pays my debt
Completely
Love rescued me
Seated me
With my king
Forevermore

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains open deep and wide
Through the floodgates of god's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide
Grace and love like mighty rivers
Poured incessant from above
Heavens peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love

Grace takes my sin
Calls me friend
Pays my debt
Completely
Love rescued me
Seated me
With my king
Forevermore

Let me all your love accepting
Love you ever all my days.

Intercessions by Claire Waller

Dear Lord

As we come to you this morning with these prayers, we thank you Lord that you are always with us and you are always ready to listen to us when we pray. Thank you Lord that you are a faithful God who never leaves us, even when we neglect you or when we feel so overcome by the troubles that we are going through that we find it difficult to pray to you. Thank you Holy Spirit that you intercede on our behalf.

We ask you Lord to heal all of us suffering from physical and mental illnesses. Heal our bodies and minds Lord. Take away all physical pain. Enable our bodies to function properly. Take away all emotional pain Lord – remove the anxiety and depression that tortures those suffering with it. Remove the stigma of mental health issues that is still in our society. Enable people to show compassion and love to those who are both physically and mentally unwell.

Thank you Lord for those friends and family that you have brought into our lives who are there for us and who pray for us and support us when we are not well. We pray for strength for them as they continue to do so. Thank you Lord that in Isaiah 41 you tell us not to fear because you are with us, not to be dismayed, because you are our God. That you will strengthen us and help us. Thank you Jesus.

We pray for our health service that has been badly affected due to Covid. We ask Lord that things will start to get back to normal asap and that extra resources will be found to improve waiting lists so that there are no more delays for treatment. As Covid restrictions start to ease we pray that people will adhere to the guidelines and rules still in place.

As students and teachers return to school, college and university we pray that they will feel refreshed and energised after the Easter holidays. Please take away any anxiety that the students may be feeling about returning. For some like James and James it means moving many miles away again from family and friends. We pray that all of them will settle back into routine and lessons quickly. Take away all stress and anxiety for those worried about what

grades they are going to get as they will not now be allowed to take the normal exams.

We pray for the children of our own Church Lord. They are the Church of the future and we ask you Lord that they will keep their interest and faith in you. Help us as a Church to help them grow strong in their faith. We pray for more Sunday Club leaders and helpers. As Illuminate starts up again, we also pray for more leaders Lord to assist Sarah each Sunday night. We thank you so much Lord for the work that Sarah is allowed to do in the schools. This is a great opening for your work Lord and we pray that you will continue to strengthen her and guide her in what you want her do with the students.

We praise you Lord that we have the freedom to worship you freely in this country. We remember the Christians in other countries who cannot do this. We pray for their protection so that they can worship without fear. We ask you Lord to work on the hearts of government leaders in those countries so that Christians are allowed to freely worship you. We pray for those injured in the bombing in Indonesia that took place outside their church on Palm Sunday.

Lord, in Matthew chapter 19 it says that with you all things are possible, so we submit all these prayers to you in Jesus name. Amen.

We will finish by saying the Lord's Prayer together;

The Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Introduction to today's message

In just a moment I will be reading from the book of John, but let me just set the scene!

The day after Christ was crucified Mary Magdalene had visited the tomb only to discover that the stone that had sealed the entrance had been rolled away. Appalled she had run to tell the apostles who joined her and they saw that Jesus had gone. His burial robes folded. They returned to their homes, no doubt badly shaken.

Mary remained distraught and she was the first to see her beloved Jesus resurrected although she did not at first recognise him. We don't know why but she needed to hear him call her by her name. Yes He called her by her name...

Reading from John. 20 19-30 The Passion Translation

¹⁹ That evening,^[j] the disciples gathered together, and because they were afraid of reprisals from the Jewish leaders, they had locked the doors. But suddenly Jesus appeared among them and said,^[k] "Peace to you!"^[l] ²⁰ Then he showed them the wounds of his hands and his side—they were overjoyed to see the Lord with their own eyes!

