

Autumn 2026 Communions - Rev John Lachie Macleod

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[0:00] The psalmist there celebrates something that we may have a tendency to neglect, that God is a God who loves to see his servant prospering.

! Or as we read it in the prose version of the psalm, great is the Lord who delights in the welfare of his servant. That God wants to see his people progress. He wants to see his people do well. And sadly, sometimes within the realms of religion and even in Christianity, we can sometimes have this fear or this thought that God's desire is to make our life hard or difficult.

Now we know that there is great suffering at times in the Christian life. We know that our salvation is based upon the suffering of God's Son, the suffering servant prophesied so powerfully, particularly in Isaiah, and brought to fruition in the life of God.

And we know that one of the great examples of faith and faithfulness in the Scripture is Job, whose life is marked by suffering. So we may think that we have something of a paradox here.

[1:13] How can you say both these things, that God wants his people to prosper, and yet at the same time we see so much suffering? Now that's a very big question that I won't deal with comprehensively.

But ultimately, we recognize that in the Scriptures, despite what we see with regards to the suffering that often comes into the experience of God's people, we recognize that God's heart is for the good of his people.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me, he guides me, he restores me. He anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows. And that undergirding principle throughout all of Scripture is in no way negated by the reality of suffering, because the truth is, even those who have suffered profoundly in their service for the Lord often find themselves with a testimony of praise towards... In fact, suffering as a Christian is the only thing that in one sense makes any sense of suffering in this world. Suffering without Christ.

Well, that's madness, and it will lead to us suffering eternally without Christ. But those who suffer for the Lord recognize that even in the difficulties and in the darknesses that he allows us, and indeed sometimes empowers his people to go through, God is working for their prosperity, for their goodness, for the richness of their salvation, for their anticipation of eternity, and for their preparation for a place in his everlasting kingdom.

[3:00] Have no mistake in your heart tonight. The Lord is concerned for the welfare of your life. Some may fear what is going to be the cost of professing Jesus Christ publicly, and there may be a cost, but it's nothing compared to the cost of denying Christ publicly, and denying Christ with your life.

And one character that we find in Scripture, who shows us how we can be in a dark place, but God's intention is to lead us to a better place, is the disciple Thomas.

It's quite remarkable that, relatively speaking, we don't know an awful lot about Thomas, and yet his name has found its place rooted in the culture of the world that is influenced by Christianity.

Some people can use the term doubting Thomas, and may not even know who Thomas is. In fact, apart from Judas, he probably is the most well-known person from the circle of disciples that finds their way into common language and common usage.

There's something about his doubting of Jesus that resonates in the mindset and heart of people, and remains there, even though in reality, Thomas is someone who actually is grossly represented by the nickname doubting Thomas.

[4:36] Because the reality is, he gives one of the clearest testimonies in all of Scripture regarding the deity, power, and salvation of Jesus Christ. It's funny how he gets remembered for his moments of doubt, but nobody sings of praising Thomas, or affirming Thomas, or God-recognizing Thomas, my Lord and my God.

And if what we know of him is to be true, we know that in his service to Jesus, he carried the gospel message to India, where he died serving the Lord.

Now, I think we could probably explore for a long time regarding the person of Thomas, why negativity is so powerful when we all want to be positive, and we speak as if we want to be positive, but yet a moment's negativity can be so marking and damaging in life.

Many is the person who's made one mistake in life, and they get remembered for it for the rest of their days. And Thomas is one of these people. But behind the doubt and behind the darkness is the testimony of a man who came to see Jesus as his Lord and his God, and whose life was empowered, whose life was renewed, and whose life was lived worthily and lived well in the light of the reality of what he professed concerning his understanding of Jesus Christ.

And you may be here tonight with all kinds of doubts and questions concerning Jesus. And I pray that as we go through this encounter between Jesus and Thomas, that the Lord will speak to our hearts.

[6:19] We're thankful, aren't we, that Scripture does reveal the weaknesses even of its so-called heroes. That weaknesses in God's children are revealed.

We can recount them often when we find the great characters of Old and New Testament, and we see the moments where the Scripture remind us that they were imperfect people like us.

When the Scripture reminds us that they were weak people like us. Because in doing so, the Scripture is encouraging us that we too can still be precious in the sight of God, and we can belong to God.

These weaknesses are revealed to us, not to confirm us in our sinfulness, but to give us hope in the light of our stumblings, that the Lord will deliver us.

