

**A Sermon by H. Matthew Lee, Licensed Lay Reader, at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, The Second Sunday of Easter, 2019.**

St. Thomas the Apostle is a rather curious character. We only have recordings of his speech in the Gospel of John, and his very first words are delightfully laconic. After the news of Lazarus' death reaches Christ and the Apostles, the Apostles are reluctant to return to Judea because the Jews attempted to stone Christ there. But as it becomes clear that Christ is firmly set on returning to Lazarus and his family, St. Thomas simply says to his fellow Apostles: *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."*<sup>1</sup> And so they went. It is a little unfair that this deathly loyal Thomas is usually remembered only as "Doubting Thomas".

But it is to the honour of St. Thomas that even his greatest moment of ignominy served, by the grace of God, his greatest glory. Thomas' cry, *"My Lord and my God!"* makes him the first person to call Jesus and recognize him as God without any ambiguity, with absolute clarity. St. Thomas suffered doubt so that we might not doubt, and he believed so that we might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life through his name.<sup>2</sup> How thankful we must be to St. Thomas who used his life so that we might learn the truth: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."*

But what does it mean to confess that Christ is our Lord our God? It is to know that Christ is not merely a man, because even extraordinary people, great teachers, radical activists, and charismatic preachers—they are all mere human beings that will, as will we all, return to dust and ashes. No amount of pride, power, fame, or wealth will help us outrun death, all our clever plans and

beautiful ideas will eventually reveal themselves to be vanity. If Jesus of Nazareth was merely some sort of respectable ethical teacher, a "nice" person, a social reformer, Christianity would be meaningless. If that is all our faith amounted to confessing then our faith would be a most pathetic banality. If that is all it was, it would be better, and far more interesting, if we were a silly cult that venerated a mad fanatic from backwater Nazareth who was crucified as a dangerous social insurgent. Indeed, if all we amounted to be was some sort of lukewarm, domesticated, and inoffensive moralism we should all just go home and shutter the doors of our parish for good.

But that is not what St. Thomas confessed, and what the Church confesses with him. Who is the Lord our God? He is the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty and Eternal One. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"* says the Lord—he is the Beginning and the End. It is this transcendent, otherworldly Lord who took on our flesh and blood. It is this King of Kings, Lord of Lords<sup>3</sup> who walked the same earth that we walk, who breathed the same air that we breathe here and now. And he rose again in our human flesh and blood as the "first-born of the dead", so that we too may rise again in our flesh and blood in the End Time.

Who is the Alpha and the Omega? He is the eternal Word who was in the beginning with the Father, through whom all things were made.<sup>4</sup> He is the Life, the True Light, the light who shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it.<sup>5</sup> He is the Beginning who moved over the formless void, when darkness was upon the face of the deep, and he penetrated this nothingness with the primordial utterance: *"Let there be light."* And the light was good.<sup>6</sup> This light never left us, and his salvation was prepared in the presence of all

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<sup>1</sup> John 11:16

<sup>2</sup> John 21:31

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 19:16

<sup>4</sup> John 1:1-4

<sup>5</sup> John 1:5

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:2-4

people in his enfleshment, “*a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel.*”<sup>7</sup> We who live in the True Life, we who take on the yoke of Christ and do not hide from his terrible light, will not be overcome by darkness. For no burden is lighter, no touch so gentle and indefatigable, than the warmth of the light that falls on our shoulders. It is only under this yoke that we will find true rest.<sup>8</sup> That formless void, that dark and twisting nothingness that creeps over our souls cannot be the victor, for our lowly and gentle Lord abolishes its claim over us.

Who is the King of Kings? He is the Creator, the sovereign who gave the Apostles the authority to forgive the sins of any, the keys of the kingdom by which whatever is bound and loosed on earth is bound and loosed in heaven.<sup>9</sup> Out of the dust of the earth we were formed by the hands of this creator, in his own image made male and female, turned animate by his breath of life—his divine *a-spiration*—his Spirit.<sup>10</sup> As it was in the beginning, in the fulness of time the same God in his risen flesh breathed on the Apostles and gave them the Holy Spirit. What was lost in the first Adam was restored by the last Adam.<sup>11</sup> The image of God, obscured by the dust of our sin, is washed clean by the blood of the Son of Man.<sup>12</sup>

Who is the Lord of Lords? He is the Shepherd and the Lamb, the High Priest and the Sacrifice.<sup>13</sup> As the Shepherd he brought a sacrifice even worthier than the fat portions of the firstlings of Abel, the first shepherd. This Shepherd brought himself, the Lamb of God.<sup>14</sup> Just as the First Covenant was not

ratified until every commandment of the law was declared by Moses and he sprinkled the people with the sacrificial blood of goats and calves, the High Priest also ratified the New Covenant with sacrificial blood. But the High Priest did not take the blood of goats and bulls. He spilled his own blood.<sup>15</sup> “*Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,*” so he submitted himself to the law so that we may all be freed. The blood of this Lamb washes us pure like snow from heaven.<sup>16</sup>

Behold, a great earthquake, the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies! The Paschal Lamb yields up his spirit—the foundation stones split, the curtain of the Temple tears, the Tabernacle revealed to all!<sup>17</sup> Behold, a great earthquake, the tomb revealed empty!<sup>18</sup> Behold, hell defeated by the death of Christ! Death thought itself victorious, but when it greedily took the sinless victim it met the face of God. Death took a human corpse and encountered the Eternal. By his descent Christ took hell captive and behold! —the stone has rolled away from the grave, the gates of hell breached! “*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*”<sup>19</sup> Christ is risen, and you are defeated. Christ is risen, and life reigns victorious.

So who is our Lord our God? He is the first-born of the dead, and it is in his Resurrection, and *only* by his Resurrection, that we can await the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. This is the Lord and God confessed by St. Thomas, who among the Apostles journeyed the farthest from home. And

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:30-32

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:15-18

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:47-49

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 9:11-14; Revelation 7:17

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 4:2-4

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 9:11:22

<sup>16</sup> Revelation 7:14

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 27:50-51

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 28:2

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55

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Acts 5:27-32; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

behold, the Apostle Thomas martyred in India—St. Thomas, pray for us! Let us also be counted among the saints who defeated the devil with nothing but the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, not clinging to our lives even in the face of death.<sup>20</sup> *“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”* For in his death is eternal life.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

*To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Amen.*

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<sup>20</sup> Revelation 12:11