²¹ Jesus repeated his greeting, "Peace to you!" And he told them, "Just as the Father has sent me, I'm now sending you."²² Then, taking a deep breath, he blew^[m] on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."^[n] ²³ I send you to preach the forgiveness^[o] of sins—and people's sins will be forgiven. But if you don't proclaim the forgiveness of their sins, they will remain guilty."^[p]

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ One of the twelve wasn't present when Jesus appeared to them—it was Thomas, whose nickname was "the Twin."²⁵ So the disciples informed him, "We have seen the Lord with our own eyes!" Still unconvinced, Thomas replied, "There's no way I'm going to believe this unless I personally see the wounds of the nails^[q] in his

hands, touch them with my finger, and put my hand into the wound of his side where he was pierced!”

²⁶ Then eight days later, Thomas and all the others were in the house together. And even though all the doors were locked, Jesus suddenly stood before them! “Peace to you,” he said.

²⁷ Then, looking into Thomas’ eyes, he said, “Put your finger here in the wounds of my hands. Here—put your hand into my wounded side and see for yourself. Thomas, don’t give in to your doubts any longer, just believe!”

²⁸ Then the words spilled out of his heart—“You are my Lord, and you are my God!”

²⁹ Jesus responded, “Thomas, now that you’ve seen me, you believe. But there are those who have never seen me with their eyes but have believed in me with their hearts, and they will be blessed even more!”

³⁰ Jesus went on to do many more miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not even included in this book. ³¹ But all that is recorded here is so that you will fully believe^[r] that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you will experience eternal life^[s] by the power of his name!

Song 2

‘Oh Happy Day, When Jesus Washed’

Oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy happy day;
Oh happy day
When Jesus washed
Oh when he washed
When Jesus washed
He washed my sins away!

Oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy day
When Jesus washed
Oh when he washed

When Jesus washed
He washed my sins away!

Oh happy day
Oh happy day

He taught me how
He taught me
Taught me how to watch
He taught me how to watch
And fight and pray
Fight and pray
Yes, fight and pray

And he'll rejoice
And He'll, and He'll
Rejoice in things we say
And He'll rejoice in things we say
Things we say
Yes, things we say

Oh happy day, oh happy day
Oh happy day, oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy day

Lowell Mason, Philip Doddridge Public Domain

The Message Part 1

FAITH; It's rather a strange word really. It's a bit of a catch-all. What does the word mean for us? We bandy the word around a lot and we tend to view Doubting Thomas in rather a bad light. We tend to think of him as being rather out -of -order, asking for proof of Jesus resurrection.

But should we be so judgemental?

Let's think it through for a moment. In the lives we lead do we believe everything we are told? Of course not, that we be really foolish and naïve. We have probably all heard the term, fake news. Trump himself made it a common explanation for everything that as negative about him and his campaign. Highly irritating as it was at

the time, he was quite right about the practice. Misinformation is a huge problem today and is a big industry. From the local to the international stand, misinformation is used to fool people and manipulate the choices that we make. I think it is propaganda by another name and is nothing new. It has however become a runaway train, with the advent of the web.

Looking at it from a frivolous point of view, on April Fool's Day the media hoodwink us all intentionally and it can be really funny and we accept that in good jest. Most of us are only temporarily deceived and it's a bit of fun.

But the greatest amount of fake news is there to manipulate us in some way, be-it in forming our political choices, to the things we buy and the decisions we make. Even our views about other faiths. I think of the BNP. A fascist organisation with the belief that the British Isles are for whites only. They routinely create racist spin and are not averse to castigating the Islamic faith amongst many others.

Are we wrong to be sceptical??? Wouldn't we be fools to be sceptical? Naïve?

Thomas wasn't in the upper room with the other apostles when Jesus made his first appearance after the crucifixion and was understandably startled by what he heard! I certainly would be! Firstly Mary Magdalen tells her story, swiftly followed by the testimony of the remaining apostles.

Quite sensibly Peter didn't immediately accept what he heard. It wasn't doubt, it was a healthy response to an incredible narrative. He wanted to test what he was told. He wanted to know for himself that he could really trust what the rest now believed.

In that period of time he needed to test things out using several different resources.

He listened to the details of his trusted friends

He considered their answers over time

He would have discussed it with them

Finally he was willing to reconsider his initial impression in the light of fresh evidence.

Thomas becomes convinced; in the end he had no need to touch Jesus' wounds.

Doubt is not wrong. It is essential. If Easter faith really matters then doubt is an essential part of the journey!

Song 3 Keith and Kristin Getty - In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me...

Keith Getty, Stuart Townend © 2001 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Integrity Music)

Message Part 2

Returning to today's message about what faith really means, there is something else that's really worth considering and I'm going to jump now to the book of Daniel.

