

WRITTEN WORSHIP

Sunday 27 April 2025

Geoff Cawthorn

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

WELCOME

Such a glorious time. How do we follow Easter Day?

The joy of resurrection is now declared and will always remain with us – we've heard the story, we've felt the emotion, we've tried to make sense of it as we observe a deadly world and now we must seek personal answers to our lives and their place in all this.

What do you believe?

Well, let's start with the most used statement of faith. The Nicene Creed had a birthday recently and is now over 1700 years old. Let us see if we can say it honestly and sincerely.

The Nicene Creed:

**I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**



From Psalm 118: 15-18 -

Shouts of joy and victory

come from the tents of those who do right:

"The LORD has done powerful things."

The power of the LORD has won the victory;

with his power the LORD has done mighty things.

I will not die, but live,

and I will tell what the LORD has done.

The LORD has taught me a hard lesson,
but he did not let me die.

STF 314 -

This joyful Eastertide,
What need is there for grieving?
Cast all your cares aside
And be not unbelieving:

Chorus:

*Come, share our Easter joy
that death could not imprison,
Nor any power destroy
our Christ, who is arisen!*

No work for him is vain,
No faith in him mistaken,
For Easter makes it plain
His Kingdom is not Shaken:

Chorus

Then put your trust in Christ,
In waking and in sleeping,
His grace on earth sufficed;
He'll never quit his keeping:

Chorus

Fred Pratt Green

PRAYERS

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father we rely so heavily on the words of Jesus to Martha in John 11 (25-27:

I am the resurrection and the life," replied Jesus. "Anyone who believes in me will live, even if they die. And anyone who lives and believes in me will never, ever die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Master," she said. "This is what I've come to believe: that you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one who was to come into the world."

O Lord, we seek to echo those words from Martha and are so grateful for all You have done even though we can't always understand what is happening.

Merciful Father, we come before You knowing we need to repent, acknowledging our sins and shortcomings and concerned for the wrong we do. We confess our need for Your forgiveness and mercy. In our unbelief restore us to Your side and show us Your glory. Wash us clean, O Lord, and create in us all pure hearts. We trust in Your unfailing love and rely on Your grace to restore and renew us. Thank you for the forgiveness we find in Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray. Amen.

As wars rage and man's inhumanity to their brothers and sisters descends to seemingly bottomless depths of depravity we bring our prayers for peace and ask that all people should gain an understanding of a better way and a better life.

We also remember Pope Francis and commend him to God as we use a prayer for peace written by him:

We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried... But our efforts have been in vain.

Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: "Never again war!"; "With war everything is lost". In-still in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace.....

Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be "brother or sister", and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam!

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father...

STF 309-

See what a morning, gloriously bright
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the grave-clothes
Tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love,
Borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for He lives,
Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping: 'Where is He laid?
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb;
Hears a voice speaking, calling her name:
It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years,
Speaking life, stirring hope,
Bringing peace to us,
Will sound till He appears,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days,
Through the Spirit
Who clothes faith with certainty,
Honour and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned
With power and authority!
And we are raised with Him,
Death is dead, love has won
Christ has conquered;
And we shall reign with Him,
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

SHORT REFLECTION - MARY MAGDALENE

We are going to think for a while about Mary Magdalene. The Bible gives us great stories and introduces us to so many characters but it is left to us to get under the skin of these people. Artist, David Nevard, was commissioned to draw some of the main characters from the Bible for a book called 'Drawn to Imperfection' by David Painting and while these portraits are no more valid than any other portrayal of Biblical characters, they all seem quite intimate and show something of the subject's character. The one I would like to show you today is of Mary Magdalene:



O Mary, you wear your love on your sleeve. Thank you for showing us your love for our Lord. Thank you for allowing Jesus to redeem you and for showing us what total commitment means..

You were a temptress, a flirt, a prostitute, you offered love and found it used by so many and tossed away like a used rag.

