

Worship – May 24, 2020

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Here we are Lord! We believe in your power to change us; your creating power making relationships new, your redeeming power saving us from despair, your sustaining power giving us courage and strength.

In this hour, as we worship together (though apart), as we pray and listen together (though apart), we open ourselves to the seismic power of your kingdom, changing our hearts, our lives, and our world. Amen!

A BRIEF CONFSSION

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we are confident to make our confession to God.

Lord of Life, hear the prayers of your people.

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we confess our failures and brokenness.

Lord of Life, forgive and heal your people.

In the surety of the Risen Christ, we seek God's mercy and compassion.

Lord of Life, renew for service, we your people.

God forgives, heals, and renews us for blessing in the world. Amen.

GREETING

The Lord be with you.

May the spirit of God's presence and love embrace us all in this time of worship today.

Come Holy Spirit, come!

SCRPTURE READINGS

1st reading – Acts 1:6-14

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

2nd reading – Psalm 68:4-6, 32-35

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is the LORD—be exultant before him.

*Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.
God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious live in a parched land.*

*Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord,
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.
Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies.
Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;
he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!*

Gospel reading – John 17:1-3, 6, 10-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

SERMON

<https://vimeo.com/41849951/0d1fdfb38e>

(Pastor Jacqui Pagel - Bishop's Associate for Candidacy and Faith Formation)

OR

(Written sermon given by Pastor Rick 3 years ago with some modifications)

Easter 7

WHAT NOW
Acts 1:6-14

May 24, 2020

In the reading from Acts we hear today,

where it says: ... as they were watching, he [Jesus] was lifted-up and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going ... they [the disciples] were gazing up toward heaven ... as you listen to that, one gets the sense that the disciples stood there “dumbfounded” looking up into the sky as though some



screen 1

Unidentified Flying Object (a UFO) had just taken away the alien who had come in a flash, told them some things, and then left.

Actually, it's not quite

that simple ... Jesus was not an alien – he was a human being.



screen 2

Jesus didn't come in a flash – but was born in the flesh the way humans are born, raised by parents, and grew into an adult.

He didn't just tell them some things – he taught them of God over a three year span of time,
he lived the Kingdom life,
he modeled service,
generosity,
compassion.

As the story goes, he did leave in a rather “*UFOish*” kind of way though – so considering the nature of the relationship these disciples had with Jesus ...we can understand why they were “dumbfounded” gazing up into the sky.

screen 3



These disciples have had a pretty wild ride



screen 4

PAGE 3

They had followed Jesus for three or so years,
kind of **on a whim ... you** know, being called out of fishing boats and such.

They witnessed his faithfulness to God,
the deepness of his spirit,
his prayer life.

They saw God working through him in compassion to care for others.

They heard him teach and were taught by him.

They saw him betrayed by one of their own ... deserted him themselves.

They grieved his death and were awe-struck by his resurrection ... a wild ride.

All seemed to **come full circle now ... They could continue with power & passion the ministry**



screen 5

Jesus had begun.

He would be their resurrected leader.

Now people would really listen to him, believe in him and what he said.

And they [the disciples] ... well, **they** would participate in proclaiming that message with him.

It all had come full circle ... Jesus' struggle with the religious people;
the whole crucifixion thing, his death;
their guilt in not being better partners with him in all of that ... but now

God had brought it all around;
transformed the whole situation;
with Jesus at the helm ... they[the disciples] **would now go to**
reform all Judaism, restore the nation of
Israel, unfetter the shackles Roman rule,
change the world.

Ahhh ... but something happened here ... Jesus left.

Jesus left

screen 6

Can you imagine that? It was all beginning to make sense.

PAGE 4

The impracticality of his teachings ... like “turn the other cheek”

&

“to love your enemies”

The riskiness of his call ... like being a Good Samaritan, risking your own life to help another

&

like speaking truth to power - like when he called the Pharisees hypocrites & threw the money changers out of the Temple.

It all made sense with the resurrected Jesus by their side.

But Jesus left ... What now?

What now?

screen 7

Indeed, WHAT NOW ... the question is as perplexing today as it was then for the disciples.

Communities of faith and Christians have been asking that question for centuries.

