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Worship
April 11, 2021

GATHERING

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS
PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

Call to Worship

Pastor: Come, people of God, and worship the Christ.

Reader: Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit, there is no deceit.

Let us come and worship the Christ who forgives sin.

Opening Hymn *“Christ the Lord is Risen Today: Alleluia”*

Greeting

P The peace of the Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

P May the risen Christ fill us with life, light, and hope.

C Thanks be to God. Jesus is risen. Alleluia! AMEN.

Hymn of Praise *“Easter Alleluia”*

THE WORD

First Reading

Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to us.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Second Reading

Psalm 133

A Song of Ascents.

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life for evermore.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to us.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Psalm Response

"How Good It Is"

Gospel Reading

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to us.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

2nd Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021. "The Missing Disciple."

Thomas wasn't there. Don't you even wonder where he was? Was he out at the empty tomb wondering, "What *did* happen here?" Was he at the Mt. of Olives, questioning himself—questioning the actions of the others as well: Why didn't we do something to stop his arrest! Or was Thomas at Calvary, reliving the horror of Friday? Or was he just wandering around the city in his grief? Or was he just angry with himself and the others for their collective cowardice? Whatever the reason, Thomas wasn't there when he most needed to be with the others. That moment when Jesus came to the cowering disciples—the moment when Jesus gave them His peace and new courage through the Spirit, Thomas wasn't there. As Jesus now readies the disciples to go forth into the world to proclaim the gospel of hope and resurrection, Thomas wasn't there.

For the disciples who were there, they heard those words of Jesus: those first most important words: Peace Be With You! For I am sure that the disciples first feelings were anything but peaceful. Certainly, they were fearful after all that had transpired in the Garden at his arrest and afterward; anxious for sure, wondering if Jesus is angry with them; full of fear at the sudden appearance of Jesus, yes, but peaceful, no, not really. Little wonder Jesus says Peace be with you. I wonder if Jesus asked where Thomas was. The Gospel doesn't say, but I wonder. After this gift of peace, Jesus now gives the disciples another gift: the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus Jesus enables the disciples and those who come after, to extend the forgiveness of sins to those to whom they proclaim the gospel. But Thomas wasn't there.

The Spirit will guide the disciples and later the Church in its' mission in the world. It will be the Spirit that will empower this group of fearful men and women to proclaim the message of the Risen Christ to all the world. It is the Spirit that will enable others to hear and to believe. It will be the Spirit that will relieve the burden of sins from a suffering humanity. What a change! What joy! What faith! What Peace! Joy has replaced sorrow! Faith has replaced the doubts and fears of Friday! But Thomas wasn't there!

How like us. For when we most need to be in the presence of Christ; when we most need to hear the message of Christ's peace; to have our faith strengthened by the Spirit, too often we are not where we need to be, in the presence of Christ. When tragedy comes; when divorce comes; when our kids get into trouble; when we are in danger of losing who we are; when fear enters our hearts; in those times—in those times we most need Christ's presence and Christ's church, WE'RE NOT HERE! We are like Thomas, wandering around someplace else and yes there is time to be alone, there is a time to grieve in the quiet of our hearts; but there is also a time to come and hear the healing message of hope and peace that the Risen Christ gives us. There are times when we need to be in the midst of the people of God and feel their love and compassion, even in these times when it seems so many have forgotten what the church is and what it is about.

Part of what the Church of Christ is, is a place not for the prosperous and healthy, though you will find some prosperous and healthy people in the Church, but as Thomas Aquinas said many centuries ago, and remains true today, is that the Church is the hospital for those who are ill of spirit and who questioning the presence of God. He goes on: The Church is the place for the broken people; for fearful people; for the hypocrites; for the sorrowful; for those filled with doubt and anger about or with God. This is the place for you! For Christ is here! And Christ says to you: PEACE BE WITH YOU! FEAR NOT! For I am with you. Receive my Spirit and know that you are not alone!

