**Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership Sunday 25th October 2020**

**Welcome**

Welcome to our service today, the 25th of October. Today’s service is being delivered by our Monday evening discussion group. Different members of our group will be leading the Youtube version and some others will lead the service in Chapel, dependant on what they feel comfortable doing.

Our service today is focussed on one word – doubt!

As Christian’s we are different from other religions. They have books of rules and regulations that they have to follow. We have the example of Christ’s life as our primary guide. That means we have to think, to analyse, to understand and interpret what we are and what we should believe. Part of this deeper understanding sometimes includes doubt – which is natural but not always easy. I have a lot of sympathy for Thomas the great doubter, who refused to believe Jesus was resurrected until he saw the wounds.

Jesus’ reply was “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” We are those people – we weren’t there, we did not see in person, but we are blessed because we believe.

Let us sing the hymn Rejoice, Rejoicehttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wtLsQ-HYJY

**Rejoice, Rejoice (chorus, verse, chorus, verse……)**

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| Chorus:  *Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you -*  *the hope of glory in our hearts,*  *He lives! He lives!*  *His breath is in you.*  *Arise, a mighty army we arise!* | Verse 1: Now is the time for us  to march upon the land -  into our hands  He will give the ground we claim;  He rides in majesty  to lead us into victory,  the world shall see  that Christ is Lord. |
| Verse 2: God is at work in us,  His purpose to perform -  building a kingdom  of power not of words;  where things impossible  by faith shall be made possible:  let's give the glory to Him now. | Verse 3: Though we are weak,  His grace is everything we need -  we're made of clay,  but this treasure is within;  He turns our weaknesses  into His opportunities,  so that the glory goes to Him. |
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We will now have our project total (Doors for project total)

Let us say thank you to God for His blessings, especially in these difficult times.

Dear Lord

We thank you for the beauty of your creation all around us,

Beauty that gives us so much pleasure when other pastimes are not available.

We delight in the familiarity of the passing of the seasons,

the comfort we find, knowing you are unalterable and trustworthy.

We see the power of our communities,

the support of strangers looking to help each other.

We give thanks for families,

for the comfort, support and joy – for our children and grandchildren.

We give thanks for your support when things are dark and difficult,

for the quiet voice telling us all will be well

That you are in charge.

Amen

And we now have 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.

In this part of the service we come to Professor Potty’s science experiment. Addie carried out two experiments to show that things we might doubt could happen, actually do happen. With faith in God, he can help us to achieve what we think is impossible.

Bible reading – the raising of Lazarus

**The Death of Lazarus**

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

**Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus**

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.”

40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him

So in this Bible reading people believe Jesus has come too late, to save Lazarus, but yet He proves His power, His authority by bring Lazarus back. Imagine if you saw this happen in your family – would this not get rid of any doubts you may have.

Our next Hymn is My Lighthouse

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| Verse 1: In my wrestling and in my doubts  In my failures You won't walk out  Your great love will lead me through  You are the peace in my troubled sea  You are the peace in my troubled sea  In the silence, You won't let go  In the questions, Your truth will hold  Your great love will lead me through  You are the peace in my troubled sea  You are the peace in my troubled sea | Chorus: *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *Shining in the darkness. I will follow You*  *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *I will trust the promise*  *You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore* |
| Verse 2:  I won't fear what tomorrow brings  With each morning I'll rise and sing  My God's love will lead me through  You are the peace in my troubled sea  You are the peace in my troubled sea | Chorus:  *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *Shining in the darkness. I will follow You*  *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *I will trust the promise*  *You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore* |
| Fire before us, You're the brightest  You will lead us through the storms  Fire before us, You're the brightest  You will lead us through the storms  Fire before us, You're the brightest  You will lead us through the storms  Fire before us, You're the brightest  You will lead us through the storms | Chorus:  *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *Shining in the darkness. I will follow You*  *My lighthouse, my lighthouse*  *I will trust the promise*  *You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)*  *Safe to shore* |
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Our second Bible reading is Matthew 14:22-33

**Jesus Walks on the Water**

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29 “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

This is one of my favourite bible readings. Peter almost has it. He realises that by faith he can walk on water – he overcomes his fear. But doubt overcomes him – he is of little faith. Our Monday evening discussion group is still meeting via zoom. So we looked at the subject of doubt as one of our themes and we would like to tell you what we came up with and then we will look at any conclusions we came up with. The actual points are actually quotes of what was said by different individuals in the group.

**Discussion Feedback**

Our home group topic was to discuss three questions

* What makes us doubt
* What gets rid of doubts?
* And in light of these doubts what has Jesus done for us?

The following are our group’s responses:

**What makes us doubt?**

The Initial response from the group was doubt is NOT WRONG,

We all experience doubt, life is full of them.

Doubt encourages us to think and make decisions for ourselves.

Of course the results and self reflection is so much easier when combined with prayer. No one is immune. It happens to us all. You’ve just got to learn how to handle the doubts as they come along.