Amid changing times & divisiveness in so many sectors of our lives ... people of faith ask today,
“*What now?*”

Faith Communities who have lost their youth ask, “*What now?*”

Faith communities with shrinking budgets and low worship attendance ask, “*What now?*”

Changes in the areas of technology, sexuality, the mixing of races, ethnicities, and cultures have caused not only people of faith, but the world to ask, “*What now?*”

Graduation from High School or college is pregnant with the question, “*What now?*”

People of faith are always

standing on the precipice of *WHERE* we are and *WHERE* God is calling us to be; and

of *WHO* we are and *WHO* God is calling us to be ... “*What now?*”

God's response to that question is revealed next Sunday ... all of Christendom observes what is called the Day of Pentecost, a day in the church calendar set aside to celebrate the gift of God giving the Holy Spirit ... **that power by which people of faith are instilled** with the courage, the vision, the skills, and the faith ... to live into the question, "*What now?*"

PAGE 5

There is a congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota that was faced very directly with the question "*What now?*"



screen 8

The Trinity Congregation has worshiped and has been actively engaged in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis since 1868 (149 yrs).

In those 149 years, Trinity co-founded Augsburg College and Fairview University Hospital, they co-developed an innovative, mixed-income 85-unit urban housing complex.

Then, in 1996 (21 years ago) Trinity lost its building, **it's church building** to Interstate 94 construction, a highway expansion project designed to cross-over the Cedar-Riverside part of town ... the question, "*What now?*" loomed very large.

After a financial settlement **from the government** ... this community of faith engaged the question for themselves, "*What now?*"

A lot of discussion:

prayer, the exploration of ideas,
more discussion, more prayer,
the airing of divergent ideas & different opinions
more discussion, more prayer ... finally, the mission-minded congregation voted to use its resources in active outreach to the Cedar-Riverside community rather than investing in the construction of a new church building.

"The lack of conventional church walls [they said] frees us to tear down walls that can separate us from effective service to God and each other" ... this insight, they were given

by engaging the question “*What now?*”

They started with their

mission statement... which is: **To help break down the walls of racism, sexuality, ethnic origin, economic status, and the religious barriers that divide people of faith.**

In the end,

the Trinity congregation saw NOT building a new church facility as a symbolic way of living into that mission statement ... one way to break down walls [they concluded], is not to build them.

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They bought a building on Riverside Avenue for office space and to hold their meetings
But they wanted this site to be more than that ... so they provide space at “below market rent”
for what is called St. Martin’s Table, a restaurant and a *peace/justice* bookstore
that caters to low-income patrons



screen 9

Also in this building ... They provide Wednesday night suppers for the poor.



screen 10

They operate “Safe Place”



Safe Place

screen 11

an after school program helping kids in the community with homework.

PAGE 7

They make space available for Riverside community organizations and 12- step groups.



12- step
groups

screen 12

And true to their calling to move beyond walls,
they run youth group activities at Augsburg college;
they have a quilting group that works in tandem with another local Lutheran church;
they have a prayer shawl ministry run out of the home of a congregational member.



And where do they worship ... they rent the Augsburg College chapel.



screen 14

To sum-up the Trinity congregation (which is Lutheran, by the way), they intentionally call themselves a congregation , not a church ... because the word “church” conjures-up in people’s minds images of a building and they want to be identified not by a structure, but by the ministry they do.

At Bethany, we have a beautiful church building and campus, our “launch pad” for ministry as I like to refer to it ... but the building doesn’t make us who we are; it’s us (the people) and the ministry we do that identifies us as the People of God.

PAGE 8



screen 15

Well, we certainly live in “*what now*” times don’t we?

A world caught in the grip of a pandemic;
A refugee crisis still of huge humanitarian proportions;
An internet world that has become a new age weapon of war seeking
to manipulate perceptions on a mass scale,
to mould & shape people with a barrage of digital propaganda;
to mould & shape nations,
a world “caught-up” in divisiveness, alternate facts, and a growing
inability to have civil discussion & discourse.