Daniel was appointed to interpret the extraordinary dreams of his King, King Nebuchadnezzar and he was celebrated at being astonishingly accurate and truthful. Sent from God and the King was beyond pleased. As a consequence he conferred authority upon Daniel and 3 of his faith-filled friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to administrate large chunks of his Kingdom.

After Daniel interpreted a significant troubling dream, the King built a massive gold statue. The King ordered all his important leaders and administrators, all the musicians in the land to come to the dedication. At that enormous event a herald announced that everyone was to fall to their knees and worship the statue. If they did not, they would be flung into a roaring furnace without hesitation.

Within that crowd, a contingent of astrologers, who had an axe to grind, informed the king that some of the Jews in the crowd were disobeying the King's command. Notably Daniel and his friends. The King was incensed and had them brought to him for an explanation. He gave them another chance to obey and warned them if they did not, they would be thrown into the furnace. He said to them "what god can rescue you from my power?"

Reading from Daniel 3 v 19-27

"¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude towards them changed. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'

They replied, 'Certainly, Your Majesty.'

²⁵ He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!'

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisors crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Amen."

.....My favourite part is when the king looks down into the furnace and sees 4 men, not 3. The presence of God in the hottest of hells. Yet something else jumped out at me this time. It was within their reply to the king and they said; "but even if He does not".

Even if He does not.....!

This to me may be that extra thing to work towards if we are learning what it means to have complete faith? They knew God could rescue them, they had faith that he could. The real faith came in those few brief words, that even if He didn't save them, they still believed he was the one and only true God They would not bow down to anything or anyone else.....

.....How often do we pray and pray and pray for something important yet God seems silent? We pray for job appointments, financial security, property, health difficulties, our own families, yet the prayer is not answered.

When we cry in the dark for rescue, but there is no response. When others seem to regularly hear from God in some way? When we wonder if He is there at all?

God doesn't always answer our prayers. It is in those times we must decide if we will continue to pray in a state of "even if He doesn't".

So, even if He doesn't, I love Him.

Even if He doesn't, I choose to trust Him.

Even if He doesn't, I am blessed by Him. I am blessed because He loves me and many times a part of being a loving Father is saying 'no'.

When your under- 5 wants a full fat coke, I would say no.

When your 8 year – old meets a new friend and within 10 minutes asks if she can go to spend that night at their house, I would say no

When your teeny person wants a mobile phone, I hope I would say no, not yet.

None of these things would hurt the child particularly, although I'd still say no to allowing my child to stay at an unknown house! But at the very least, it is much better for them, to say 'no'.

God wants to hear from us, he loves to talk with us but sometimes that silence means "no". Sometimes that silence means "not yet". His love for us is profound and we recall he desires His best for us, not our best for ourselves.

If we can face the many fiery furnaces in this life and say "but even if He doesn't" then we can know we have truly been blessed. Then we can understand that fiery pits in life mean nothing when compared what we have been promised, an eternity in His presence and in His love.

Yes it can be anything from mildly uncomfortable to a pain we feel we cannot bear but we can be sure, it will not last. Even if He doesn't save us from our own experience of the fiery furnace He promises to deliver us to a lasting afterlife of no more pain.

Sometimes fire is meant to purify us, to remove what should not be there. Sometimes we need to smell the smoke to remind us of the truth.

And the truth is, even if He doesn't, He still loves us. He still has plans to prosper us and to work out all things for our good.

He is still our God and we won't bow down to anything or anyone else just to avoid a little fire

May I leave you with a thought to consider? It can't be any surprise that for so many, our faith, our belief seems extraordinary, possibly far-fetched. Maybe out of touch with reality. As all evangelists know, so has it always been the case. This isn't new.

In our own lives how do we communicate our faith to those we love? How do we make the truth acceptable to a society grown fat on untruths, blinded by fake news?

Amen

Closing prayers and the blessing

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the example of Thomas who had the courage to test the truth of what he'd been told, even if it meant he had to stand alone.

We thank you for the example of the other disciples and Jesus, who did not reject Thomas but helped him find what he needed to believe. Help us to value questions and questioners, and not to reject either when it feels 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.

Send us out Lord, emboldened by your love, excited by the prospect of sharing our faith with others and willing to try. Amen.