

**Sixth Sunday of Easter**  
**May 17, 2020**  
**Living Faith Lutheran Church**

*I must confess that one of the blessings of this time we are not permitted to gather together for worship is that we can read hymns and songs we would normally not use since the tunes might be quite difficult or unfamiliar. However, the texts of these same hymns and song are often quite rich in meaning and power; therefore, reading them as the poetry they are can stir our hearts, minds and souls in ways we never imagined. So, perhaps we can give thanks for notes and tunes we can't sing while being blessed by the words and images. I hope this morning's choices do that for you.*

**A Prayer before worship**

God of grace, you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise. Fill us with your Spirit, that we may celebrate your glory and worship you in spirit and truth, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

**Easter Acclamation**

Christ is risen! **Christ is risen, indeed, Hallelujah!** (3X)

**GATHERING**

**Order for Confession and Forgiveness**

While we still were sinners, Christ died for us.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God promises to heal us and forgive us.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another wherever we may be today.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.

For self-centered living, and for failing to walk with humility and gentleness:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For longing to have what is not ours, and for hearts that are not at rest with ourselves:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For misuse of human relationships, and for unwillingness to see the image of God in others:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For jealousies that divide families and nations, and for rivalries that create strife and warfare:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For reluctance in sharing the gifts of God, and for carelessness with the fruits of creation:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For hurtful words that judge and condemn, and for angry deeds that harm and wound:

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

For idleness in witnessing to Jesus Christ, and for squandering the gifts of love and grace:  
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin,  
and made us alive together with Christ. By grace we have been saved.  
In the name of ✝ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.  
May almighty God strengthen us with power through the Holy Spirit,  
that Christ may live in our hearts through faith. **Amen.**

### **Gathering Song      #391    “This Joyful Eastertide”**

This joyful Eastertide, away with sin and sorrow!  
My love, the Crucified, has sprung to life this morrow.

#### *Refrain*

*Had Christ, who once was slain, not burst his three-day prison,  
our faith had been in vain.  
But now has Christ arisen, arisen, arisen, arisen.*

My flesh in hope shall rest and for a season slumber  
till trump from east to west shall wake the dead in number. *Refrain.*

Death's flood has lost its chill since Jesus crossed the river.  
Lover of souls, from ill my passing soul deliver. *Refrain*

### **Invocation**

May the the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God  
and the companionship of the Holy Spirit be with us all and be with us always. **Amen.**

### **The Kyrie (“Lord, have mercy”)**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**  
For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**  
For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,  
and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**  
For our holy houses where we dwell, and for all who offer their worship and praise,  
let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**  
Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen.**

### **The Prayer of the Day**

Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great  
mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth  
and peace, though Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## WORD

*The following readings are two of the three appointed for this, the sixth of the seven Sundays which make up the Easter season (Eastertide). While Lent is four weeks long and begins with Ash Wednesday, Easter is seven weeks (actually, 50 days) and concludes with the Feast of Pentecost on May 31. The commemoration of the Ascension of our Lord falls on a Thursday, the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Easter—which, this year, is May 21. It is often, but not always, celebrated on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.*

### **First Reading**      I Peter 3:13-22

<sup>13</sup>Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

<sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you — not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

*The hymn that follows is in praise of all those gardens being planted everywhere to feed, sustain and delight us. Although the lovely words of this text speak of Christ's dying compared to wheat, let them also refer to any of those other seeds that are just now peeking up or already blooming out of the good earth in which they were planted—the earth from which we came and to which we will one day return. Let the images and rhythm of the poet and the poem remind us that, in our dying and being “planted” or “sown” or “scattered”, we not only find new life but will also will provide nourishment and life to other creature, indeed, to the creation itself.*

### **#379 “Now the Green Blade Rises”**

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
love lives again, that with the dead has been;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.

In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain,  
thinking that he would never wake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.

Forth he came at Easter like the risen grain,  
he that for three days in the grave had lain;  
raised from the dead, my living Lord is seen;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
your touch can call us back to life again,  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.

### **Holy Gospel** John 14:15-21

<sup>5</sup>If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees it nor knows it. You know it, because it abides with you, and it will be in you.

<sup>18</sup>I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

### **Sermon**

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

John 14:18-31 LFLC

All of us know about loss.

For example, on the property on which we live,  
we have a tree planted in memory of my parents  
and another one in memory of Trudy's parents.

We also have a tree planted in memory of my younger brother  
and a sister plus another tree in memory of Trudy's sister.

Wherever we go, we are confronted with our losses.

And losses are not unique to us and our family  
since each of us and every one of us, both personally and deeply,  
have dealt or are dealing with loss.

But, oddly enough, we don't talk about it very much--  
and that unwillingness or inability to be candid about loss  
can often do a lot of psychological and spiritual damage.

However, this Sunday's text invites us, even begs us, to change that--  
and to move into an important, and largely uncharted, terrain.

You see, there are all kinds of losses that we face every day.

We may have lost -- or be in the process of losing --  
a loved one to Alzheimer's or dementia or death.

We may have lost someone with whom we were  
in a significant relationship through a divorce or break-up.

We may have lost colleagues, co-workers and friends  
because of one of us losing a job or moving to a different one  
or relocating to a new city. . .and a new life.

