

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Second Sunday of Easter - April 11, 2021

Call to Worship

We gather with joy, for Easter continues.

Locked doors have been opened and fear has turned to peace.

We celebrate the presence of the Risen Christ among us.

Doubts have been erased and uncertainty has turned to faith.

Let us rejoice and be glad!

Let us offer our prayers and our praise with humble, hopeful hearts.

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Hymn

Jesus is risen from the grave

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| 1. Jesus is risen from the grave;
Jesus is risen from the grave;
Jesus is risen from the grave.
Hallelujah! | 2. Jesus was seen by Mary;
Jesus was seen by Mary;
Jesus was seen by Mary.
Hallelujah! |
| 3. Peter will soon be smiling;
Peter will soon be smiling;
Peter will soon be smiling.
Hallelujah! | 4. Thomas will stop his doubting;
Thomas will stop his doubting;
Thomas will stop his doubting.
Hallelujah! |
| 5. Jesus will meet his people;
Jesus will meet his people;
Jesus will meet his people.
Hallelujah! | 6. Jesus is here in bread and wine;
Jesus is here in bread and wine;
Jesus is here in bread and wine.
Hallelujah! |
| 7. Jesus will live forever;
Jesus will live forever;
Jesus will live forever.
Hallelujah! | |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of new life,

we come to you, rejoicing in the mystery of the Risen Christ,
present among us always, even when we least expect him.

We marvel at your constant love, your victory over evil and death,
and your resurrecting hope which embraces us in every circumstance.

Trusting in these gifts, we seek to live as Easter people in every place and time.

Strengthen us with the gift of your Holy Spirit in this time of worship,

and bless us with your peace through Christ, our Risen Lord.

Yet even as we delight in Easter's promise, we confess the ways we fail to live it out: Merciful God, we confess there are times when our trust in you weakens, and we become anxious about many things. We talk about love, but we are gripped by fear of those who differ from us. We cling to our personal agendas and forget you call us to live as a community of believers. Forgive us for seeking our own interests before the needs of others. Open our eyes to the many signs of your love for us.

Breathe your Holy Spirit upon us, O Lord, as we listen to the scriptures. Open our minds and hearts to receive your Living Word, and be filled with renewed hope. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, rekindle our passion for you, so we can work together to witness to your love. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Hear the words of the risen Christ: *Peace be with you.*

Receive the peace and forgiveness of Christ,

and rejoice in his gift of new life this day and every day. Thanks be to God.

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Scripture Reading John 20:19–31

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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." ²⁷Then 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." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.**

Message Closed Doors

Most of you watching are aware that the church of which I am the minister sits in the downtown core of the South side of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Provincial restrictions due to the pandemic have severely limited our ability to meet in person for worship. It is not that we can't gather, as there is provision for at least some ability to come together for worship within the guidelines, but we have chosen to stay closed as long as there is great risk to the health and well-being of the people we love and care for. However, that has meant that since the declaration of the pandemic last year the church building was only open from mid September to just before Christmas Eve. Not all churches chose that, but we did.

For us this has been a choice to care for those who may be physically vulnerable. A choice made because Jesus also cared deeply for those who were vulnerable. Arguments could be made that our spiritual and mental health are at risk with this choice, still it was felt that we could help mitigate some of those challenges through people caring for one another with phone calls, cards, and using visual and print media such as you are now watching, and available through various online platforms. It is not a perfect solution, but we have found that we have actually done a better job of connecting and our reach is broader. Still, we know that the restrictions are challenging and we look forward to a time when we continue what we are doing and are also able to be in person to worship.

For now though, I am broken hearted each time I walk up to the church, key in hand, and see the sign that says the building is closed. It has felt like Jesus has left the building, well that was until I began to ponder this scripture about the two resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples. The first happened on the evening of the day we know to be the resurrection and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked...Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" Then again "A week later [Jesus'] disciples were...in the house...[and] Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'"

Two things in this have brought hope and promise, one is that Jesus isn't constrained by locked or closed doors, wasn't then and certainly isn't now and, Jesus brings peace to those who are in places where doors feel locked and/or closed. This is also closely tied to the unbelief and belief of the disciples. Often Thomas has been singled out for not believing the witness of the other disciples when they told him that they had seen, met, and spoken with Jesus, but that is not at all fair. The first resurrection story in the Gospel of John is Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. She didn't believe it to be Jesus at first. He had to speak to Mary for her to recognize him. From there she "went and announced

to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’” (John 20:18) but they did not believe immediately either. The scene later that day has the doors of the house where the disciples were meeting locked “for fear of the Jews.” If the disciples had believed Mary, then maybe they would not have been so fearful. Yet, Jesus meets them in their fear, in their unbelief and in their locked room, to say “Peace be with you” and “After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”

We forget how much convincing everyone needed in order to really believe that Jesus had risen from the grave. And to be honest it would take that much and maybe more now if we found ourselves in the same position, having just witnessed the gruesome death of one we loved so dearly, and knowing that death is always final. But for Jesus, death was not final, it was the beginning of a new way for the disciples then and now to be in relationship with Jesus and with God. When Jesus returns a week later to meet the disciples, again behind closed doors, it is to meet the one person who still could not believe. Jesus offered to have Thomas touch him in order to prove it was he, but we really don’t know if Thomas ever did touch Jesus or even needed to in that moment. All that is written is Thomas’ response to seeing Jesus, “My Lord and my God!”

