

# WEEK 1: SERVICE RESOURCES

## THEME: JESUS APPEARS TO THOMAS

READING: John 20.19-29

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

SECOND READING (if needed) Revelation 1.4b-8

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Though darkness seems to envelop us,

**People: Jesus breaks through with a word of peace.**

Leader: Fears are banished!

**People: Hope is more than restored.**

Leader: Rejoice! The Lord is with us!

**People: We rejoice in the peace and blessings He brings. Amen.**

## PENITENCE

**Merciful God, We come before You with humble hearts, Acknowledging our moments of doubt, And our times of wavering faith.**

**Just as Thomas struggled to believe, We too have questioned Your presence.**

**Forgive us, Lord, for our uncertainties,  
For the times we have demanded proof,  
And have been slow to trust.**

**Fill us with the faith that transformed Thomas,  
That we may proclaim with joy, "My Lord and my God."  
Strengthen our belief in the resurrection,  
And help us to live in the light of Your truth.  
In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.**

As we embark on this worship,  
may our doubts be transformed into declarations of faith,  
and may we, like Thomas, proclaim with conviction,  
"My Lord and my God!"

## COLLECT

Risen Christ,  
for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts,  
that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace  
to the praise of God the Father. Amen

## INTERCESSIONS

Loving God, we bring before You our world, filled with uncertainty and doubt. We pray for those struggling to find faith amidst the challenges they face. May they encounter Your presence and be strengthened in their belief.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, we lift up all who are burdened by doubt and fear in their lives. Just as Thomas found assurance in Your Son's resurrection, may they find peace and confidence in Your promises.

Lord, in Your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray for the Church, that it may be a beacon of hope and faith to those who seek truth. Grant wisdom to its leaders and strength to its members to boldly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.

Lord, in Your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God, we remember those who are isolated and lonely, feeling disconnected from their faith communities. May they find comfort in Your love and the support of those around them.

Lord, in Your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, we give thanks for the gift of faith that overcomes doubt. As we journey through life, may we be inspired by Thomas' confession and always declare, "My Lord and my God."

Lord, in Your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

## BLESSING PRAYER

May the peace of Christ be with you, As you go forth in the light of His resurrection. May your hearts be filled with the faith of Thomas, Who declared, "My Lord and my God."

May doubts be transformed into steadfast belief, And may you find joy in the presence of the risen Lord. As you journey through the days ahead, May the love of God guide your steps, And His truth shine brightly upon your path.

May you be a beacon of hope, Reflecting the grace and compassion of Jesus Christ, In every action and every word.

Go in peace, with the blessing of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Now and forevermore. **Amen.**

# WEEK 1: HYMNS AND SONGS

## HYMN / SONG SUGGESTIONS

STF 303	I know that my redeemer lives
STF 305	Low in the grave he lay
STF 314	This joyful Easter tide
STF 347	Crown him many crowns
STF 354	Jesus is the name we honour
STF 421	Empty, broken here I stand
STF 556	Just as I am, without one plea
STF 655	We cannot measure how you heal

1. Safe, locked inside that upper room,  
too scared to let the truth be known,  
disciples had to see their Lord  
before that truth could be their own.

2. And Thomas, still so full of doubt,  
would not believe the tales they told  
till Christ appeared, to show his wounds  
then his conviction made him bold.

3. Yet doubts and fears returned again.  
Once more they locked themselves  
away until the Holy Spirit came  
on that inspiring, vital day.

4. The truth is now a living fact.  
The love of God can never die.  
So bold apostles stood their ground –  
their living Lord is not a lie.

5. We have not seen, but we believe  
and we must witness by our faith  
to living truth we have received,  
awakened by the Spirit's breath.

*Tune, Long Metre (8,8,8,8)*

# WEEK 1: REFLECTION

The disciples are hiding out of fear.

They're not merely worried—they're terrified.

Just as Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God in the Garden of Eden, the disciples are now concealing themselves from both the Jews and possibly from God Himself.

