

OPENING SENTENCES

With Mary, whose glad tidings signaled hope
and summoned joy, we proclaim:

We have seen the Lord!

With the disciples, whom Jesus greeted with peace
and freed from fear, we declare:

We have seen the Lord!

Behold! The risen Lord is in our midst!

Let us worship God!

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

you meet us in this time today

and greet us with your message of peace.

Breathe your Spirit upon us in this time of worship
that we may be set free everything that keeps us locked in fear

and experience your presence guiding us forth

in the joy of your resurrection glory.

AMEN

HYMN Joyful, joyful we adore you

CONFESSSION

God has been made known to us

in deeds of power, signs, and wonders,

and will not abandon us

if we come in humility

confessing the truth about our lives.

Risen Lord,

you have breathed the Spirit upon us,

and sent us forth to testify

to what we have heard and seen.

Yet we resist this calling,

huddling behind locked doors

rather than stepping out with confidence.

We yearn for more—

more proof,

more courage,

more guidance,

**more faith—
and forget that you have given us all we need:
the gift of the Holy Spirit.
Forgive us, we pray.
Free us from fear
and send us forth to proclaim:
“We have seen the Lord!”**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God hears us when we call
and lifts us out of the desolate pit,
setting our feet on solid ground;
putting a song of praise in our mouths.

Our joy is found in this:
that Jesus Christ has died for our sins.
Let us sing praise to the Lord our God.

Time with the Young and Young at Heart

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:14a, 22–32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3–9

John 20:19–31

SERMON - Freed For Service

The great season of Easter;
50 days of celebration in the church calendar each year.
We adore the great Easter hymns
and the sure and certain proclamation of the Church
during the Easter season.
All around us we are witness to new life:
new life all around us in creation
as spring blossoms forth;
new life in faith
as we proclaim the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But it bears remembering that it wasn't always so!
Jesus' disciples on that first Easter
did not burst forth from the upper room
declaring that great Easter affirmation
Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!

As we join the disciples this morning,
they are locked away in the upper room.
Even after the women returned to them
with their proclamation that they had seen the Lord,
the disciples remain hold up
the shutters closed
the door barred.

There was no rejoicing in that upper room
only fear.

John tells us "for fear of the Jews".

The disciples feared that after the death of Jesus
the religious authorities of Jerusalem
may have turned their attention to them as well.

The disciples feared for their very lives!

But perhaps there was even more for them to fear.

Perhaps the disciples also feared that they had been wrong
these last three years.

The ministry of Jesus that had begun with such adulation from the crowds
had ended with the cries "Crucify! Crucify!"

What if the hope and the compassion that Jesus had shown
had been nothing more than an aberration?

What would they do now?

Where would they go?

Then into their despairing Jesus appears!

He greets them.

He breathes his peace upon them.

And then there is rejoicing!

And if you weren't paying careful attention to John's story
you would think that the disciples went out into the streets
forgiving sins and sharing the good news about Jesus.

But that is not what John records for us.
After recounting for us how Thomas had missed Jesus' first appearance,
John says:

*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."*

For this recounting of Jesus second appearance
the NRSV Bible states that the doors were "shut";
but the original Greek texts use the same word as in the first appearance
kekleimenon – they had been barred.

Just as the soldiers had sought to make the tomb of Jesus as strong as they could;
so too the disciples sought to make their doors secure
-- even this second time;
-- even having been witness to the risen Christ.

It is not that Thomas alone was doubting
-- they all were.

All of the disciples were still wrestling with where God was calling them now.
Some had received Jesus command to go forth a week earlier
but they still locked in the past
just as much as they were locked in that upper room.

During our Lenten book study
these past few weeks,
many have commented on how our present circumstance
has caused them to read scripture in a new way.

Words and phrases that might now have stood out before
now take on new meaning.

Reading the texts for this week

I found that same thing to be true.

As we remain isolated in our homes,

reluctant to venture out into the world,

perhaps we have a sense of what Jesus' disciples experienced
after Jesus' crucifixion.

All those things that gave purpose and meaning to their lives,

all those things that had defined them for these past three years

were now gone.

What else did they have to do?

What would they do next?

And likewise for many people in our society,

perhaps for you,

this time of self-isolation has been a time of great disruption.

All those things that we thought we knew,

all those things that we thought were certain,

have been stripped away;

and along with it our sense of identity.

How many people define themselves by their outward expressions?

they define themselves by what they do

-- their occupation or their leisure time --

they define themselves by their relationship

or their accomplishments;

and now all that is gone;

and all that is left is our self.

This time of self-isolation is an existential threat

because it had caused us to wrestle with most difficult of questions:

who am I?

With all of the distractions of life now silenced

we have an opportunity to truly look at ourselves.