Doubt seems more significant when we are faced with disasters and suffering at home and throughout the world. We ask ourselves why Lord why, where are you ????

Over analysing can be confusing and harmful ….especially when praying and the results of prayer do not come swiftly or don’t result as we thought they should be or we would like. Doubt can be negative or even crippling, but for the most part, doubt helps us not to be foolish or get us into bad situations

**What gets rid of doubts?**

* Encouragement and experience from others who have faced similar situations and from those going through similar situations using prayer as a guide.
* The example set by the disciples

We read in our bibles the examples given by the disciples who doubted till they saw ……….

* Doubting through action - Doubting Thomas, a sceptic, who refused to believe, without his direct personal experience. He needed to see and feel the wounds received by Jesus on the cross.

And the example of other believers

* Doubting through visual experience (seeing) - In Matthew 28 we read that the disciples went to the hill in Galilee because they were told that the risen Jesus would meet them there, When they saw Jesus they truly believed in the Risen Christ.

**And finally: What has Jesus done for us?**

Jesus proves himself when we ask,

* Doubting Peter asked Jesus to let him walk on water. Jesus gives Peter the means to trust him. When we’re totally honest with God about our doubts, asking through prayer helps us grow,
* Jesus trusts us to live for ourselves while showing us how to live in unknown and uncertain situations. He helps us overcome doubts by directing our lives and opening up opportunities through giving gentle nudges in the right direction helping us focus on the good in our lives, and reflect on our past achievements.

As adults we can easily complicate life, We read we should have faith like a little child …..simple yet honest.

Jesus died for you and me, so we wouldn’t die in Him. How can we doubt in Jesus when He shows us and others how to live through love? Amen

So our discussion group came to the conclusion that there are many things happening out in the world that can cause us to doubt. But doubt is not a bad thing – it is the fire in which we test our faith and make it stronger. Through prayer, through the example of the disciples, through the support of Jesus – we can face and overcome our doubts and our fears for He is with us until the end of time.

We come now to our prayers of intercession

LOVING FATHER GOD, we thank you today for the message of hope that lies at the heart of the Gospel, the assurance that whatever may seem to deny it, your love will emerge victorious. Help us to use this time that you have given us to hear your voice, discern your will and grow closer to you so that we may return to our daily lives renewed by your hope and vision. Help us to be strengthened in our faith and equipped to offer thanksgiving not just with our words but through everything we are and the actions we take.

SPIRIT OF GOD your peace is for all, for you are at work in every heart, so today Lord, we pray for all in our world who hunger for peace and fairness, we pray for those tormented by fear, torn by doubt, troubled by anxieties or tortured by guilt. We pray for the homeless, the hungry and Nations ravaged by war, may they find through you, love and peace of mind. In faith we lift them before you. Please hear our prayer.

CARING GOD you have promised that those mourning the loss of a loved one shall be comforted, so we pray for all those facing sorrow at this time, support them with your love through all that they face, sharing their pain and their sorrow. Be their light Lord.

GOD OF LOVE we pray today for people everywhere who are sick and suffering in any way. In a moment of quietness we offer up to you those people known to us………

We thank you today for all who work in our essential services and in particular those who work in the NHS, Social Care Services and other caring roles. We value the skills, compassion, and dedication we depend on so much. Please support and encourage them to maintain their care for us and show your love through their ministry.

Finally Lord we pray for one another, in our relationships with family and friends at work or leisure, and in our relationship with you. Help us to always acknowledge the mercy and love you so freely offer and always to show love and mercy in return.

We ask all these prayers in the name of your beloved son Jesus Christ.

AMEN

Our last hymn is Great is Thy Faithfulnesshttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQzzc41z5Q

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| --- | --- |
| Verse 1  Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  there is no shadow of turning with Thee,  Thou changest not,  Thy compassions they fail not,  as Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be. | Chorus:  *Great is Thy faithfulness,*  *great is Thy faithfulness,*  *morning by morning*  *new mercies I see;*  *all I have needed*  *Thy hand hath provided -*  *great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!* |
| Verse 2  Summer and winter,  and springtime and harvest,  sun, moon and stars  in their courses above,  join with all nature in manifold witness  to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. | Verse 3  Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  Thine own dear presence  to cheer and to guide;  strength for today  and bright hope for tomorrow,  blessings all mine with ten thousand beside! |
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Jesus knows how difficult our journey can be, the problems and attacks we get from all sides. But he does not leave us on our journey alone:

**Footsteps in the sand**

One night I dreamed a dream.

As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.

Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.

For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,

One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,

I looked back at the footprints in the sand.

I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,

especially at the very lowest and saddest times,

there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,

You'd walk with me all the way.

But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,

there was only one set of footprints.

I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you

Never, ever, during your trials and testings.

When you saw only one set of footprints,

It was then that I carried you."

Let us finish by saying the grace together.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen**.