

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2023
SECOND SUNDAY IN EASTER
JOHN 20:19- 31



ST. JOHN

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Thomas said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

We are in a liminal space, confused between brokenness and new opportunities.

Many: Dear God, fill us with the power of Resurrection to embrace newness.

We are hiding like the disciples behind closed doors with fear and doubts, waiting for your appearance.

Come into our midst now, penetrate into our closed hearts bringing your peace.

Refresh us, O God, and empower us.

As we worship today, blow into us your gentle spirit.

***OPENING PRAYER:**

God of the risen Jesus, we praise you for the great love that you have shown to redeem us by sending your Son Jesus. Help us today to embrace the New Life that the resurrected Christ is giving us. A Life beyond our doubts, faith over fear, courage over confusion, belief over disbelief, and trust to follow your guidance. As we worship today, help us to feel the presence of resurrected Jesus in our midst, reminding us of your love and our purpose. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Loving God, we confess that many a time, we are more doubters than believers. We doubt your love for us when we see the oppression, sickness, death, violence against nature, wars, and hatred against each other. Help us to recognize these outcomes of our selfishness, greed, and the evil spirit of dominance.

Through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, help us to understand your sacrificial love for us so that we will love one another. Help us to learn from the courage of Jesus to take up the cross to stand against oppression. Enlighten us as we celebrate resurrection to

rise again and again to annihilate injustice and to create peace in this world. Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:** God never abandons us, no matter how far we stray. God shows us the path of life and offers us fullness of joy. Let our hearts be glad and our tongues rejoice The Living Christ is in our midst. We are granted new birth into a living hope.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM:

Parents: Timothy & Stacie Pickens

Alister Mark Pickens Sponsors: Amy & Joe Blanchard

Garrett Alvin Pickens Sponsors: Michael & Ela Carpenter

SECOND TESTAMENT READING: Acts 2:1-4a, 22-32

¹⁴ Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words!

²² “Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. ²³ In accordance with God’s established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. ²⁴ God raised him up! God freed him from death’s dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him. ²⁵ David says about him, **(Psalm 16:8-11)**

*I foresaw that the Lord was always with me;
because he is at my right hand I won’t be shaken.*

²⁶ *Therefore, my heart was glad
and my tongue rejoiced.*

Moreover, my body will live in hope,

²⁷ *because you won’t abandon me to the grave,
nor permit your holy one to experience decay.*

²⁸ *You have shown me the paths of life;
your presence will fill me with happiness.*

²⁹ “Brothers and sisters, I can speak confidently about the patriarch David. He died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this very day. ³⁰ Because he was a prophet, he knew that God promised him with a solemn pledge to seat one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Having seen this beforehand, David spoke about the resurrection of Christ, that *he wasn’t abandoned to the grave, nor did his body experience decay.* ³² This Jesus God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact.

EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Thanksgiving

³ May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ⁴ You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish—an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you. ⁵ Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God’s power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time.

⁶ You now rejoice in this hope, even if it’s necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. ⁷ This

is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold, which will be destroyed even though it is itself tested by fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Although you've never seen him, you love him. Even though you don't see him now, you trust him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. ⁹ You are receiving the goal of your faith: your salvation.

***GOSPEL READING: John 20:19-31**

Jesus appears to the disciples

¹⁹ It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

Jesus appears to Thomas and the disciples

²⁴ Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!" But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

²⁶ After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!"

²⁸ Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don't see and yet believe."

³⁰ Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll. ³¹ But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "I'm Not Qualified"

It is most likely that the disciples continued to meet in the upper room where the Last Supper had been held. But they met in a mood of terror. They knew the intense bitterness of the Jews who had brought about the death of Jesus, and they were afraid that their turn would come next. So they were meeting in terror, listening fearfully for every step on the stairs and for every knock at the door, in case the representatives of the Sanhedrin should come to arrest them too.

As they sat there, Jesus was suddenly in their midst. He gave them the normal everyday middle-eastern greeting, "Peace be to you." It means far more than, "May you be saved from trouble." It means, "May God give you every

good thing.” Then Jesus gave the disciples the commission which they might not think is such a good thing. Jesus says “As the Father sent me, so I’m sending you.” .” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

Here they are, eleven frightened men, still confused with what happened that weekend, afraid to leave the upper room, possibly wishing they could go back to their families and fishing, and Jesus wants to send them out. The disciples might have been feeling like Jesus was sending them out into a pack of blood-thirsty wolves.