Indeed, it is the community of the disciples—the earliest Church—in which Thomas finds Jesus—or rather the place that Jesus finds Thomas and shocks him to his core. And it is still in the midst of God’s people that one will find Christ most often. As with Thomas, it is here that Christ comes to invite us to believe; to find hope; to find a word that brings with it peace. For as it was with Thomas when Christ came to him, Christ also says to us, Peace be with you; my Holy Spirit I give you! Have faith and believe, for I am with you until the end of the age. And thus with Thomas, we also can proclaim; “My Lord and My God!” Amen

Hymn of the Day

“All That We Have Seen”

Affirmation of Faith

We are an Easter People! We proclaim our belief in a God of life; in the image of the Creator we are made. With God’s Spirit woven into the fabric of our being we are called to be caretakers of the earth and to bear the life-giving energy of the divine.

We are an Easter People! We proclaim our belief in Jesus Christ, sent by God to be a living example of God’s desire for the world. We believe that in Jesus, the powers of darkness and death have no claim over us, that our broken lives find healing in God’s compassionate mercy. Jesus is that compassion and mercy risen and alive in the world today.

We are an Easter People! We proclaim our belief in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit empowers us be the light and life of Jesus in the world. This Spirit is the vitality of God’s embrace active within us through what we do and what we say.

Thanks be to God for life and new life! Christ is risen! Alleluia! AMEN!

Prayers of the People

P. We are alive in the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, so now we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

(A brief silence)

P. Lord, you shower your church with grace. We ask you O Lord, to unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the Resurrection of your Son, Jesus the Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God:

C. Your mercy is great.

P. Lord, you direct the nations. Enable those who lead the nations hear your voice that guides them to truly be the servants that they were called to be. Give strength to those who search for justice for their people, and give courage to those who would speak the truth to power in these uncertain days. And we pray for the time when violence and war will be no more. Hear us, O God:

C. Your mercy is great.

P. Holy and gracious God, we pray for our Call Committee, that your Holy Spirit will direct them in their search for a new pastor for Bethany. Give them Lord, an extra measure of discernment in the weeks ahead that will choose wisely. Hear us, O God:

C. Your mercy is great.

P. Lord, in this time of the Covid pandemic, so many lives have been shattered; so many lives lost; so many families in mourning, we pray for your arms of comfort, compassion, and hope to surround all in need. Indeed, Lord, where possible use us your people to stand with those who mourn; with those who are ill; with those who struggle in darkness. Hear us O God:

C. Your mercy is great.

P. In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Offering

Offertory

Prayer of Blessing

P Let us pray:

C God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these gifts which we have received from your generous hand. Use them to bring your blessing into the lives of others. AMEN

MEAL

A Brief Confession

P In the power of the risen Lord, we make our confession to God.

C Gracious and forgiving God, we seek your pardon for actions that have caused harm; for the lack of action that could have been an expression of your love. Forgive and heal us Lord.

P We rest in the mercy of a compassionate God. We are an Easter people; we are a forgiven people.

C Thanks be to God. AMEN.

Communion Dialogue

P The Lord is risen!

C We have seen the Lord!

P Lift up your hearts, people of God.

C We lift them to the Risen Christ.

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C We offer our thanks and praise to the One who gives us new life.

P On the night he was betrayed ...

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

Communion Invitation

P: Come to God's table; be fed and satisfied.

C: We come to feed our spirit and be in the presence of God.

Communion Music – “We Walk by Faith”

Erin

Communion Blessing

P: Let us pray:

C: Radiant God, may your Word take flesh in us that we may be your holy people. May this meal empower us to better be your loving servants. AMEN.

SENDING

Benediction

Pastor: May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you with every good blessing. Amen.

Closing Hymn – “Rise Up With Him”

Dismissal

Paster: Go in Peace...to live and serve in the way of the cross.

Response: Thanks be to God.

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt8qX94ICK-omDHSc71en4w>