In Jesus you found real love, love beyond what any human can offer, love beyond your imagination. In Jesus you are offered tender love and kindness that fills your heart and swells your soul. Your hopes were far more modest given your lowly status. You hoped for some form of love to build a future upon but what your Lord gave you was more

than the love of a husband, more than the love of family or a friend. It was love that demanded love in response and how wonderfully you responded.

Not concerned about what any gossips might say you let your hair flow free something only prostitutes do – such shocking behaviour. Yours was the role of a penitent prostitute emotionally caressing Christ's feet and releasing all the feelings that were welling up inside and overwhelming you. Tears flooded from your eyes. Tears of grief for the friendship you knew that was about to be disrupted. Tears that ran onto Christ's feet cleansing them and making them ready to receive the balm in preparation for the onslaught to come and then being stroked dry with your soft, fulsome hair.

Thank you Mary for this act of love that we would all like to have performed as Jesus readied Himself for the pathway to His death.

Christ's death would hit you so hard.

Thank you, again, Mary for the tears of frustration shed in the garden on Easter morning: 'Why have they moved the body? What have they done with Him?' You only wanted to say goodbye, anoint His skin one last time.

Perhaps the gardener could help you.

Suddenly her eyes just couldn't cope with more tears, 'O Mary' – how could it be. Eternity spoke to her and she recognised its voice. God lives! He is with her! She laughed, He laughed and they hugged. 'Don't cling to me, Mary. I will always be with you from now on.' You took His hand. 'Why me, why come to me and not Peter and John.'

I want you to tell the others.' 'Me, the worst woman in the world.' How they laughed and danced together. 'Well, I wanted it to be you, Mary, for another reason. I just wanted to see you happy, so free, and have the joy of hearing your voice. And you know, it was worth it, because you, the worst woman in the world, are worth it. Go Mary, tell the men that I am alive and that they can be also!'

What news she had to take to the others. Amen

STF 479

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

Henry Williams Baker

BIBLE READING - John 20:19-31 The Message

To Believe

Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." Then he showed them his hands and side.

The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were awestruck. Jesus repeated his greeting: "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you."

Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he said. "If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?" But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We saw the Master." But he said, "Unless I see the nail holes in his hands, put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side, I won't believe it." Eight days later, his disciples were again in the room. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." Then he focused his attention on Thomas. "Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe." Thomas said, "My Master! My God!" Jesus said, "So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing." Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book. These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he personally revealed it.

MAIN REFLECTION - WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Beliefs of all sorts drive us to action, so what we believe is important.

Mary Prince (c. 1788-1833) is someone whose beliefs drove her to greatness but you may not have heard of her. She was born in Bermuda into a life of cruelty and brutality in 1788 and as soon as she could work she was sold into slavery away from her mother.

Somehow, inspired by Christians around her, who shared her woes, she knew that God loved and valued her even in the midst of this deprivation and turmoil.

Throughout her troubles she never faltered in her belief. She would say, "I still live in the hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty."

False promises of release from slavery were made to her and all the slaves. But she continued her mission to bring God's justice to slaves and she found a way to break free from her bondage and eventually found shelter in a church in London. From there she became the first woman to present an anti slavery petition to Parliament. Her first attempt failed but her response was to write her autobiography, *The History of Mary Prince*, in 1831. It was a heart-wrenching story about being torn from her mother, and gives graphic details of the brutality during her life as a slave. Her book sparked an uproar but was a great success. Her owner in the Caribbean sued her for libel and won, but the book had done its job and opened eyes across the country. Two years later, 800,000 slaves living in British colonies were finally set free following an Act of Parliament.

Mary Prince had a belief that inspired her actions and these developed into a mission. She believed God would lift her to do whatever was necessary to achieve fairness and deliver respect to the slaves. She believed God's justice is inevitable.

What do you believe?

Faith or belief is no stranger to us; in fact it can be completely routine. We show deep faith every day: we don't ask for a worthiness certificate before jumping on a bus or train – we believe them to be safe. We don't even ask to see a surgeon's qualifications before they carve us up or check on a dentist before he rips into our mouth – we believe they are genuine. We have faith even in the chairs we sit upon – we believe in their ability to hold us without testing them first.

