

Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2021

Hope you are enjoying the many blessings of Easter! I'm hoping this spring weather keeps going, because if it does, I'm hoping we can meet again soon – outdoors! It will look a little different, but it will be wonderful to be together! More details coming soon!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Praying together:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us now pray together the collect of the day.

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

First Lesson
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.

The Response
Psalm 133

Ecce, quam bonum!

1 Oh, how good and pleasant it is,
when brethren live together in unity!

2 It is like fine oil upon the head
that runs down upon the beard,

3 Upon the beard of Aaron,
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.

4 It is like the dew of Hermon
that falls upon the hills of Zion.

5 For there the Lord has ordained the blessing:
life for evermore.

The Epistle

1 John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Gospel

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John.
Glory to you Lord Christ.

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.

Praise to you Lord Christ.

A Reflection

May the words written and the prayers of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

Welcome to the second Sunday of Easter – we need to remember that Easter does go on for 50 days! It is still Easter, but no egg hunts or socially distant bunnies today – today we go for a simpler celebration.

I remember being introduced to the idea that this Sunday is known as “Humor Sunday.” Logic suggests that we have celebrated the highest of Holy celebrations last week, so this week we can be reminded of the more grounded aspects of our joy. Finding joy in God, finding joy in each other and finding joy in the world. Somewhat of a challenge these days, perhaps, but the joy and wonder in our faith is important. Where is your joy? What does it look like?

Where I hesitate to do so, I may have to say the Gospel story of Doubting Thomas is one of my favorites. This Gospel is, in my opinion, a perfect post resurrection Gospel. Perfect, because the stories of Easter week push the boundaries of our belief and what we believe to be “true.” We know, in our profound wisdom of our time and culture, that death is the end of the story, isn’t it? So we have doubts regarding this story. I’m sure they had doubt in the context of the time written, too – these people knew death, and had seen death from the hands of the Romans before and had experienced it in the natural cycle of life, and it was prone to be the end of the story. And we have of course in our more recent context entered a new relationship with death as we struggle on in the Pandemic – leading to a whole assortment of doubts. I suspect Thomas was not the only one to have doubts, he was the only one who spoke up about what he was thinking, and will now be remembered forever for that doubt.

In Matthew 28 Jesus offers this to the disciples, “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” But the disciples saw what happened. They heard him cry out “It is finished” from the cross. Quoting from John, “then he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.” Does this mean he was wrong? Does this mean he won’t be with us “to the end of an age?” Don’t forget the disciples and followers don’t know the rest of the story at that point.

Wouldn't you have doubt? Even with what they had seen, even after the miracle of Lazarus, could they even begin to believe that these things could happen *twice*? Doubt gallops through the darkness. We seem to walk with doubt and worry these days. Doubting the vaccine and any sort of help – worrying about exposure. The doubt has indeed galloped through the darkness we have felt – until those sometimes too brief bursts of light shine through the darkness.

But, then again, is doubt always a bad thing? There is one form of reference that says the opposite of Faith is Doubt. I've often heard that challenged by the idea that the opposite of Faith is Certitude. Because when we are certain, when we have no questions about something, when we know for absolute sure without a doubt, that is when we are closed off – nothing else can be seen or learned in this place. I believe this kind of certainty is where much of our culture lives! Always leave room for doubt, and for questions – you will find it actually enlivens your faith and opens you to new learning! So don't be too sure – always leave room for doubt, therein leaving room for the unexpected.

One of my favorite memories of Easters that have passed was getting home after the Easter Vigil service in Gloucester one year, and noticing Fiona looking sort of far away. I asked what was up, and the conversation continued with her asking "How do you *know*?" She was asking in reference to all the God talk from the week. We talked for a while about truth and faith and doubt and how you act on all these things. It was a wonderful talk about all that is important in our ongoing relationship with God. She wasn't doubting, she was asking questions – always a good thing!

One for the more significant phrases in this Gospel is Jesus asking Thomas "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." We cannot all be blessed in the way Thomas was, but to be honest, I believe we can see the presence of God in our lives. Believe what you feel in your heart. Some will say that isn't as tangible as the seen – but I feel in many ways that it can be more real than what you see with your eyes.

Think about the miracles in life you see everyday. Think about the number of them you take for granted! Every sunset we see. The flowers starting to bloom at this time of year. When I see people caring for each other. Seeing an infant discover the miracle of their hands. The laughter of children. The laughter of the ones who used to be children. The list of miracles in life goes on. I believe because I have seen - there are days it is a stretch to find these moments, and there are days people need to be reminded these moments are there. There are miracles out there – God is present to be seen – we just have to pay attention and open our eyes and our hearts.

Your homework for this week – (don't panic, this is easy homework and I'm not collecting anything next week!) – is to find those moments where you are reminded of the presence of God in your life, and know you are blessed. If you want to share those stories with me, I'd be delighted, because I love to hear your stories. Or even better, share your story with someone who does not believe they see God – and see what happens.

In the Spirit of Humor Sunday, I found a prayer written for days like this. Let us pray:

O Lord, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts.

For the moments of laughter and unbridled joy you give to us:
for opportunities to laugh at ourselves,
for the belly laughs of children,
for friends and family who love us because of our quirks, and not just in spite of them,
for artists who give us the opportunity to see the world through the surreal,

for the courage to smile even when difficulties arise,
for those who have hope even when others think there is no hope,
for saints in the Lord who overflow with laughter and
spread your joy to all of us.

For the words of Jesus that defy our logical minds;
for teaching us that we can be born again,
for the woman who finds a lost coin and calls her
friends and neighbors to celebrate,
for the absurdity of a camel trying to fit through the eye of a needle,
for the father of the Prodigal Son who is willing to look like a fool as he runs to greet his son,
for the generosity of the landowner who will pay
workers a whole day's wage when they only worked one hour,

for tiny bits of faith that can move entire mountains,
for the reality that nothing can live unless it first dies.

For the great reversal of the Gospel:
that the last shall be made first,
that the rejected stone became the cornerstone,
that those who wish to become great must serve,
that the lost will be found,
that the small will become great,
that though you are Wisdom, you choose to forget our sins,
that when we are weak, your strength shines through us.

O Lord, giver of joy and laughter, we thank you for giving us these gifts.

Thank you for the gift you give us that allows us to enjoy these things to the full.

We can laugh because of the most amazing thing of all – that you conquered death, that the tomb
is empty, that light shone so bright that it overcame the darkness.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Amen.

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to
yourself – just know that God hears you.

*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,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The prayer of Spiritual Communion this week is from apartheid era South Africa. In that time many prisoners were denied the sacraments and had to find other ways of taking Communion. This found its way into the 1989 Anglican Church of Southern Africa Prayer Book as a help to others who could not receive.

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me. May your body and blood be my food and drink. May your passion and death be my strength and life. Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given. May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross. Let me not run from the love which you offer but hold me safe from the forces of evil. On each of my dyings shed your light and your love. Keep calling to me until that day comes when, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.

A Blessing for Easter

The world is now too dangerous
And too beautiful for anything but love
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone
Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.
May your hand be so blessed
That everything you touch is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed you run
To those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened,
So set on fire, that your love,
Your love changes everything. *Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yours in Christ,
Dave+

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