

**April 11, 2021 - Second Sunday of Easter
Service of Word and Prayer**

We are using parts of the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons. Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Call to Worship:

God of the ages, who sweeps throughout the whole of history: we are but simple creatures who need your guidance and care. It is to you we turn in our sadness and joy; in our despair and in our triumphs. You protect us and uphold us, your presence enfolds us. Hear us as we come together in worship. May our prayers be from our hearts, and may our ears be open to your words. Amen.

Hymn: LBW 131 - ELW 382 - Christ Is Risen! Alleluia

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Prayer of the day: Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the day of our Lord's resurrection. By the grace of Christ among us, enable us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.
Amen

The Word

The First Reading is from **Acts 4: 32-35**

Psalm 133, found on page 282

The Second Reading is from **1 John 1: 1-2:2**

Our guest preacher today is Bishop Michael Pryse from the Eastern Synod.

Please rise for the gospel lesson. *Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.*

Gospel: **John 20:19-31**

Dear friend in Christ. It's a privilege to be with you as a part of this morning's worship and to be able to give your dear pastor some much welcome relief. Our rostered ministers have been doing such a wonderful job over the course of the past year. But its hard work and we need to do everything we can to give them our encouragement and support!

Today's Gospel lesson raises questions that cut to the very heart of what it means to experience Christ's presence; questions that cut to the very heart of

what it means to say the words, "I believe."

We witness the gathering of the disciples on Easter night and we can't help but asking some very basic questions about the nature of belief. How is it that you believe -or disbelieve- for that matter? Who can you believe? How much proof do you need before you can say that you believe something? How certain does your belief have to be, before you really believe?

I need to tell you that I think poor old Thomas has received a bit of a bum rap by many Christians over time. Yes, he had doubts and questions, but we don't know that he had any more doubts than the other disciples would have had, given the same circumstances. He certainly had no more doubt than I would have had!

Remember, the others had already seen Jesus; he hadn't! All he had to go on was the strength of the disciple's witness, and obviously, it wasn't all that convincing! If Christ were indeed raised, why were they being so fearful? Thomas didn't doubt the Lord! He did, however, fail to be inspired or convinced by the witness of his colleagues who claimed that the Lord was risen but were still hiding behind closed doors.

I find it very interesting that, while the Western Christian world typically speaks of Thomas as "doubting Thomas," the orthodox church of the east calls him "believing Thomas" in reference to his exclamation "my Lord and my God" after having seen Christ and touched his wounds! Isn't that something?! They choose to honour his exclamation of faith rather than his quite understandable – and temporary – expression of doubt. Furthermore, Jesus honoured Thomas's questioning in a very special way! Think about it for a moment. He came back, just for Thomas! He'd already visited the others. He returned just for Thomas and said, "Peace be with you. Touch my hands touch my side. See and believe."

Friends, never, ever be ashamed of your doubts and questions. And let's be honest; if you don't have any doubts or questions, you are either fooling yourself or spiritually asleep! Frederich Buechner tells us that "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving!" Remember, there is often much

more faith expressed in an honest doubt or question than in many of the pious platitudes that all too easily cross our lips. In fact, I would maintain that doubt, in many ways, is a precondition of faith!

The disciples of old could not reveal Christ while they remained safe and comfortable behind closed doors. Their witness couldn't even convince Thomas, one of their own number! And neither will the church's witness convince modern day Thomas's so long as we remain in a similar posture; hidden away, seemingly safe and secure behind closed doors.

Those who are seeking a new experience of the Christian life will not be easily drawn to churches that blithely assume the fact of their own relevance or give all too-easy answers. People seeking a deeper experience of theological inquiry will struggle to maintain connections with faith communities that are intolerant of their questioning.

We need to follow Jesus' example and open ourselves to the honest questioning – to the touch - of those who come seeking a new truth. We need to equip ourselves with the tools needed to engage in mature but robust theological reflection, confident in the knowledge that our faith tradition is robust and strong enough to bear the weight of our critical self-reflection. Indeed, if that faith tradition is to carry any real authority, beyond that of mere lip-service, such reflection is of absolute necessity.