There are a few things that might be helpful to unpack. These are not given in order of importance, but are intertwined. One piece that is often forgotten or not even realized is that the risen Christ still bore the marks of the crucifixion on and in his body. He was and is the wounded Saviour. The wounds were not hidden or forgotten because of the resurrection. For those of us who are wounded, who have been beaten down in any sense of the word, those wounds are the reminder that Jesus understands and knows suffering. His invitation to Thomas to put his finger here and see his hands, for Thomas to reach out his hand and put it in Jesus side, seems to be about proof, but it is also a stark reminder that Jesus had lived, had died, had the scars in his body, held the scars in his memory, and so knows our suffering.

Another piece is about unbelief and believing as was mentioned earlier. It would be near impossible for anyone of us to believe that someone who we knew to be dead somehow rose from the grave. It was beyond difficult for those who had followed Jesus for three years, heard the stories, shared meals and conversation with him and had even witnessed his many miracles. The miracle of a risen Saviour was way over the top. And yet...they did believe, as the New Testaments attests, they risked their lives because they believed. We have our faith because they believed. No one would risk life and limb for a lie. Through their interactions with the risen Christ, the disciples, the followers of Christ believed, they lived, they suffered, and they gave us reasons to believe. And Jesus acknowledges that this will be the legacy when he said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (v29)

The writer of the Gospel of John also concludes with “Now Jesus did many others 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.” (v30-31) There is an understanding, as the Gospel is written years after Jesus’ resurrection appearances, that going forward, if we are going to believe, it is because we believe without seeing the physical proof, but believe the accounts of those who were present and their stories of Jesus ministry in and for the world.

One other promise to glean from the reading of this scripture is that Jesus meets people where they are at. Jesus met Mary Magdalene in a garden, in her grief, she did not have to find him, he was present. The disciples later that day were afraid, huddled behind a locked door, unsure of the future, and scared for their very lives, and Jesus comes to them. It didn’t matter that they were fearful and hiding behind a locked door, Jesus came to them, met them where they were at. And finally, when Thomas and the others continued to meet behind shut doors, and Thomas needed more than what the other disciples could offer, Jesus met them all where they were, physically and emotionally.

This is the promise that we receive as a gift out in these written and shared encounters with the risen Lord...Jesus meets us where we are at and will do it repeatedly. It doesn’t matter how closed our doors are literally or metaphorically. Jesus meets us in our fear, in our unbelief and in our locked-up places, to be present and say “Peace be with you”

And that brings me to one last thought. Three times in this passage Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” These are not mere words, but another promise. Jesus is present and Jesus brings peace. In chapter 14 of the Gospel of John at verse 27, Jesus said to his disciples long before the horrors of the cross and the joy of the resurrection, “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.”

This day I say to you, “Peace be with you.” Trust that the risen Christ is present, and no barrier, physical or emotional, no door, will stop Jesus from repeatedly offering himself and God’s abundant grace to each of us and to the world. The wounded Saviour meets us where we are at, in our need, an in order to restore us to wholeness.

This happens in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Thank you, loving God, for your renewing presence in our lives,
and for the many ways you make yourself known to us:
in words spoken in peace, in actions that embody love,
in creation that awakens wonder within us,

and in worship that inspires faith and understanding.
With memories of the grace you have shown us,
and with confidence that you will yet show us more,
we pray that all people will come to know the life-giving joy we find in Christ.

We pray for those who are feeling fearful, worried or overwhelmed,
especially as the months of pandemic restrictions stretch on.

We pray for those who face violence and unrest each day,
in countries around the world and at home in our own community.
Lord Jesus, reveal to them your risen presence.

We pray for our national, provincial, and municipal leaders
as they lead planning for our communities to recover from the pandemic.
Give them wisdom and compassion

We pray for our congregation, for churches in our community,
and for Christians around the world, especially those who face persecution.
Lord Jesus, reveal to them your risen presence.

We pray for our neighbours, especially for those who live in poverty
and those who know rejection and discrimination.

We lift up to you those who are ill, in pain or in grief.

We remember before you, silently or aloud, those on our hearts today:
Bring them comfort and strength,
Lord Jesus, reveal to them your risen presence.

God our Maker, hear our prayers,
and use us in ways we may not yet even imagine
to respond to those around us with the love we see in Jesus Christ
and the confidence we draw from his resurrection.

With hopeful hearts we offer the prayer that he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

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. 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 yours now and forever. 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 rising. There are people from different churches and places following this service. As you present your offering to God this day to your church community, may our

generosity reflect God's goodness to us and the hope we have found in Christ Jesus. May the gifts we offer spread hope and joy in the world God loves. In the name of the greatest gift, Jesus Christ.

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If you would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

Hymn

Precious Lord, take my hand

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1. Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.
2. When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near;
when my life is almost gone,
hear my cry, hear my call; hold my hand lest I fall:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.
3. When the darkness appears and the night draws near,
and the day is past and gone,
at the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

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Benediction *(inspired by John 20:21-22)*

Jesus said: "Peace be with you.
As the Father sent me, so I am now sending you."
The help of the saving Christ,
the wisdom of the Living God,
and the support of the loving Spirit,
will be with you every step of the way, now and always.

Written by Bruce Prewer, and posted on Bruce Prewer's Homepage. <http://www.bruceprewer.com/>.