When the men hear what Jesus is telling (not asking) them to do, their first thoughts might have been, “I couldn’t possibly do that! I’m not qualified. I’m not prepared. I don’t think I’m willing to take on that task.” Yet Jesus thinks the **disciples can do it**.

How many times in your life have you been asked to do something that you don’t think you know how to do? If you would ask me to make a quilt, I have a vague idea on how to do that, but it wouldn’t be pretty when it’s done. Not like Nancy Eisenhauer’s beautiful quilts.

But what if Nancy said, “I’ll teach you how. I’ll be with you through the entire project and step by step you’ll learn how to make a quilt.” I’d feel better then and be willing to try.

What about the disciples? What did they get for assistance? “²² Then Jesus breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Would you be a little skeptical when you heard that? What does that mean to

receive the Holy Spirit? Is it a book of step-by-step instructions? (Yes and No)

And then Jesus said to them, “²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.” The men might have replied, “But we thought only God could forgive sins!” And they’d be right. God is going to forgive sins – **through them**.

The Holy Spirit! Jesus has said so much already about this spirit, his own spirit, the spirit which is the father’s special gift to his people. Now the time has come.

The point of receiving the Holy Spirit, it’s clear, is not to give the disciples new “spiritual experiences”, although to be sure they will have plenty. Nor is it to set them apart from ordinary people, a sort of holier-than-thou club – though to be sure they are called to live the rich, full life of devotion and dedication that is modelled on Jesus’ own. The point is so that they can do, in and for the whole world, what Jesus had been doing in Israel. “AS the father has sent me, so I’m sending you.” (verse 21)

That’s the clue to it all. How does the unique achievement of Jesus, in one time and place, affect all other times and places? How does the message he preached, which made so much sense in first-century Palestine, spread to other cultures and peoples who aren’t thinking about God’s kingdom, who aren’t waiting for a Messiah, who don’t look at the world like that at all?

In John 4:22 it reads “salvation is from the Jews.” *From* Israel, *for* the world. The long story of God and Israel has reached its climax in Jesus. Now the salvation he has brought to Israel is to come *from* the Jewish world, out to the wider

world of the Gentiles (and us). And the disciples are to start the process of taking it there.

What do you think? Can they do it? Can we do it? I think we can, but we must be sure to take the Holy Spirit with us. That Spirit is here, right now. It's with us. We just have to acknowledge it and thank God for that gift. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of crisis, God of everyday, God of eternity, we prefer the view of beauty around us, but we are grateful for warning signs that make us more attentive to the hazards of a careless road of life. We give thanks for all who have set an example for us of certainty and assurance amid trouble, conflict, and disaster. In emulating them, when the end of the journey comes for us, we will rejoice.

Sovereign God, you have called us to pray not only for ourselves but for all humanity. We pray for your church everywhere in the world that all your people may pray without ceasing, using whatever name for God they wish.

Bless all those people in government and positions of authority that they may govern with clarity and charity. Sustain all who give themselves to serve those in need; those who teach immigrants, social workers who care for the poor and the those who are unable to care for themselves, church visitors who attend to shut-ins and those who send them cards. Bless all our clinics, nursing homes, hospitals, and health services that your work of healing may continue among us.

Merciful Parent, heal your children who look to you for new health and strength. We are thankful for the good health for especially Alister and Garrett

We pray all these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray . . .

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

CALL TO OFFERING: We are blessed beyond all deserving. How marvelous is the opportunity placed before us to share what we have received. Let us express our thanks to God for all that is more precious than gold, we pass on God's gifts to us.

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Generous God, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You have touched our lives with eternity, with indescribable and glorious joy. We want others to experience what we have begun to realize in company with one another and with you. To that end, bless all the offerings of this day. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Let us step out into the world
Knowing that we are not alone when doubts and fears

surround us. The Risen Christ is with us empowering and encouraging us to transform our wounds into sources of liberation. May the power of resurrection, the divine peace, and the empowering grace of the Triune God Be with us now and forever more. Amen.