So why don't we find faith in God just as easy as, say, having faith in the chairs we are sitting on? It is obvious that chairs don't have the ability to form relationships and they don't offer anything else once you are sitting on them. God offers a future but even though sitting here on our sound chairs we believe in Him, but what do you believe about Him?

What do you believe?

Thomas believed in Jesus. He was one of His disciples so knew His powers and His charisma but still there were nagging questions. He had to be sure he was putting his faith in a power that could overcome death and he wasn't prepared to take someone else's word for it. If Jesus really had come back to life after being destroyed and murdered on the cross it was a game changer, it would mean eternal life for all. How could he believe?

Jesus had the answer, standing before Thomas, He invited him to explore His wounds, and so invited him to understand the reality of Christ risen from the dead. The tension in the room would have been palpable. How dare anyone question both the word of their friends and the resurrection power of the risen LORD. The brutality had been such that the wounds and the scars were plentiful and through Thomas we too know the truth of Christ risen. Through the boldness of Thomas, Jesus is inviting us to touch and experience the wounds He suffered for us and because of us.

Think for a moment about Christ's wounds, and the proof Thomas sought. We all know the pain of open flesh and we all know the cause of Christ's suffering. But as we imagine them in front of us perhaps we can start to understand that these wounds and this suffering have not gone away. We can see the wounds of Christ all around us, as we see grim skeletons of people wasting away for the want of someone to offer food or water, the dying and the grieving as yet another round of bombs is unleashed on the innocent, the sheer, deep seated, hatred that brings with it the devils that drive humans to do inhumane things. If, in the midst of all this heartache, we ignore the word of love shown so tenderly and clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus, hope leaves town and hatred beds itself in human, daily life. People start by saying, 'We don't like them, so we don't have anything to do with them.' 'We don't like them and we find their ways so weird.' 'Their beliefs are so strange, so we oppose them when we can.' The seeds of hatred are but a tiny step away from love, just as a knife pointed in anger is only a few inches away from bringing grief and despair.

The wounds of every day hatred scar society and blight the world. These bitter wounds of life display our failures and disfigure God's Kingdom and destroy the love that would cure us. Our wounds, grief and worries cannot be dismissed easily but we can rely on the wounds of Jesus to offer transformation and new unburdened life. The world is being offered an unconditional rescue that would turn lives round. Christ has paid the cost of our sin in full but there is that small step or great mountain of having faith in Him that will confirm our transformation.

This is God's solution. He requires us to see the worth in others. It binds people together (even, maybe especially, the ones we don't like) because we were all created for a purpose, a purpose as the hymn writer says, that rises above envy and falsehood and pride, a purpose that rises above suspicion and brings the world together. A solution we need to ring the bell to celebrate, as we raise praises that will reverberate in heaven and acknowledge that God is Lord of all is high over all.

Thomas has put the wounds of Christ in plain view in all their gory horror, but there is beauty there as well. The beauty of sacrifice through love and the beauty of blood freely spilt to raise us up.

This place Thomas has lead us to is the place where compassion takes over. Death and despair have done their worst but they have failed and lay defeated. They lay stricken in the gutter.

Our wounds may weigh us down – they have been accumulated over all our years and they may have become part of us and haunt us....but all that stops right here, in the room with Thomas and the others, as we are face to face with the reality of our risen Lord, our brokenness is taken by Christ and transformed into experiences which become part of our future. He will take our pain and our joy and make from them both the gold and gems that will form the bedrock of His Kingdom.

We carry our wounds with us to present before Him when He greets us to His kingdom.

All we have to offer is our broken selves and our hope born of faith.

But we are safe!

His healing power, His sacrifice and degradation, have pulled off the greatest rescue of all time.

Go forward in peace. Amen

POEM - Nicaea 1700 by Rev Laura Darrall

What do you believe?

As we stand in our pews or rows of chairs, and recite the Nicene creed, I wonder, what do you believe?