And the way that Jesus deals with Thomas is a great encouragement to anyone who has doubts about faith, doubts about salvation, doubts about eternity, doubts even about professing faith and standing up for Jesus publicly.

[7:27] So let's consider what we see in Thomas' life as we recognize the reality of his doubting and discouragement. This incident does serve us and gives us the opportunity to address the reality of doubt and how we deal with it.

We can have doubts about all kinds of things. Doubts about our faith, doubts about the Bible, doubts about the reality of God's existence.

These things can plague our minds at times. And it's maybe a great encouragement to us in the first place that even someone who had been with Jesus for these three years, even someone who had witnessed the miracles, someone who had heard firsthand the teachings, someone who had witnessed the love and compassion, someone who had been close to Jesus through all the wonders that he performed, yet when his greatest miracle had been accomplished, that he had risen from the dead, Thomas is plagued with doubt.

And I want to explore for a moment why that may have been. And it may help us understand why we sometimes find ourselves doubting in life.

Now, we do this carefully because the Scripture doesn't explicitly say these things to us, but these are things we can learn from Thomas and his experience.

[8:57] And one of the things that should strike us that whilst we don't want to condemn him with the moniker Doubting Thomas, what we see of him does indicate to us that his personality may have contributed to his doubting.

His personality may very much have been part of the reason that he was separated from the disciples, therefore missed the miraculous appearing of Jesus and found himself more ready to disbelieve than to believe.

We don't know an awful lot about him, but what we see of him doesn't give us the indication that he was the life and soul of any part. Indeed, when we see him, we see that he has this kind of dark disposition.

I don't mean dark in the sense of evil, but just gloomy. I don't know where we would find a character in popular culture to compare him with, but he seems to be one of these people that is almost more

ready to not believe than to believe.

In John chapter 11, when they were preparing to go to Lazarus' tomb and Jesus had been speaking to his followers about the reality that Lazarus' death was to be for the glory of God and so on, and they were worried about going because they knew that the religious opposition was rising, Thomas speaks and he says, let us also go.

[10:27] When Jesus was saying he was going, Thomas speaks and says, let us also go that we may die with him. Now, you can read that in a way that sounds admirable, but the sense of the language that is used and recorded is that this is a gloomy acceptance of faith rather than a positive commitment to follow.

It's almost, oh, well, we're all finished anyway. We might as well go. Let's be honest, we don't have to look too far for that attitude in our own lives or in the lives of others at times.

Sometimes it's our personality that can lead us to have a kind of gloomy outlook and acceptance. Thomas is the one who spoke to Jesus in John 14 with a spirit of resigned confusion when Jesus was speaking to them that he was the way, the truth, and life.

He says, Lord, we don't know where we are going, so how can we know the way? He was somebody who just seemed to have a natural disposition and a personality that was inclined to doubt.

And the reality is, friends, we are all different. Our personalities are different. Some of the wisest words that we ever hear outside of Scripture are in that prayer that has been adopted by the Alcoholics Anonymous movement and was written by an American clergyman as he wrestled with teaching his congregation, how do you live in a world where there's so much wrong and there's so much that needs to be challenged and much needs to be changed?

[12:05] How do you live in that world while at the same time dealing with the reality of your own life? And of course, he came up with what is now a world-famous prayer, God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

God knows who we are. God loves the gloomy person as much as the exuberant person. Jesus died for the gloomy person just as much as he did for the exuberant person.

So personality, friends, can lead us. We are all made up in our own unique DNA and form and all that influences our lives and all that shapes us naturally and biologically.

These things can affect us. We shouldn't be ashamed of God knows us, God made us, God can change us, and where we don't get changed because it's ingrained in personality, God can comfort, strengthen, and help.

But Thomas also, we recognize, particularly if that position he had was one inclined towards gloom, could have found himself falling to doubt because of his circumstances.

[13:23] Because Thomas, like all the disciples, had come through this terrible experience, and they were living in fear of their lives. Twice we read of how the door was locked because they were living in fear of the Jews.

And that kind of intensity, that kind of emotional pressure, these circumstances, being disillusioned. Doesn't the Bible itself tell us that hope deferred makes the heart sick?

Well, how much that could have impacted people like Thomas and many others where the hope that they had had in Jesus seemed to have been dissipated and seemed to have died on the cross? The hope that they had for a new day and for a new kingdom and for the restoration of Israel, all that was gone. These kind of situations can impact us.

And we go through things in life, friends, that can leave us, to use that Scottish expression, truly sculled with life and with the way things worked out.

