

Home Service for April 7, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

*The risen Christ comes to us and says, “Peace be with you.” May we lay down the worries of our lives to welcome the peace of Christ.*

Call to Worship:

We have been freed! Fear and death have no claim on us! Christ the Lord is risen! Even though we have not touched his wounded hands, yet we believe. Even though we have not heard him speak our names, yet we believe. Let us celebrate God’s love through the life of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Opening Prayer:

Holy One, we gather with grateful hearts to remember the blessings of your light and love as they flow through our lives each day. In this moment, open our hearts to your Holy Spirit. Open our minds to the truths of your story. Open our hands to welcome the risen Christ among us. And open our eyes to your glory—a glory reflected in the faces around us.

In the name of the risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of grace and mercy, we want to continue singing the alleluias of Easter, but there are days we just don’t feel like singing. Sometimes we lock ourselves away, fearful of what has happened or what the day may bring. Sometimes we allow our doubts to overwhelm our faith. Sometimes we forget about the needs of our neighbors because we are so focused on ourselves. Forgive us. Draw us back to you and to one another. Help us walk in your love and light, that others may see in us the loving presence of the risen Christ. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

*Brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ, Jesus promises:*

*“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.”*

*Receive the hope and promise of this good news, for forgiveness is ours when we forgive one another. Thanks be to God!*

Read Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup>It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron's beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.

<sup>3</sup>It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.

Prayers of the People:

*Lord of mercy, it has been a week since the Easter celebration. Our church was beautified with flowers, lovely decorations, banners, lots of people, beautiful music. It was the kind of Easter in which we could celebrate. But during this week we have slumped back to our old ways. The world, which seems to be too much with us, has claimed our souls. Our resurrection faith has become dim. Let the story of Thomas who wanted more than anything else to see the risen Lord, pour into our hearts, reviving our spirits, giving assurance to our souls. Let fear subside! Replace our doubts with certainty in your love and healing mercies. As we have brought names before you this day, asking for your healing touch, be with us as we also receive that same healing love. Give us joy and courage for all the times ahead; for we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.  
AMEN.*

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, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Acts 4:32-35

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great

power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 John 1:1–2:2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup>The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup>We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We write this to make our<sup>[a]</sup> joy complete.

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all<sup>[b]</sup> sin.

<sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

**2** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup> 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!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[a]</sup>), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> 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!” <sup>27</sup> 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.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

## Message

Our Gospel lesson for today is a familiar story, we know it well, for his moment of questioning the witness of his fellow disciples, he has been forever labeled, Doubting Thomas. The truth is, we should be grateful to poor Thomas, for he was a lot like most of us, if we would be honest about it. God’s most faithful servants have usually also been among the most doubtful. It has been well said, a faith that does not doubt is a dead faith. The mark of great faith is a great and continuous struggle to get it, keep it, share it. If faith becomes static, if it fails to move us, open us, deepen us, better us, then it is no longer faith. It simply is another idol that we put up on the mantle to worship, but with which we do not actually do anything with. So, what are we doing with our Faith? I think you agree that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not the easiest truth to grasp and believe. Christians throughout the ages have struggled with what the church proclaims at Easter. The fact that Thomas was not shunned by the other disciples, but together with them a week later, and he was not condemned by Jesus when he made his second appearance to the disciples should give us all courage.

Our Gospel tells us that the disciples of Jesus, but not Thomas, were gathered together behind locked doors, in fear of the Jewish authorities. For the threat to their lives was real. Not only did the disciples fear that they might be accused and sentenced to the same death as Jesus based on their association with him, Matthew

states that they were accused of stealing a corpse and perpetuating a hoax, which were punishable by death.

So their fear have them safely behind a locked door when the risen Christ came and stood among them. Here they were huddled in fear for their lives, and their crucified and risen master comes and stands in their midst. I can see Peter being the first to fall to the floor in despair for having denied Jesus three times. I am sure the rest followed suit for each of them had deserted him. I can imagine their original fear being replace by total fear and total awe of being in the presence of the risen Christ. The first words he says to them, “Peace be with you!” In other words I feel he was saying, “Calm down.” or “Do not be afraid.” Even better I think it said, “I love you!” or “I forgive you!”

He showed them the agonizing wounds of his crucifixion, as if to assure them that he was really Jesus, and he again said “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” A week later, this same scene is repeated, only this time Thomas is present. Without condemnation, Jesus offers to Thomas the proof that would answer his doubt, but there is no hint that Thomas actually touched the risen Christ. He simply makes the profound statement, “My Lord and my God!”

The message of Easter I find in today’s Gospel is that we do not find Jesus, he finds us. The terrified disciples were not out seeking to find the risen Christ. They were huddled behind locked doors in total fear, and the risen Jesus came and finds them, appears to them, and empowers them to go and tell others about his victory over sin and death. Thomas expresses this the best. After hearing the report of the disciples about the risen Christ appearing to them, he does not go out to the tomb to confirm that it is empty, nor does he search the streets to find the risen Christ. He simply joins the others behind locked doors, continuing to question in his heart what the disciples proclaimed, and the risen Christ comes and finds him.

In our day and age, we may even find our lives filled with overwhelming worries, troubles, heartaches, and sorrow, so it is important for us to remember we are not alone. It is Jesus who comes into our hearts by grace through faith. True faith allows us to have complete trust in the comfort of Jesus’ words, Peace be with you! These simple words strengthened the early disciples and the words of Scripture still strengthen us today. God plants his word in our hearts and we harvest God’s divine peace.

Some people are tempted to say, “Seeing is believing.” There is some truth in those words. By faith we look at the wounds of Jesus. We see Jesus’ body and blood he offers believers in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. We believe the words of Jesus that remind us he gave his body and blood for each of us for the

forgiveness of our sins! May each of you discover your glorious joy in Jesus' words: "Peace Be With You!" today and every day.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, has been the greatest news that the world has ever heard. It turns our priorities upside down, and draws us into an ever deepening relationship with you, the source of life itself. Grant us your Holy Spirit, that we might continue to grow in faith, witness to others of your tremendous gift of redeeming grace, and live our lives in praise and thanksgiving as our Lord's disciples. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Benediction:

*Lord of mercy, be with us as we go from this place today. Fill our lives with your love. Help us to bring the good news of hope and peace wherever we go. Let us truly be people of the Resurrection - the Easter people! AMEN.*