Before Jesus was arrested, they vowed to remain loyal to Him no matter the circumstance, even if it meant death. Yet when the moment came, they fled and denied knowing Him.

Now, they realise that Jesus is dead, and His body has disappeared from the tomb. Mary informed them that she saw Him, but they simply couldn't grasp it.

## ***They're frightened and bewildered...***

In the Bible, the act of hiding can symbolise shame or fear. Adam and Eve concealed themselves from God because they felt ashamed after disobeying Him (Genesis 3:8-10).

Likewise, the disciples may have been hiding due to fear and shame for abandoning Jesus during His crucifixion.

It's a natural human reaction to seek refuge in times of distress. Psalm 31:20 reassures us, *"You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them."*

In their fear, Jesus appears to them. What does He say? Does He ask them why they abandoned Him? Does He scold them for their lack of faith? No, He says, *"Peace be with you."*

Just imagine the relief and joy they must have felt. They see Jesus alive again, and His words of peace are like a balm for their terrified hearts.

He is essentially saying, *"I forgive you. You are still my friends."*

In this context, peace means more than just a greeting. It's a deep sense of reconciliation and restoration. In John 14:27, Jesus promises, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."* This peace transcends fear and doubt, offering comfort and reassurance.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He repeats, *"Peace be with you,"* and then He does something incredible—He tells them He's sending them out.

These frightened men, hiding in a locked room, are being sent on a mission. They don't need to pass a test or prove themselves first.

Jesus says, *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."*

It's a call to action: get up, take your mat, and walk—as Jesus said elsewhere.

Jesus commissions the disciples, much like He does with all believers.

This commission echoes the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus instructs His followers to go and make disciples of all nations. It is a call to spread the Gospel and share the message of salvation.

Then comes another astonishing moment: *Jesus breathes on them*. It may sound odd, but it is profoundly symbolic.

Recall how God brought Adam to life by breathing on him (Genesis 2:7)? In that same manner, Jesus breathes new life into the disciples, who are dead in their sins and denial. He instructs them to receive the Holy Spirit.

The word for spirit in both Greek and Hebrew also translates to breath or wind. Thus, Jesus is imparting to them the breath of life, the Holy Spirit, just as God did with Adam.

The act of breathing on the disciples signifies a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"*

Jesus' breath symbolises the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, bringing new life and purpose to the disciples.

Jesus knows precisely what we need. He understood that the disciples needed to see and touch Him in order to believe, so He showed them His hands and side to prove He is real. Thomas, who was not present the first time, desired to see and touch Jesus' wounds to be certain.

When Jesus appears again, He offers Thomas that opportunity. Thomas does not even need to touch—seeing Jesus suffices for him to declare, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28).

These questions and doubts are relatable. When we are grieving or afraid, our minds can play tricks on us. Was it merely wishful thinking? A hallucination? Yet Jesus knows our hearts and our needs. He gave us Holy Communion as a tangible reminder that He is real.

Each week, we are able to touch, taste, and receive Him in the bread and wine. It is His way of saying, *"I'm here, and I'm real."*

At the end of this story, Jesus speaks directly to us. If this were a movie, it would be the part where He looks right at the camera and says, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe"* (John 20:29).

That's you and me. Jesus steps out of the story and into our lives, offering peace and sending us out with the Holy Spirit.

We're blessed because we believe in Him, even without seeing.

This message reminds us that faith doesn't always require physical proof. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "*confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*"

Jesus acknowledges the challenge of believing without seeing, but He blesses those who do.

In conclusion, Jesus meets us where we are—in our fear, doubt, and inadequacy—and offers us peace and purpose.

He breathes new life into us through the Holy Spirit and sends us out to continue His work. His story becomes our story, and our story becomes His.

As we navigate our own challenges, let us remember Jesus' words: "*Peace be with you.*" We are blessed, sent, and empowered to share His love and grace with the world.