[14:31] One scholar, speaking of Thomas' experience, said, the sheer, stark reality of the cross overwhelmed Thomas. At this point, nothing had comparable significance, whether the exuberant testimony of his fellow disciples or the clear and repeated teaching of the Scripture or of Jesus himself.

often the root of doubt lies precisely here. Some specific happening has broken into our world, seeming to contradict all else we have known or previously believed.

And as we remember and repeatedly ponder this happening, it blots out all other realities, including the word and promise of God.

God. I wonder if any of you can identify with that. Some sore experience, some tragic loss, some pain, some disillusionment, something that seemed to be going the right direction, suddenly hitting a dead end.

And in your circumstances and in the emotion of it, it can be also overwhelming. As that scholar said, it blots out all other realities, even including the word and promise of God.

[15:55] So here is Thomas and his own personality may be holding him back. His circumstances may be holding him back. But there's something we definitely know about him that I think easily infers this also held him back.

Thomas wasn't there when Jesus turned up. Absence from the fellowship of his fellow believers was part of what contributed to Thomas's experience.

He may have been the first ever recipient of what we refer to now as the fear of missing out. Can you believe the one time you don't go to the prayer meeting, it's the best prayer meeting ever.

The one time you don't go to church and everyone comes home raving about what happened.

Thomas for whatever reasons, probably the contributing factors we've already discussed was not with the twelve and the resurrected Christ suddenly appeared in the middle.

Peace be to you. And people run to him and tell him that the great experience that they've had and no matter how great their experience was, he's missed out on it.

[17:08] he wasn't there. And I know it may appear a very simple point, but you do have to ask yourself, and I have to ask myself, how much do I miss out of what God wants to give me when I don't assemble with the fellowship of his people?

How much do I need to think about my commitment to the gatherings of God's children? I was listening to a minister recently in America, he was nearing retirement and was having one of these interviews reflecting on all the changes he had witnessed in a 40 plus year ministry, and when people were asking about the changes, one of the things he said, you know, when I started in ministry, a committed church member was in church three times a week.

Now he says they consider themselves committed members if they're in church three times a month. And we don't want to go legalistic, and church is important.

Christianity, though, is not just about being at meetings. It's about assembling with intention to meet with God's people that together we might seek his presence, encounter his glory, revive ourselves in his promises, encourage one another all the more as the day approaches.

It's not just a case of turning up for meetings, it's turning up with desire, it's turning up with intention.

Lloyd Jones in one of his books mentioned that the people that gave him the least pastoral problems in life were those who were most often at the means of grace, because they were coming to God for themselves, they were growing in God themselves, they were building their faith up themselves.

[18:59] Thomas had been absent from the fellowship, and that undoubtedly contributed to his doubt.

And friends, we need fellowship in the church of Jesus Christ. We need one another in the encouragement of being part of God's kingdom in this world.

The old African proverb that said you can go faster alone, but you go further together. How much we owe a debt of thanks to God for those in our lives who have been with us through the journey as we seek to follow Christ together.

Indeed, Bishop Ryle said in his commentary on this section that Thomas' experience underlines how much Christians may lose by not regularly gathering, not regularly attending the gatherings of God's people.

God's people. So there we see the reality of how doubt can come in, and doubt can plague us, and things can cause us to question, and cause us to really have an uncertainty about things we should be certain of.

[20:17] But what we notice is that Jesus comes specifically, doesn't come immediately. And let's be clear about this, doubt is not a sin.

Doubt has affected some of the greatest saints at times in life. It's not a sin in and of itself, but how we respond to it can lead us into sin or lead us to be sinful.

I think the church, as it often does, has erred on two sides of how we deal with doubt. For many years, people were scared to question anything, scared to ask anything, or even to confess that they had ever had a doubt in their mind, as if they would be portrayed as some weak, pathetic

Christian.

But then we erred on the other side, where it almost became trendy to be doubtful, and not really to believe anything, but just to hang out with the church. And we see that neither of these situations are true to the experience Jesus has with his followers, because Jesus is patient with Thomas.

Jesus is kind to Thomas. Jesus doesn't rush in with a sledgehammer when Thomas expresses this doubt, and he expresses it so assuredly, I will never believe unless I see.

[21 : 37] Jesus was patient, Jesus was merciful, Jesus was kind, but neither did Jesus intend to leave Thomas in that condition of doubt, or say, oh, that's cool, Thomas, we're okay anyway.

No, he came and he challenged the reality of what Thomas was believing or disbelieving. Jesus knew the exact nature of Thomas' doubts.