This is the experience of the disciples we read of this morning ;

it is the experience of those

who have committed their lives to a monastic way of life

-- a life set apart from all those things that would distract
- from family
- the responsibilities and distractions of this world –
so that they may participate in finding themselves
in a relationship with God;

it is the experience still today
of those who participate in retreats
as an opportunity to deepen their faith
and refocus their lives.

Time and again in the Psalms
we hear the authors reflect that they have waited for the Lord
and that in their waiting – God has responded.

Psalm 40 which we read this day
is just one example of this statement of faith.

And yet we know how hard it is to wait
-- now more than ever.

We live in an instantaneous society.

Everything we want,
we want now.

And to a large extent we can have it.

We have the world at our fingertip
in our electronic devices.

And while it is a great blessing,
it comes at a terrible cost.

We can no longer wait.

Any silent moment is a moment to check e-mails
or update social media,

surf the web;

-- what for – nothing.

But waiting was always hard.

Why else would the Psalmists draw attention to their waiting.

Waiting was always hard.

We sense the disease of the disciples locked in that upper room,

-- fear ... fear ... God know what!

Every day there is article or story in the media
will grocery shopping ever be the same after Covid -19
how will air travel change as a result of Covid-19
will we shake hands again after Covid 19.

The one thing that all these questions has in common
is the recognition that we have been given a time of reflection
in which we can re-evaluate – everything.
And yet I fear that these are often “upper room questions”;
questions asked not as a result of a renewed sense of purpose
but questions asked out of fear.

The same questions, however,
are being asked of the church.
What will our churches look like after this period?
What will we have learned?
Will we have changed?

And like everything,
the answers have not been arrived at yet.
But I hope so.
I hope everything will change.
Just as everything changed for the disciples
when they had finally unlocked the doors
and allowed the light to shine in.

But first they had to wait.
The disciples locked away in that room were like the Psalmists
waiting for that moment when God would appear for them
and that they would be convinced that God was leading them forward.
And sure enough, Jesus stepped into their despair
and breathed on them his peace.

Each of the people we encounter in John’s story of the resurrection of Jesus
say at one point or another in the story

these words: "We have seen the Lord."
For the gospel writer that is an important statement:
that we have seen the Lord;
because it is in that seeing that we experience Christ
and in that experience of Christ there is rejoicing.

As we spend these days shut up in our homes,
locked away in self-isolation,
let us look for the Lord.

Let us open our eyes,
now that all the other distractions have been silenced
So that we can see God moving in our lives and in our world,
giving us new opportunities to be the people of God.

And let us respond with eager and open hearts
knowing that this one thing is true:
it is as we experience the love of God
that we will once more be able to step out into the world
and declare with the disciples
we have seen the Lord too.

MISSION MINUTE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of bountiful blessing,
we thank You for the promise of Jesus Christ,
who is the Life by which we live,
and the perfection of Your holy glory.
We thank You for the faith to believe that which we have not seen,
and for Your mercy upon us
as we clumsily grasp the significance of Your love.
We thank You for Your sustaining strength
as we try to lead lives which reflect Your glory,
and for Your ever-present Spirit as our guide, helper and advocate.
As we offer ourselves this day,
our lives and our livelihoods,
may we show forth the love of Christ to a world

which stands in need of your mercy.

We pray for all people around the world in fear of violence:
acts of war and destruction committed in the midst of peaceful civilian lives.

Where terror has a grip,
 where violence dominates,
 Lord, bring justice, bring peace.

We pray for those who know the harshness of natural disaster;
where lives are lost in unpredictable catastrophe.

Where storms destroy
and people's lives are uprooted;
we pray for generosity and provision for all Your people.

We pray for those who are of poor health.

We pray for those known to us,
 where poor health prevents full living;
 where pain is a daily reality;
 where frailty causes bodies to falter.
 Lord, give healing, give comfort, give perseverance.

We pray for those who mourn:

 those who mourn lives that have been lost;
 long lives well lived, which have come to an end;
 and lives which had still much promise
 and feel to us to have ended far, far too soon.

We trust each life to You, saving God,

 and we trust that each soul finds its home in Your eternal love;
but for those who mourn,
 who know any loss;
 give comfort,
 give reassurance,
 give Your gentle presence in the lives of us still living.

We pray for all those growing:

 for young people who so often are at the heart of a story of faith
 that we can overlook.

We trust them to Your nurturing,
and we pray that all those involved in the lives of young people and children
will empower them to flourish
and to daily grow in faith and wisdom.

In all our prayers,
we pray trusting in your sure and certain promise,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who taught his disciples to pray in this manner:
OUR FATHER >>>

HYMN Sent Forth by Your Blessing

BENEDICTION

And now may the love of Christ
free you from the captivity of fear
that you may go forth serving the risen Lord.

And may the Peace of Christ be yours
This day and always
AMEN