*Heavenly Father, we come before You in our moments of fear and doubt, seeking Your peace and guidance. Just as Your disciples hid in fear and uncertainty, we, too, sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed by life's challenges and uncertainties.*

*Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your boundless mercy and forgiveness. When we stumble and fall, You greet us not with condemnation but with words of peace. We are humbled by Your grace and assured that despite our shortcomings, we are still Your friends.*

*Breathe new life into us, Holy Spirit, just as Jesus breathed upon His disciples. Fill us with Your presence, renewing our hearts and minds. Grant us the courage to step out in faith, knowing that You are with us at every turn.*

*In our moments of doubt, remind us of Thomas, who needed to see and touch to believe. Strengthen our faith, Lord, even when we cannot see. Thank You for the tangible reminders of Your presence, such as Holy Communion, which reassure us of Your reality and love.*

*Blessed are we, for we have not seen and yet have come to believe. Let this truth fill our hearts with joy and peace. May we always find comfort in Your words: "Peace be with you."*

*We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.*

# Sermons in Art #1



Caravaggio, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## Caravaggio, The Incredulity of St Thomas

Although he is better known as Caravaggio, his real name is Michelangelo Merisi. He was an artist who worked in Italy from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries.

While he may have created exquisite art that points us toward heaven, his life was a catalogue of human frailties. He led a profoundly turbulent and violent existence, much of which he appeared to have instigated himself. He was hot-headed, jealous, angry, and impulsive. His crimes ranged from the not particularly serious offence of throwing hot artichokes at a waiter to the somewhat more serious—and frequent—street brawls, and he fled Rome after a particularly unpleasant episode involving unpaid debts.

Amidst all this undeniable human failing and shame, the irony remains that he offered some of the most insightful artistic interpretations of Christ's life. Perhaps his continual exploration of the delicate edges of human behaviour—the risky facets of human existence—allowed him to portray human emotion and passion in a manner distinct from that of his predecessors and contemporaries during his brief 36 years.



Today, we are focusing on his 1602 painting, *"The Incredulity of St Thomas,"* which tells us much about the relationship of Christ and Thomas.

On Easter evening, Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared in the locked room. When the disciples informed him that they had seen the Lord alive, Thomas firmly replied, *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger into the marks of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"* (John 20:25).

A week later, Jesus appears in the room once more. This time, Thomas is present. Jesus takes Thomas's hand and places it at His side, saying to him, *"Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and place it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe"* (John 20:27).

Earlier, Thomas had questioned the disciples' proclamation because he allowed his feelings to overshadow his faith and the truths of the resurrection.

When the religious leaders demanded a sign from Jesus to prove He was the Messiah, Thomas heard Him respond, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:38-40).

On their way to Jerusalem for the final time, Thomas was present when Jesus informed all the disciples, *"Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the experts in the law. They will condemn Him to death and hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, spit on Him, and kill Him. On the third day, He will rise again"* (Mark 10:33-34).

Thomas heard all of this. He witnessed everything. He had all the facts.

Yet, his sorrow over His Master's death, his fear of being arrested and crucified, and his guilt for fleeing

Caravaggio was an innovator who rejected the notions of 'ideal beauty' and was decidedly unconventional. He aimed to represent life as he perceived and experienced it, using ordinary individuals from the streets, including prostitutes and beggars, as his models.

He was regarded as deliberately shocking and displayed a blatant disregard for tradition. He faced criticism for 'telling it how it was' instead of employing the traditional, stylised approach.

If his portrayal of the doubting Thomas scene seems quite bold and even somewhat surgical to us, it must have seemed even more so to his original audience. People were accustomed then, as they still are today, to seeing the Apostles as decorous and venerable gentlemen in expensive robes with an elevated level of piety in their expressions.

Caravaggio depicts three elderly labourers with weathered, wrinkled, and weary faces, formed by the sun, wind, and arduous work. They are clad in their working attire.

Look again! Thomas is literally coming apart at the seams...