All this, in the midst of a growing gap between the “*haves*” and the “*have not’s*”

All this, on the cusp of global climate change (human caused or natural, maybe a

combination of both) ... the net effect is that things are changing and it will affect the way we live and where we live.

People of faith, that's us ... people of faith need to be asking, *What now ???*

This question is a prayer, really ... a prayer for how **WE ARE TO BE**
in the midst of such times ... it is a prayer for WHERE
God is calling us to go, and it is a prayer for WHO
God is calling us to be.

One of the things I learned at the preaching conference I just attended 3 years ago in San Antonio was to take a biblical text for preaching and write it in such a way (without changing the meaning) ... to write it in such a way, that it becomes immediate for your congregation ... in other words, write it in such a way that it places your hearers into the action of the text.

I'm going to take a stab at it and trust that God's Spirit works in all of us through the words we hear. Just as a side note, first ... I commend this modified reading from the Book of Acts to our graduates this morning, for you are in the midst (in many ways) of your own "What Now" time

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So when the people of Bethany had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore our nation, the world?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the God has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses to the neighborhoods around you, in all of Scottsdale and Phoenix, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight ... and they were asking one another, "What now ... What now?" While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly God's Holy Spirit came upon them and said, "People of Bethany, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, comes to you always and is always with you. Listen for his call ... listen for his call of WHERE you are to go and WHO you are to be. AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (Confirmation Class 2014)

We believe in an active and creative God who formed the earth inside and out. God gives us beauty to see and mysteries to consider. Our God is radically amazing.

We believe God sent Jesus to teach us to forgive, to serve, and to live as the people God calls us to be. He chose to die on the cross giving us God's healing love to live holy lives. Jesus' presence is with us always.

We believe God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This spirit connects us with God and each other for relationships of trust, faith, belief, heart, and love. These are holy relationships filled with God's energy for praying and working to bring God's heaven into our lives and into the world. The Holy Spirit is alive

within us always. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of mercy, God of love, as your people redeemed and empowered by the gift of your Holy Spirit, we seek your guidance, your wisdom, courage to ask the question "What now" in our desire to live into the purpose to which you call us. These times are difficult times and we need your voice, your direction, your insight in helping us to be a people and a faith community responsive to the needs of those around us. Grant us, Lord, what we need to serve in way pleasing to you in these times. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of mercy, God of love, we pray for our world, our communities, our friends and loved ones. For those who are ill, for those who have lost loved ones, for those who live in fear, for those who struggle with the basics to live each day, for those who live amid the violence of war and conflict, for those who are homeless, for those unemployed, and for those with ailments and difficulties of which we do not even know ... wrap them in your arms of grace, mercy, and healing. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of mercy, God of love, we pray today for all those on the Bethany prayer list. For the twelve step groups beginning to meet again renewing their road to recovery. For our own Bethany homebound members. For our church leaders and Task Force seeking how best to safely begin in person worship again. For our Grand Canyon synodical leaders who partner with us in all the up's and down's of congregational ministry. For faith communities everywhere, healthcare workers, leaders of governments (domestic and international) that your guiding presence give them wisdom and compassion to lead and serve well. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of mercy, God of love, we each come to you now in a moment of silent prayer ... Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hear us now as we pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

(You may say the traditional Lord's Prayer or the Aramaic version printed below.)

O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe, You are the sacred source of our being.

Focus Your ways, Your light, within us, make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one.

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.

Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away from You and Your purpose.
But free us from what holds us back, give us power to live as you intended and created us to live.

From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN

OFFERING

(Please mail your weekly offering to the church.
4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)

PRAYER OF BLESSING

P Let us pray:

C Good and gracious God, you are the source of all blessing. In generosity, you provide all we need for the living of our lives. We, in turn, are called to be generous ourselves. We pray that what we give be used as an expression of your presence and healing in the world. We thank you for this opportunity to give back something of the blessings we have received from your

hand. AMEN.

BENEDICTION

*May the beauty of God
be reflected in your eyes,
the love of God
be reflected in your hands,
the wisdom of God
be reflected in your words,
and the knowledge of God
flow from your heart.*

DISMISSAL

P Go forth to be the People of God for good in the world
ALL We go in the spirit of Jesus to love and serve. Thanks be to God.