

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, April 19, 2020**

207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

**Call to Worship**

Christ is risen!  
Though we find ourselves isolated  
in homes, apartments, and residential places,  
yet, we would listen to the birds singing,  
reminding us that the whole creation  
rejoices in the love of our God.

Though we cannot reach out and touch  
our friends and neighbors,  
we would rejoice that Jesus is in our midst,  
holding out hands of grace and hope to us!

Though we have to stand at a safe distance  
from others, whispering hello through masks,  
we know that the Spirit is all around us,  
breathing peace on us in these moments,  
surrounding us with grace and hope.

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**Hymn**

*Jesus is risen from the grave*

**Opening Prayer**

O God, in this time after Easter, help us to understand with all our being that we are a resurrection people. Prevent us from being merely spectators staring at an empty cross or peering into an empty tomb. Rather, charge us to be persons who strive toward receiving the power that used emptiness as a means of revealing fullness of life. How tempting it is, now that Easter is past, to lapse into believing that sin and death again hold sway, that resurrection can be packed away as past event. Forgive us when we succumb to temptation and allow the life and laughter, the hope and happiness of Easter, to be interred within. Grant us the wisdom and the courage to trust in a present power of resurrection that enlivens every day.

Enable us in our worship, in our work, and in our leisure to meet Christ, to realize that our Savior is not someone dead whose day has come and

gone, whose work is finished. Help us to acknowledge with our responsive love that Jesus is with us today as our living partner, guide, and companion. And remind us that, in a world where there is yet much good to be done, only a living faith will do.

©Glen E. Rainsley. Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P70-71.

Gracious God, as we listen to your Word, increase our understanding by the power of your Spirit. May our lives be shaped by your wisdom and inspired by your love through Christ, your living Word. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Pardon**

Dear friends, the risen Christ is in our midst, speaking words of peace and forgiveness to us this day. Receive his gift of forgiveness. Be at peace with yourself and with one another. Amen.

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## **Scripture Reading John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup>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." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>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."

<sup>26</sup>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." <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>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."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>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.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Reflection

How are you doing right now? Are you at peace or struggling? What does it mean and what would it take for you to be at peace and know peace?

I think all of us know what it means to not be at peace. We have experienced inner turmoil and struggle. It may be about a decision, or a relationship, words spoken that we wish we could un-speak, actions taken that we wish we could undo. Still, it is not always negative either. We may have an opportunity for a wonderful career move, choosing a partner, buying a home, retirement, or moving into a place where we know we will be cared for as we age. Each time we have to make a decision we find there is a period of unrest, where we do not feel at peace. We don't have what they call peace of mind. Broken relationships can cause a great deal of stress and unrest. Stomach's churn and the mind is a whirlwind of thoughts. The same happens when one is given dark news of illness, death, loss of a job, of income, or a home.

There was about an eight-year span in my life when I struggled with depression. I can tell you; I did not experience very much peace in my relationships or within myself during those days. Depression, and all that it brought with it, stole many of the wonderful moments that could have been with my very young children, my husband, and with family and friends. It felt as though the ground had been ripped from beneath me and sadness, anger, and fear were my constant companions. All of this was the furthest thing from peace I have personally ever experienced. I spent many days "hidden" behind the doors of my house.

In the reading from the gospel of John, we find the disciples, behind closed doors, living in fear and trepidation, with unrest and unknowns, a tangle of thoughts going through their heads. They have heard the women, who had been a part of Jesus's life and ministry, tell them that Jesus was not dead, but they had not seen it for themselves, and until they did, they were going to be worried, concerned for the future and their safety.

Then in an instant Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Jesus' first words...peace be with you. After saying this he showed them his hands and his side, the disciples rejoiced and again Jesus said, "Peace be with you."

Jesus could have explained all kinds of things, talked about being in the tomb, his experience of death, and his coming back to life in this wonderful miracle, but he doesn't. He starts with those around him, their fears, knowing their hearts and minds, and the state of turmoil they were in, and says, "Peace be with you."

He shows them what they need to see in order to believe. They wanted proof, just like any one of us would want proof, just like so many still want proof that Jesus really did come through death alive and fully intact. Then we find out that Thomas wasn't there when Jesus had shown up, and just like the women who needed physical proof, and the disciples who had been locked up in a room needed physical proof, all Thomas was asking for was the same proof of Jesus alive and well as everyone else experienced.