Remember that. He had said to the followers, unless I place, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side.

That's what Thomas says to the disciples. Eight days later, Jesus comes, and he says to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, put out your hand and place it in my side.

Jesus knew the exact nature of Thomas' doubts, and the invitation he made corresponds directly to what Thomas had expressed regarding his skepticism about Jesus' resurrection.

[22 : 42] And there's something profoundly comforting in that, friends, in that Jesus knows the exact nature of our fears, our struggles. Jesus knows all about our struggles.

There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus. No, not one. No, not one. Jesus knows all about our struggles. And he will fight till the day is done.

He will remember us. He will come near to us. How often these psalms that we sang tonight had that sense of great prayer and expectation in them of God's deliverance and God's victory.

How much he was looking for God to come and overcome the enemies. And Jesus will come and he will challenge the enemy of doubt. He will conquer the things that are holding us back in our unbelief.

Even when he hadn't been physically present, he was truly aware of all the words and fears and doubts that Thomas expressed. And we see that Jesus challenged what Thomas had said.

[23 : 52] Thomas had spoken with a resolve never to believe unless he saw these things. Well, Jesus came to himself, well Thomas, here are these things. Jesus. Therefore, stop disbelieving and believe.

This is where we learn that yes, Jesus is patient and Jesus is kind and Jesus is merciful. But don't for a second believe that Jesus wants to affirm us in our doubt or that Jesus has a tolerant attitude towards unbelief.

He will not condemn us for having doubted, but he doesn't want to condone us and console us in that position. He wants us, as he said to Thomas, stop doubting.

I want you to progress. We want you to come forward. We want you to acknowledge Jesus. I want you to know the life that is to be found when you have your trust and your faith fully in Christ.

There is an element of rebuke in the statement that Jesus makes when he says to him, do not disbelieve, but believe.

[25 : 16] Translations have variations on these themes just because of the desire to be accurate with regards to what is conveyed in the original language, but they all kind of lead in the same direction.

Don't be an unbelief, but be a belief. Don't be unbelieving in your life about Jesus, but believe in him. Show yourself to be a belief, as one translation puts it.

Stop being unbelieving and show yourself to be a belief. Jesus challenges the reality of doubt, and I wonder if tonight you need to know that the doubt that has held you back is being challenged by Jesus because he loves you.

Yes, there may be an element of rebuke in the statement, but it's that anger and discipline that comes out of the love he has for your soul and the desire to see you progress, to see you find your freedom and strength in him, to live the life that he has promised you.

That's what John says this gospel is all about. These things that are written, we read at the end of the chapter, they have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[26:40] Jesus knew the doubt, he knows your doubt, Jesus challenges the doubt, he challenges our doubt, and friends, Jesus conquer the doubt that had plagued Thomas' soul.

As I said at the outset of the message, Thomas actually makes one of the greatest, if not the greatest, testimonies about the person of Jesus Christ that is contained in the whole Bible. What Thomas said of Jesus when he says, my Lord and my God, when he says that of Jesus, that is what the nation of Israel would have said of Yahweh, you are my Lord and my God, you are our Lord and our God.

When Thomas responds to Jesus' invitation to put his hands where the scars were, and so on, and by the way, we don't have any indication that he did it, that simply in the presence of the reality of Jesus, simply in the presence of the reality of the resurrected body of Christ, despite his previous adamancy, that unless I put my hand in, I won't believe, he didn't actually have to do it in the end, because this vision of Jesus, this understanding of Christ, was sufficient to conquer the doubt that had plagued.

This personal declaration is made, this confession is set forth in the room of the disciples, and in the scriptures, it speaks to us, that here was someone who was plagued with doubt about what happened with Jesus.

[28:20] He questioned the reality of the resurrection. He questioned what's happened here. But in a moment when he saw Jesus and heard his voice, he falls and confesses.

One of the greatest confessions a human soul can ever make, Jesus Christ, you're my master, and you're the one I worship. I worship you, risen Lord.

As Thomas is faced with the resurrected Jesus, his doubt is vanquished. His doubt is conquered. Christ conquers the doubt within him, and the focus on Jesus gives him hope.

Thomas didn't conquer doubt through his own research, or through his own apologetic understanding of the gospel, or through intellectual wrestling. He conquered doubt through believing and seeing the person of Jesus Christ.

And you know, friends, what he said after that, if what Thomas said to Jesus is one of the greatest testimonies regarding the Son of God in Scripture, what Jesus then says next, is one of the greatest challenges to you and to me.