Thomas has a wise face; perhaps this is at odds with our perception of him. The lesson we are taught from an early age about Thomas is not to be like him, suggesting that he lacks wisdom. However, in his quest for hard empirical data, *"I'll believe it when I see"* isn't any more unreasonable than how we might react.

Also he has a face etched with years of experience and perhaps a touch of cynicism born from who knows what adversities. While it might not justify his lack of faith in the resurrection without seeing it, it does endow Thomas with a humanity we all share and the all-too-real doubts we face. He is a figure with whom we can all surely identify.

## **What of the other Apostles?**

Our Gospel reading does not inform us of their reactions to Thomas. One might easily presume that the others have no difficulty accepting the risen Lord's physical presence. However, that is not Caravaggio's implication.

Why else would he portray the two others as deeply engaged in Thomas's incredulity, just as Thomas himself is? They are witnessing it for themselves as well. They are being human about the situation.

They do not distance themselves from Thomas' perspective; rather, they support him: after all, they have had the advantage of an earlier resurrection appearance, unlike Thomas, and perhaps they are considering that they might well have reacted as Thomas did had they been in his position.

And what of Christ? He remains more in shadow than the others. Perhaps this suggests that there is more to learn about Christ.

Perhaps it is because he may, in some respects, be unknowable. Perhaps it serves to enhance the sense of awe and mystery? What we see in Jesus' face appears to be a pain – perhaps Caravaggio is suggesting – for a good reason, after all – that digging a finger into a gaping, barely-healed wound is bound to hurt.

Perhaps he seeks to emphasise the reality of the resurrection and all that physicality implies. Telling it as it is. Caravaggio depicts Jesus taking hold of Thomas' hand and guiding it to his wounded side. Thomas seems to be looking slightly to one side.

Is it excessive to think that Thomas, having stated that he wished to verify the resurrection by placing his hand into Jesus' side, then experiences some of the reluctance we might feel when confronted with such a situation?

This is an intensely human story, told by Caravaggio in an intensely human way.

Perhaps that's why it is such an enduring depiction: We can see ourselves in this scenario. Perhaps our empathy for the doubting Thomas, because of our own daily doubting, emphasises that despite all our human frailties, we are nevertheless blessed by God's grace and that God uses us, frail and faulty as we are, as his hands and feet on this earth.

# WEEK 1: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Life moves quickly. From the moment we wake to the moment we fall asleep, we are inundated with tasks, responsibilities, and distractions. In the rush of daily life, it is easy to feel disconnected from God—not because He is distant, but because we frequently fail to take the time to notice His presence.

But what if we could invite God into our ordinary moments? What if, instead of seeing our daily routines separate from our spiritual lives, we wove prayer into our day?

This is where “breath prayer” in the ordinary comes in.

## What is Breath Prayer?

A breath prayer is a simple, short prayer that is repeated in harmony with our breathing. It serves as a means to centre ourselves in God’s presence, particularly during routine activities that do not necessitate deep focus.

The beauty of breath prayer lies in its simplicity—it does not demand long periods of silence or profound theological reflection. Rather, it weaves prayer into the natural rhythms of your body and daily life.

A breath prayer typically consists of two parts:

- A name for God (e.g., “Jesus,” “Lord,” “Father,” or “Holy Spirit”).
- A short, heartfelt request or declaration (e.g., “be my peace,” “I trust You,” or “You are here”).

*For example, you may pray, “Jesus,” as you inhale, and “be my peace,” as you exhale.*

This simple practice serves as a reminder that God is present in every breath you take.

## Bringing Breath Prayer Into the Everyday

Rather than reserving prayer for specific quiet times, breath prayer can turn ordinary moments into encounters with God. Here are some ways to incorporate it into your daily activities:

### 1. While Washing Dishes

Turn an everyday chore into a sacred moment. As you let the water run over your hands, breathe in and pray, “Lord,” and breathe out, “cleanse my heart.” Let washing dishes remind you of God’s renewal and grace.

