

## 04/16/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

I Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

### WELCOME –

How many of you still have Easter decorations up in your homes? Now... how many of you still have them up just because you haven't had time yet to take it all down and put it away? If you wanted to follow the Church calendar, you could leave your Easter decor up all the way through May 28 – Pentecost – which, of course, is when the Church celebrates the Holy Spirit being sent to the faithful. So, welcome to the Season of Easter!

What “opportunities for celebration and service” do you have to share this morning?

SONGS - #350 and #57

### OPENING PRAYER –

O Risen Christ, you breathe your Holy Spirit on us and you tell us; “Peace be yours.”

Opening ourselves to your peace – letting it soften the harsh and rocky ground of our hearts – means preparing ourselves to be bearers of reconciliation wherever you may place us. But you know at times we are at a loss.

So come lead us to wait in silence, to let a ray of hope shine forth in our world. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP – (bulletin)

SONG - #375

CHILDREN'S STORY – Chrystiana

MORNING PRAYER – Karl

### OFFERING PRAYER –

Giver of all good gifts, we praise you and thank you for your bounty and your mercy. Be with us in our giving. Bless us with joy, with generosity, with open hearts and hands and minds. May this money be used for things that shine your light into the world and may ALL the gifts you gift us be used fully and joyfully in your name. Amen.

READINGS – Nathaniel Schmucker

## MESSAGE – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

### **This Time of Fear and Peace**

At the beginning of the service I said that we're now in the Season of Easter and that season will take us through Pentecost which The Church calendar observes (this year) on May 28. That means that the Easter Season is 7 weeks – 50 days from Resurrection day.

But the writer of the gospel of John describes the whole story – the empty tomb, Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene, his appearance to a gathering of disciples, his comforting mandate of "peace", and the gift of his breath that brought the Holy Spirit to them – in John, all of these monumental events happened on the same day. The writer of Luke-Acts describes the events over a longer period of time and to slightly different combinations of people.

For John, it was important that the followers of The Way knew that their mission in the world was directly and immediately connected to Jesus' resurrection and the empowerment of his Spirit. Because Easter is not just a day and it's not even a Season; Easter is how we live. Even when we're scared... maybe especially when we're scared.

And these disciples were scared. For their lives scared. They had been part of a prophetic and powerful movement that had upset the status quo, it had called into question people's allegiance to Caesar and it had changed the world as they knew it. Their leader had just been executed by the state and was dead and buried. Then there was this confusing report from Mary that she had seen him! That he had spoken to her and given her a message for them. They were really scared – too scared to even move. Have you ever felt that way? Too scared, too sad, too overwhelmed, too anxious, too uncertain, too angry, too hurt... to even move?

And then he was there with them with that gentle command, "Peace be with you", and the "proof" that our human minds need in order to wrap themselves around the stuff we cannot grasp... the wounds – and the familiar mandate again. "Peace be with you." There it was, just as it had been a few nights earlier as they sat around the table together. "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."

"Don't be afraid." It's the most often repeated phrase in the biblical text and it's what the writer of John wanted to communicate to his readers. We hear those words from John 14 read often at funerals or grave-side services because it's so comforting and familiar. And that's good – it's as it should be. But here, in John 20 the writer brought back those words and that image of Jesus as an urgent message, a firm and powerful command to the living! These were words of instruction and admonition – and they were for *all* disciples, for *all* time.

We have the peace of Christ – which does not mean we won't feel all the human, God-given feelings. We surely will, just as Jesus of Nazareth felt them. And in the midst, his Holy Spirit will

be with us. We have the apostolic assignment of Christ, being sent into the world as he was sent, not to be the judges of others' moral transgressions, but to bear witness to God and God's limitless Love as Jesus showed it to us. And as we, the faith community, show God's love to one another and to the world, we create beauty and fellowship and relationships that sustain and support one another and all of creation – God's kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven. And our joy is irresistible and invitational.

And this is where the Peter letter comes in. The first readers of this letter were Gentile Christian slaves – and women owned by or married to non-Christian men. They were at the very bottom of the social ladder and by claiming faith in Jesus they pushed themselves even lower as they refused to obey the heads of their households by worshipping their gods.

So this is a letter of comfort and encouragement. It begins with a prayer of blessing and praise to God for the mercy believers have because of Christ's resurrection and it reminds them of the new life they have because of their baptism. In fact, they are reminded that they have an inheritance! This may not seem like a big deal to us – we have come to almost expect to receive some kind of an inheritance... maybe our parents or grandparents left us a lovely inheritance upon their passing. Could be ground, or a house, could be money or valuable jewels or a precious old car or tractor. But imagine from the perspective of an enslaved person, the promise that you have an inheritance! The writer goes on to tell them that it's not any earthly inheritance that can rust or wither or fade, but their inheritance is forever.

The inheritance of the followers of Jesus is the joy we can experience while we are in the process of being saved. This is not a one-time, fire and brimstone experience, but something that continues to happen throughout our lives as we nurture and deepen our relationships with one another and with God. As our faith matures and we're able to dig deeper into God's love, we can find that joy in spite of suffering, and alongside of painful and difficult circumstances we can come to know Christ through praise and worship. One commentator wrote that "singing the faith" is part of the church's testimony to the resurrection and an invitation to the listening world. Our hymns and songs of worship can offer a way to genuinely proclaim our faith.

Of course none of the original hearers of this letter had seen the risen Jesus – the Bible tells us that the number of people who actually witnessed that was relatively small and besides, the audience of this letter was far away, in Asia Minor. But the writer encouraged these Gentile believers to praise Jesus and love him, to believe in him and rejoice in their faith in him, to live their lives modeled on him.

This is a letter of hope and encouragement for us too – these 2,000 years later. We don't have much in common with those ancients, but there are a couple of things we share. One is that there is still plenty to fear. The familiar chorus, "Don't be afraid" is needed every bit as much now as it was when the Bible was written. Secondly, like those in the early church, we can recognize Jesus in those who love him and embody his life and teachings. No one does that perfectly, of course, but we can catch glimpses of his divine presence in others and we can reflect glimpses of his divine presence for others. This is how the good news of Jesus continues

to be shared – we keep telling his stories, we keep trying to model our lives after his, we keep being saved every day – that’s part of the reason each day is a gift! We keep looking for his love in ourselves and in others, we keep singing his praises and claiming his peace.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! (The Lord is risen, indeed...) Joyous Easter! Amen.