[29:45] Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

people. We think we're underprivileged if we don't get to see things physically. Tomorrow we will distribute physical elements and their design is to purpose our spirits and understandings to think of Jesus and to remember him.

But we don't see the resurrected body before us. We don't see a real body before us. We see emblems and symbols. And in terms of physical vision it may be all we see.

But you know what Jesus says, how blessed are you? If that's what you see and still you believe. We often think of how great it is to think that we were in the mind and heart of Christ as he wrestled and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We know the teachings we hear of how amazing it was that Jesus thought of us. He fights for breath, he fights for me as he struggles and wrestles and ultimately dies on the cross of Calvary.

[31:03] But as we read these verses tonight we could say with assurance that the resurrected Jesus was thinking of us as he addressed Thomas.

You've seen and believed but blessed are those who have not seen. They've not had the benefit or blessing of a physical encounter with the resurrected Lord yet their faith and hope is truly in Jesus Christ.

What is remarkable here is that the status of the belief for those who have not seen is equated with the experience of Thomas. The benefit Thomas received is equated with the benefit and blessing of belief in the lives of those who have yet to believe.

And John who recorded this is consistent in this spiritual revelation throughout his writings. You know when we read his first letter the power of the blessing that he conveys he says we want you to have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ.

And he's saying as he writes the epistle you are not second class citizens in the kingdom of God. It's not as if the further we get from the upper room and the further we get from Calvary and the further we get from Pentecost as if the quality of love and the quality of acceptance and the quality of your place in the kingdom of God becomes lesser and lesser.

[32 : 32] No it's as if you were there. It's as if you were in the room tonight with Thomas if you believe in Jesus. If you can look to Jesus and say my Lord and my God. And the angels in heaven would rejoice.

And the Lord rejoices. And the people are blessed because we know the wonder of the power of the Son of God.

Doubt dissipates. Faith rises. Hope is strengthened. Love is encountered as Jesus is beheld and Jesus is praised.

one of my favorite words of testimony came from a gentleman I have to confess I didn't know very much about him.

Even I was a bit young to fully appreciate the life of Malcolm Muggeridge who was a broadcaster in the United Kingdom. His life sadly towards its end was not a great example of ecclesiastical faithfulness but he had lived a public life and had come to a very real faith in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 47] And this is what he said of himself. I may I suppose regard myself or pass for being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets.

That's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough money to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the inland revenue. That's success.

Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly if they care to may partake of trendy diversions. That's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time.

That's fulfillment. Yet I say to you and I beg you to believe me. multiply these tiny triumphs by a million.

Add them all together and they are nothing. Less than nothing. A positive impediment measured against one draft of that living water Christ offers to the spiritual thirsty irrespective of who and what they are.

[35 : 21] No more we doubt thee. Glorious prince of life. Life is not without thee.

Aid us in this thrive. life. Let's pray. pray. These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Lord, in a world obsessed with fame, success, pleasure, and fulfillment, show us again the glories and life fulfilling experience of the love of Christ washing over our souls.

And lead us, God, in this communion season to drink afresh or even to drink anew at the life-giving fountain of the gospel of your Son.

Help each one of us, Lord, to be delivered from doubt, to live by faith, and to know the glorious hope that belongs to those who follow Jesus.

[37 : 22] Amen. So let's sing in closing from the Scottish Psalter, from Psalm 116.

Psalm 116, I love the Lord, because my voice and prayer she did hear, I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear, and will sing down to the end of verse marked eight, for my distressed soul from death, delivered was by thee, thou didst my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free.

sing down to the Lord. I love the Lord, because my voice and prayers he did hear, I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to be his ear.

Of death, the courts and sorrows that about become past round, the pains of hell to hold on me, I creep and trouble found.

Upon the name of God the Lord, then did I call one say, deliver thou my soul, O Lord, I do thee humbly pray.

[39 : 43] God merciful and righteousness, yea, gracious is our Lord, God saves the me, I was brought low, he did me help afford.

O thou my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest, for thou say, lo, the Lord to thee, his bounty hath expressed, for my distressed soul from death, delivered was by thee, that is my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free.

And so may you know the blessing of almighty God, that would give you a clarity of understanding concerning Christ's sacrifice for your soul, that would give you absolute confidence in the glory of the love with which God formed you and sought you, and that you might know all these truths, burning in your heart through the comforting presence of his most Holy Spirit.

And now to our most gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all the honour, praise, and glory forever. Amen.