## 2. *While Driving or Commuting*

Traffic, delays, and the stress of getting from one place to another can easily frustrate us. Instead of letting tension take over, turn driving into a time of prayer. Try breathing in with *"Jesus"* and out with *"guide me."* You may find yourself arriving at your destination with a greater sense of peace.

## 3. *While Walking*

Whether you're walking in your neighbourhood, through a store, or in nature, use the rhythm of your steps to focus on God's presence. As you step forward, pray, *"God,"* and with the next step, *"You are with me."* This simple practice helps shift your awareness from the chaos of life to God's steady presence.

## 4. *While Waiting*

We spend much of our lives waiting—waiting in line, waiting for a phone call, waiting for an answer to prayer. Instead of filling the time with scrolling or frustration, turn waiting into a moment of connection with God. Breathe in, *"Lord,"* and breathe out, *"I trust You."* Allow your waiting to become worship.

## 5. *While Falling Asleep*

Many of us grapple with racing thoughts at night. Rather than allowing your mind to spiral into worries, employ a breath prayer to settle into God's peace. As you lie in bed, inhale, *"Jesus,"* and exhale, *"Hold me close."* Allow this to be your final thought as you rest in His presence.

# **The Power of Breath Prayer**

Breath prayer is powerful because it doesn't add another task to your to-do list; instead, it transforms what you're already doing into sacred moments.

It reminds us that God is present not just in church services or Bible studies but in the ordinary, mundane moments of life.

By incorporating prayer into our daily activities, we nurture a continual awareness of God's presence. Our perspective changes. Washing dishes transforms into an act of surrender, driving evolves into a practice of trust, and waiting presents an opportunity to rest in God's timing.

God is not distant. He is in your breath, your steps, your routines.

You don't have to wait for a perfect moment to connect with Him. Just breathe—and notice He is already there.

# WEEK 1: WRITING PROMPTS

1. **"Hiding in Plain Sight: How Fear and Shame Shape Our Spiritual Lives"**  
Reflect on the ways we, like the disciples, hide from God and others due to fear or shame. How does Jesus' message of peace speak to these hidden places in our hearts?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. **"Peace Beyond Understanding: Jesus' Response to Our Failures"**  
Consider how Jesus greeted His disciples with peace instead of condemnation after their betrayal. What does this teach us about grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation in our own relationships?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. **"Blessed Without Seeing: The Challenge and Beauty of Faith"**

Write about the struggle of believing without physical proof. How do doubt and faith coexist, and what practices help strengthen faith when God feels distant?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. **"Sent Despite Our Fears: Embracing the Call to Mission"**

Reflect on how Jesus sends His fearful, imperfect disciples out into the world. What does this say about our own readiness (or lack thereof) to share the Gospel? How can we find courage in His commissioning?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# WEEK 1: SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Here are some discussion questions you can use for your Bible study on John 20:19-29, where Jesus appears to Thomas:

**Reflecting on Fear and Faith:** What were the disciples feeling when Jesus first appeared to them in the locked room? How do these feelings compare to your own experiences of fear and doubt?

**The Power of Presence:** Why do you think it was significant that Jesus showed Thomas his wounds? How does this gesture speak to the importance of tangible proof in strengthening our faith?

**The Doubting Thomas Label:** How do you perceive Thomas' doubt? Do you think his doubt was justified? How do we often judge others (or ourselves) for doubting?

**Blessed are the Believers:** Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." How can we strengthen our faith without physical proof?

**Personal Encounter:** Have you ever had an experience that felt like a personal encounter with Jesus or a deepened sense of faith? How did it impact you?

**Role of Community:** How do you think the disciples supported Thomas in his journey from doubt to faith? How can we as a community support each other in our spiritual journeys?

**Trust and Vulnerability:** In what ways can we be more vulnerable in expressing our doubts and questions about faith?

**Transformation through Belief:** How did Thomas' declaration, "My Lord and my God!" transform him? How has your faith transformed you?

*Feel free to adjust these questions to suit the specific needs and dynamics of your group.*