

Christ Among Us Service Prayers for the Third Sunday of Easter April 18, 2021



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
Telephone 397-6323
Secretary – Judy Hartman
Rev. Rosemary Captain
Prayers and Liturgy by
Rev. Dr. Sheila Harvey Guillaume
Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Acts 3:12-19 Psalm 4
1 John 3:1-7 Luke 24:36b-48

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”

Stewart Landon

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Christ is Risen, and greets us with peace.

The peace of Christ is among us, indeed.

We are witnesses of God’s glory and steadfast love.

The transforming love of Christ is among us, indeed!

Come, let us worship.

INVOCATION: (responsive) God of love and light,
we come as witnesses of your glory and faithfulness,
amazed to discover your transformative love.

God, we desire for you to abide within us,
and for your grace to be revealed anew daily.

**Be with us and awaken within us the call to love one
another, in the way it was made real through Jesus the
Christ. Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Ever-present God, forgive us when we stand in disbelief,
and comfort us when our fears outweigh your peace.

God, forgive us when we become too busy to pray.

Help us when we fail to see our neighbors in need.

Abiding God, forgive us when we are overwhelmed
with bad news, and shut down completely.

**In these times, remind us that we are called to be your
love-lived, your faithful witnesses, and your humble
servants. Help us to wake up to the work of love,
and to your renewing strength each day, we pray. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

O God, hear our prayers of repentance and forgiveness, and awaken us from doubt, disbelief, and distress by transforming us into your resurrection joy!
God, we desire for your loving spirit to be among us, to comfort us in our fears, and to renew our faith. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI:

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

HYMN: (Music only) “Precious Lord, Take My Hand”

SCRIPTURE: Luke 24:36-48

³⁶ While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ³⁷ They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, “Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It’s really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones like you see I have.” ⁴⁰ As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, “Do you have anything to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of baked fish. ⁴³ Taking it, he ate it in front of them.

⁴⁴ Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written

about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

MESSAGE: “Beyond a Shadow of Doubt”

(Any similarity to familiar people is unintentional. I don’t really know anyone who dyed their hair on St. Patrick’s Day. It’s a metaphor.)

This scripture text is very much like our reading from last Sunday. However, last week’s lesson was from the Gospel of John and today we Luke’s version of the story.

Let’s put ourselves in the minds of the Disciples. It is the evening of the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus. Perhaps the disciples are thinking, “What now? I’m confused. Jesus is gone. What are we supposed to do? Do we go back to our lives before we met Jesus?”

Just then Jesus appeared before them in their locked room. They were startled and terrified, and they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, “why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Jesus had to convince the disciples of his true identity.

If we are told a story, how do we know its true? A friend of mine told me that my friend, Nancy, had dyed her hair for St. Patrick’s Day. I couldn’t believe it. Knowing Nancy well, or so I thought, she is very conservative and would never do something so radical, or so I thought.

How can I be convinced the story is true? Were there any witnesses to the green hair? I asked her friend, Jan, and she said she helped Nancy do the deed. Nancy's husband, Jim, said the bottle of green dye is still in the bathroom. Sharon said two weeks before St. Patrick's Day she heard Nancy say she was going to do it. So, Nancy was fulfilling a promise she made. It's not like no one else has done this. Many ladies celebrate St. Patrick's Day by dyeing their hair green, so the customs go "way back". What will it take for me to believe this story?

What will it take for the disciples to believe Jesus is alive? Going back to verse 39 and forward. "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Even after the disciples saw the hands and feet of Jesus, while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

To convince the disciples of Jesus' true identity, the resurrected Messiah, Jesus showed his wounds, ate a meal with them, spoke the same words he had spoken to them

before he was crucified, mentioned Moses and the prophets, and fulfilled his promises. (*It also would have helped them if they had believed the women at the tomb. Just sayin'*) Actual witnesses.

I assume the disciples eventually believed Jesus since they followed him to Bethany.

Even after all the research I did, I never did believe Nancy's hair was ever green. Maybe next St. Patrick's Day.

What does it take for you to believe "beyond a shadow of doubt?"

MUSIC: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" video

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Hearing God, Responding Savior, Inspiring Spirit, we offer our prayers as a sign of our faith in you. May we and all the members of the church of Christ cling to your word revealed in the holy Scriptures, seeking also to do what you direct us to do through the commandments and examples of faith that we discover in its pages. May we be faithful in our witness to your love, so that those who suffer doubt may believe and reach out to touch you for whatever they need.

Grant that those who are undergoing trials of sickness and suffering may know your presence and a measure of resignation or healing.

Creator God, you made all things in your wisdom, and in your love, you save us. We pray for the whole creation. Confront both godless and believing world leaders with your call to justice and peace. Teach us effective ways to challenge injustice and evil in the power of your Spirit, and with humility, acknowledging our own faults and failings.

God of patriarchs and matriarchs, you are the God of the living, not of the dead. Through your glorified Son, whom you raised from death, you have offered us repentance and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We rejoice in the promise that because he lives, we too shall live. Holy Spirit, keep us in your communion that we may serve God every day and every hour as we pray the prayer your Son taught us . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today 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, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THREE-FOLD AMEN: Amen, Amen, Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING:

Today, we are reminded of the joy surrounding the witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection! We remember that before their resurrection joy, these witnesses experienced grief at the cross.

Witnessing the Risen Christ in their midst challenges the disciples to turn their disbelief into joyful belief.

Witnessing the Risen Christ challenges the disciples to turn their fear into a courageous proclamation of God’s glory.

God calls forth a transformative love that marks a change in the ways of repentance and forgiveness, by witnessing the Good News of salvation for everyone, everywhere.

So, let us give thanks for God’s steadfast love by being witnesses to those who are hungry for food, encouragement, and relationship.

Let us also witness to those who are poor in spirit, by allowing God’s Spirit to loosen our grip on belongings and possessions, in order to awaken every troubled heart.

And lastly, let us offer ourselves in gratitude and with generosity, as witnesses to God’s goodness by our joyful giving.

DOXOLOGY:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

DEDICATION:

God of abundant love, we offer a portion of our time, spiritual gifts, and resources as a sign of our love for you and the world. O God, we give you our thanks for all that we have and ask a special blessing on these offerings. And God, we ask that our collective offering be an expression of healing, that brings hope to a hurting world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Let us go forth having had laid down our burdens. Let us go forth rich in spirit, knowing God has a plan for our lives. And, let us go forth as witnesses to God’s hope of justice, peace, grace, and love. Believing fully that Christ is among all humanity, now and always. Amen.

POSTLUDE: “Majestic March” Rob Roy Perry

PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for:

Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Becky Ballard, P.J. Bennett, Nelson Libell, Joe Knapp, Danny Ballard, Jim Garrett.