Even with all the talk that must have been happening throughout the week, all the spoken witness to the events that the women and the other disciples had to have shared, Thomas needed proof and Jesus obliges. His, first words in this moment are again, "Peace be with you." Jesus shows Thomas the evidence of the wounds, invites him to reach out his hand and put it in Jesus' side where he had been pierced by the guard while he hung on the cross, and Thomas cries out, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

So often people question how it is that one can believe in Jesus Christ, in God, and in the Holy Spirit when there is no proof. Part of the answer is that through the experience of those whose lives are written about in the scriptures, we are given the testimony of those who have seen, who did experience, who have touched the wounds of the Saviour, who themselves required proof in order to believe.

These people were fearful, having the last three years of their lives completely turned upside down as they watched Jesus die. Jesus, the one they thought was going to become their modern-day king, who they believed had the power of God behind him to take on the authorities and free their

oppressed nation. Everything lost. Death was death, just as death is death now. There was no coming back from that.

And yet, there in front of them was the proof that death had been defeated. God was as powerful as they believed, and now they would have to rethink and reframe all of their experiences and expectations, because this freedom was different was something else, something better.

Let's come back to Jesus' words, "Peace be with you." In the most troubling of times for those whom Jesus loved, he wanted them to know and have peace. He had said earlier in the Gospel of John, when he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27) These words were spoken during what is dubbed, the Farewell Discourse. It took place in the days just prior to Jesus death. And now, after all that had gone on, when Jesus once again was present with those who had followed him, those who had witnessed his death, his words are, "Peace be with you."

Jesus says this in the midst of turmoil, grief, uncertainty, insecurity, and so much more. Those words have echoed throughout the centuries, and now are for us to hear, "Peace be with you."

When I was depressed to the point of deep darkness, I read those words... "Peace be with you." I had work to do. I took medication and I went to a therapist, but I also believed and trusted Jesus' promise of peace. I learned, as did the disciples, and believers since then, that peace is something one experiences from the inside out. It defies all logic when circumstances are unstable, but the peace of Christ is there for anyone who desires to hear the words and cling to the promise that Christ's peace is possible.

You can know the peace of Christ whether or not things in your life broken or fulfilling. The peace of Christ comes despite the decisions, struggle, broken relationships, the fear of loss or change, illness or death. The peace of Christ is a sense of well-being, security, completeness, fulfillment, hope, and love that resides within a person regardless of what is going on around them.

It does not mean that everything is going to be okay or will workout. It does not mean that an unfaithful partner will change, a child will become well, that

addiction will cease, or that you will not have to make some very difficult decisions. The peace of Christ does not say that the pandemic will end soon or that loved ones will have family with them as they are dying.

The crap will still happen, but how we react to it, how we live through it, how we view ourselves and others as we deal with all that stuff, well that does change when the peace of Christ overrides the fear and angst and gives us security, quiet, and a restful soul.

The peace of Christ is offered to you by the Prince of peace, Christ himself. Peace be with you.

### **Closing Prayer**

God of new Life, Christ came speaking words of peace and understanding. Thank you for strengthening our faith and empowering us to live with hope and trust in you day by day. We are grateful that you give us courage to face our fears and struggles, patience to endure moments when the way ahead is not clear, and resilience in the face of new realities.

Loving God, we pray for the many places of brokenness in our world. We think especially of those suffering in the COVID-19 outbreak, those with the disease, those who have lost loved ones, those working hard to respond to the pandemic, and those who have lost work or lost hope., In these moments of quiet, we name the situations on our hearts today, all those places in need of your restoration.

We ask that the whole earth will experience your gift of new life and hope.

We pray for those who struggle with their experience of the church. Open them to your love and grace so that any pain the church has caused will be healed. Guide us with your Spirit of wisdom to know how to live out our faith in ways that create pathways for others to find you, not barriers.

We pray for this congregation, for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and for the Church of Jesus Christ in every country and culture. In these days of unexpected challenge, when worship and fellowship have been disrupted, strengthen our trust in you and our concern for others. Make us good stewards of time apart to reflect on your presence with your people in circumstances of deep challenge. Help us maintain the joy we know in the Risen Christ. We also pray for ourselves, our family and friends, our neighbourhoods and community. We lay before you in silence all the people and concerns on our hearts and minds today.

We are grateful that we can place all our worries and our hopes into your hands, O God, knowing that you will hear us and respond.

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Hear us now as we offer the words our Risen Lord taught us to say...

### **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 heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

### **Invitation to make an offering**

In this season of Easter, we celebrate God's most precious gift to us in Christ's dying and his rising. In response you may be moved to reflect God's goodness and generosity to you and the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

If you would like to make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay I invite you to visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

### **Hymn**

*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the Risen Lord*

### **Benediction**

Go from this moment as witnesses of what you have seen and heard.  
Share God's love with those you meet.  
Bring hope to those who are in despair.  
Live lives of gratitude and praise.

And may the love of God,  
the peace of Jesus Christ,  
and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit  
be within you and among you until we meet again. Amen.