

April 19, 2020, Easter 2

The parts of this service marked with an asterisk () may be led by one person.*

Invocation

* The disciples were self-isolating.
They were scared.
They were confused.
They needed to be alone.
But even in the middle of their isolation, they discovered that they were NOT actually alone.
Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn (*Read or sung together*) (5th verse not included)

(Hymn lyrics printed under OneLicence # 11411292)

Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness!
God has brought forth Israel into joy from sadness,
loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters;
led them with un-moistened foot through the Red Sea waters.

'Tis the spring of souls today: Christ has burst his prison,
and from three days sleep in death as a sun has risen.
All the winter of our sins, long and dark, is flying
from the Light to whom we give laud and praise undying.

Now the queen of seasons, bright with the day of splendour,
with the royal feast of feasts comes its joy to render;
comes to glad Jerusalem, who with true affection
welcomes in unwearied strain Jesus' resurrection.

Neither could the gates of death, nor the tomb's dark portal,
nor the watchers, nor the seal, hold him as a mortal:
but today, among your own, you appear, bestowing
your deep peace, which evermore passes human knowing.

For those of you reading this on line, a slightly modified version of this hymn may be heard by clicking here - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbQ_5pzRlLM

Prayer of the Day (*Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress*)

* Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Let us pray.
Almighty and eternal God, the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt, may we, who have not seen, have faith in you and receive the fulness of Christ's blessing, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel Reading

* The Holy Gospel according to John.

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 Judeans, 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

* As we began this service, we recalled that the disciples were essentially self-isolating.

They had gone through the roller coaster of Holy Week, the confusion of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday, the numbness of the Sabbath, and now the mind-boggling vastness of Easter.

So it's pretty easy to understand that they were feeling a little overwhelmed by it all!

And when we are overwhelmed, we want to plug out for a bit. We NEED to take a step back and think, or distract ourselves for a while, so we can come to grips with all of it. So it's perfectly human, and perfectly reasonable, that the disciples would self-isolate, pull back, gather with their few friends, and try to make sense of it all.

So one thing that this story from John's gospel reminds us of is this: Jesus comes to us when we are overwhelmed. Our desire, our *need* to “plug out” does not keep Jesus away from us. Easter happens anyway. God happens anyway. Jesus comes to us anyway, with words of peace, forgiveness, and yes, words of commission. Even when we are overwhelmed, we are called to love, and forgive, and reach out.

Then there is Part Two of this story.

Thomas was also overwhelmed by all that had happened. But I can't help but wonder if maybe he was so overcome by events that he was even self-isolating from the other disciples.

Maybe he couldn't even face *them* at that point. Maybe he simply needed a break from all the intensity, a break from everything and everyone.

Or maybe he was just out buying bread!

The point, of course, is that he wasn't there. For whatever reason, Thomas missed one of the most important moments in their collective lives.

But again, the point is not that he missed it. Nor is the point that he had a hard time wrapping his head around this new story that his friends were telling him.

The second point of this story, the other thing that John wants us to remember, is this: being missing, being separated from our community, does not stop Jesus, either. It does not stop Easter from happening, or from becoming real for us. Any of us. Ever.

I suspect we need to hear this again, especially this Easter. We are completely aware of being isolated. We are completely aware of not being able to eat with family, of not being able to play cards with friends, of not being able to worship together, or even stop for a chat when we pick up the mail.

But let us also be aware of those who are *chronically* isolated, who are *always* overwhelmed: abused spouses, the homeless, refugees in crowded camps, the family members of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by all of these things, especially when there is still no end in sight.

But our being overwhelmed has never stopped Jesus before, and it won't stop Jesus this time, either.

Jesus came to the overwhelmed disciples on the first Easter evening.

Jesus came to Thomas the next week when he had missed it the first time.

Jesus comes to us, no matter how isolated we are feeling today.

And Jesus comes *through* us, whenever we call someone, or wave, or send a card, or donate to the Food Bank, or take a stand for justice.

Jesus continued to come, to *all* of us. So together, we *all* continue to celebrate that Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

Prayers of the People

* Celebrating the victory of love over death, we offer our prayers to God.

[*Short pause*]

God who keeps coming, you leave no one out. We give you thanks. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

God who keeps coming, your presence arrives inside the doors of those who are isolated by disease, by fear, by distance, by circumstance. Open our ears to hear your greeting of peace. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

God who keeps coming, your presence extends even to those who cut *themselves* off from family, community, church, friends, or themselves. May we be a welcoming presence in this place. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

God who keeps coming, inspire your church, in these days of pandemic, to be creative in the ways we reach out, to be persistent in extending love, to be faithful in sharing Good News with this broken world. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

God who keeps coming, we come to you with those who are sick, who are secluded, who are lonely, who see no hope for any kind of future. Use us to touch those whom we name before you.

[Names of those who are of special concern may be offered.]

God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

God who keeps coming, you leave no one out. Strengthen us to do the same. God of Easter,

Hear our prayer.

We pray this in the name of our risen and living Saviour, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray,

Our Father....

Lord's Prayer (*Prayer used by permission of Augsburg Fortress*)

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.

OR

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are your, now and forever. Amen.

OR

To pray with the leaders of our local congregations, you may click here -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D7r99aSnzg>

Hymn (*Read or sung together*)

(*Hymn lyrics printed under OneLicence # 11411292*)

Be not afraid, sing out for joy! Christ is risen, alleluia!

Be not afraid, sing out for joy! Christ is risen, alleluia!

(*Sing as many times as you like!*)

For those of you reading this on line, this hymn may be heard by clicking here -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1x6EbPw8OJ0>

Benediction (*Read together*)

May almighty God,

The Father who created us to live in love,

The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,

And the Spirit who comes even when we are **self**- isolating,

bless us all, now and forever. Amen.

Go in peace. Never alone.

Thanks be to God!

For Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!