As we sit in a meeting about whether we should use pews or rows of chairs, I wonder, what do you believe?

As we put out the tables and make the coffee, and put out the rota for making the coffee and put out the rota for putting out the tables, what do you believe?

As we sit with a stranger who was looking for quiet, as we hand them a candle to light and remember, as we clear up the crumbs from a mum's giddy toddler, what do you believe?

As we stretch out our hands to share Peace and for bread, as we lift up our voices and bow down our heads, as we love one another just like Jesus said - what do you believe?

Do you believe in the Father who flung stars into space, whose benevolent image can be found in your face, who traced lines of eternity into every embrace, do you believe?

Do you believe in the Son, the second person of the trinity, the three in one, the one who would come and renew us all with a promise to be with us until the Kingdom will dawn - do you believe?

Do you believe in the Spirit? The giver of life? The teacher of Love and the queller of strife, who pours out its gifts at our baptismal start, and makes us one body, one faith, one heart. Do you believe?

Do you believe in the church? The vessel for God's mission, who is called to stay humble and accept the commission to be beacons of hope and children of light until that day comes when we resurrect and reunite with the one who made us. Do you believe?

We stand with the Saints, and join with their praise, in our pews and our chairs all our voices we raise, to proclaim our faith, our Creed, our Way

Following the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, we say: We believe.

STF 686

Jesus, Lord, we look to thee;
let us in thy name agree;
show thyself the Prince of Peace,
bid our strife forever cease.

By thy reconciling love
every stumbling block remove;
each to each unite, endear;
come, and spread thy banner here.

Make us of one heart and mind,
gentle, courteous, and kind,
lowly, meek, in thought and word,
altogether like our Lord.

Let us for each other care,
each the other's burdens bear;
to thy church the pattern give,
show how true believers live.

Free from anger and from pride,
let us thus in God abide;
all the depths of love express,
all the heights of holiness.

Charles Wesley

PRAYER

Let us pray:

Father God we pray for the Church in this country as we look for revival and see churches building congregations. We ask for Your support for all those Christian communities around the world who struggle or find it dangerous to witness to their faith. May they know they are remembered in our prayers and keep them safe through Your grace. We pray for those Christians we know, and offer You our own devotion as each of us use our individual talents to witness to the "One Body" of Your Holy Church.

Help us all to spread the warmth of Your love to those we meet and help us to welcome all no matter what their background, outlook on life, or outward appearance. Help us all to appreciate the roles of each other.

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Gracious God we pray for the work and service of all those looking after the weak and frail in our society. The carers, who look after family and friends in their own homes, the care and nursing homes and day centres. We thank you for the many charity organisations who raise money and provide supportive services to serve those in need. We pray for all finding their life painful, lonely or uncertain, especially those who are ill or vulnerable. Help them to sense Your comfort in times of distress and bless their families and carers. We bring before You all who are struggling with their lives and want to bring them hope. Show us how we should behave to help those who are in pain, without being intrusive and without turning away from their pain either. (Add names of those on your hearts at this time)

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Merciful Lord, Your love reaches beyond the grave to those we love but are now separated from us. We believe they rest in Your eternal peace. So, we remember those who have died and we pray for all whose life is saddened by the death of a loved one - be with them in their loneliness.

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Everlasting God we pray for ourselves; help us to believe more deeply in You and in our unbelief walk with us until we find greener pastures. Comfort us in times of difficulty and pain. Help us to put what we believe into action and we ask that in all we do, we may walk more closely with You at our side safe in the knowledge that Your deep and Fatherly love knows no bounds.

Merciful father: accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

STF 293

All heaven declares
The glory of the risen Lord
Who can compare with
The beauty of the Lord
Chorus

*Forever He will be
The Lamb upon the throne
I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone.*

I will proclaim
The glory of the risen Lord
Who once was slain
To reconcile man to God
Chorus

Noel & Tricia Richards

BLESSING

Dear Master, Lord, and Friend,
by the death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ
You delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in Him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of His victory;
through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with You,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
And now we go in peace and may God's peace go with us. Amen