The story is told of a student who asked his teacher about the nature of faith. The teacher told her about a dog who scared up a rabbit and began to chase it. Soon other dogs heard the barking and joined in the chase but slowly they began to drop out, one by one until only the first dog was left. "What does this tell me about true faith," the student asked? The teacher explained that, "The first dog stayed in the chase because it had seen the rabbit. And for us to maintain a deep and abiding faith, it is necessary for us to have seen and experienced the risen Lord.

Most churches today claim to be very concerned, and rightly so, about questions of evangelism and outreach. And my guess is that the church can do all

sorts of things to try and bring people into our buildings. It can put on a kinder, friendlier face; it can use gimmicks, frills and tricks. (Most of us have learned that threats no longer work, if they ever did!) But unless the church provides people with a living experience of the Risen Christ all of its efforts will be for naught. The hounds might follow for a while to see what all the barking's about, but they won't stay in the chase because they will not have seen the rabbit. And why should they?

An old saying tells us that ships that remain in the harbour are safe ships. But we need to remember, that isn't what ships are made for. The same is true for the ship that is the church. It can remain safe and comfortable in the harbour; its disciples can remain safe, locked away behind closed doors. But that's not what this ship has been made for and that is not what disciples are made for.

A spiritually hungry world is pleading "Show us your wounds." They are looking to see where God is to be found today. Those who are searching are looking for a body of believers that resembles Christ's Body, a church that is visibly following Him in the way of the cross. And unless we are serious about providing that kind of a witness, then all our busy chit-chat about evangelism and outreach is really just a lot of empty talk.

We are currently celebrating the season Easter; the holy season of resurrection and new life. It's an opportune time for us to take a good hard look at the witness we are providing; for us reclaim our place in the pack and dedicate ourselves anew to running the chase of our lives; following Jesus the Christ, our resurrected Lord.

It's an opportune time for us to join with Thomas in His great confession "My Lord and my God;" an opportune time for us to invite others to join us in that confession by revealing the crucified and risen Christ to them, in our words, but especially in our actions and our choices.

May God help us to be faithful in that task. May God bless the work that you do – as a people of God called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in your home communities – and may God bless the work that we do together as a wider

church community called to show, in thought word and deed, that the Lord is risen! That he is risen indeed, Alleluia! AMEN

Hymn: ELW 635 - WOV 675 - We Walk by Faith

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God, receive our gifts as you receive us. You walk beside us and you meet us in hunger with bread from heaven. Nourish us anew in your tender care, and empower us in faithful service to tend to others with this same love, through Jesus Christ our saving grace. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People by Andy Kalnins

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

You shower your church with grace, O God. Unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You proclaim the blessing of life forevermore. Like dew upon the mountains, refresh your creation. Restore waters, cleanse the air, and provide revitalizing moisture to parched land. Give your whole creation the promise of new life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You direct the nations, O God. Guide all in authority, that they shepherd their peoples in the ways of your love. Defeat in us our impulse to war. Bestow the peace of Christ upon those in authority and breathe upon them the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You place within the heart of the church a spirit of sharing. Give us the power of your generous Spirit, that we provide for the needs of others, and as we pray for those who are ill especially Announce your peace to those who are lonely, hurting, suffering, or afraid. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You give us fellowship with one another in this faith community. Shine the light of the risen Christ in our life together, so that we live in love for one another and our joy may be complete. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You share the gift of eternal life. In thanksgiving and remembrance, we recall the lives and gifts of those who now live in endless joy. Unite us with them in resurrection hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

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. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **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.

Hymn: ELW618 - LBW 343 - Guide Me Ever Great Redeemer

Benediction

God the creator strengthen you; Jesus the beloved fill you; and the Holy Spirit the comforter keep you in peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Thanks be to God.