As well, for those of us who are aging,  
there are those personal losses such as failing health  
and the sense of security that bring with them the loss of dignity  
or the loss of the abilities and capabilities we once knew.

And then, of course, there is the loss of the friendships  
and sense of community. . .even family. . .  
that are part and parcel of life in today's world  
where gathering together with our family and friends. . .  
and for worship. . .is not yet permitted.

All of these losses, even the ones that were necessary  
or that resulted from a positive change in our circumstances--  
all of them are difficult and worth being recognized and named.

Now, as I said earlier, it is my experience and sense, that as a culture,  
we are not terribly good when it comes to talking about loss.

And, I don't know if it's because admitting loss  
challenges the eternally optimistic stance  
that our culture or society used to have. . .  
and may still even expect us to take in the future--

the stance that celebrates, even reveres, youth and vibrancy,  
novelty and personal fulfillment, the adoration of celebrities,  
and, of course, an ever-and-endlessly-growing economy  
and the lavish spending habits we once practiced.

Or maybe our reluctance to talk about our losses  
is because they remind us of our own mortality and frailty.

Whatever the reasons, we seem to lack the resources  
and emotional wherewithal to acknowledge the losses  
that we, and those around us, are facing.

So, for instance, unsure about what to say when confronted by a friend  
who has recently suffered the death of a loved one  
or gone through a divorce or been let go from a job--  
unsure about what to say, we often end up saying nothing,  
avoiding the painful subject altogether,  
leaving the person who is suffering,  
not only feeling wounded or broken by their loss,  
but feeling even more alone and afraid.

With that in mind, I wonder if we could encourage congregations—  
like ours, to be different—to be places and communities  
where we are not ashamed of our losses but can admit them--  
where we recognize that loss is a difficult. . .  
but normal. . .part of human existence--  
and therefore reach out to one other in comfort, care, and solidarity  
in order to combat the feelings of isolation and fear that come with loss?

And if such an idea and practice is possible—  
that is, to encourage and support one another  
in times of sadness and anxiety, doubt and even despair. . .  
if that is possible, then I think this morning's text  
has something helpful to say to us in that regard.

Now, given that we are nearing the end of the 7 week-long Easter season,  
we need to remember that in John's story this morning,  
it is still Holy Week—Maundy Thursday—  
the evening before the crucifixion.

After sharing a meal with his disciples and offering them  
an example of selfless love and service in washing their feet,  
Jesus is now preparing them for his departure  
in a lengthy section known as “The Farewell Discourse.”

He then tells them that he is about to leave them  
and, quite naturally, they are distressed.  
That's what the threat of loss does.  
It shakes up our sense of safety and security  
by putting the future into jeopardy,  
making us feel unsure and uncertain about things.

But to assure them that they need not be afraid  
he has already told them -- in last week's reading --  
not to let their hearts be troubled because,  
yes, while he is going away, he is leaving  
in order to prepare a place for them.

Nevertheless, they are still upset, anxious and worried because, after all,  
the fear of loss is not so easily defeated or deflected  
by simple words of hope that, someday, all will be well.

And so, once again, he reinforces his assurance to them  
by promising them that he will not leave them orphaned or alone  
but will send an Advocate to be with them.

And here is where we need to hit the pause button for a moment  
and offer some good old-fashioned teaching. . .  
because the word John employs in this passage  
*is paracletos* in Greek or "paraclete" in English.

Now, I don't mean "parakeet"--the little pet bird. . .  
nor a "pair of cleats"--referring to the special shoes  
worn by those who play soccer or football or run track.  
The word is "paraclete"--which is often translated as "Advocate"--  
but it can have several overlapping meanings.

For instance, and you may already know this:  
The Hebrew name "Satan" means "The Accuser"--  
roughly like a Prosecuting Attorney who is seeking to find,  
exploit and make public all our flaws and failings, our crimes and sins.

On the other hand, the term "Advocate",  
functioning in the same legal context, means  
"one who vocalizes or speaks on our behalf in a court of law"--  
and so an Advocate is more akin to a Defence Attorney--  
who defends us against the charges of the Prosecuting Attorney.

At the same time, while the Greek word "*paracletos*"  
does have this legal aspect to it,  
it can also be defined or understood in terms of relationships  
by designating the paraclete as the "Comforter"—that is,  
as one who brings help, consolation and encouragement to those in distress.

And, given this morning's conversation regarding loss. . .  
and given the state of our community, our nation and our world  
suffering through and struggling with all kinds of losses--  
not least of all, the coronavirus—

perhaps it is this definition of *paracletos* that is most meaningful because the word literally means “to come alongside”. . .that is, to come alongside another.

Following this little linguistic lesson, we see clearly  
that there some aspects or dimensions of “paraclete”  
that we can reflect on and use when it comes to this concept  
of the Spirit at work in this and every congregation:

Because Jesus is hinting very strongly here that when we  
“come alongside” each other to comfort and encourage one another  
in dealing with our losses and our fears--  
that when we do that, we are, first of all,  
really imitating **him** and showing our love for **him**  
by keeping his commandment to love **one another**;  
and, secondly, we also imitating the Holy Spirit  
that Jesus has sent to us and upon us.

In other words, when we act like Jesus and stand with  
those who are suffering, then we are sharing in  
or participating in the Spirit's very essence or being.  
To put it another way:  
We are carrying out the Spirit's job description  
by doing exactly what Jesus says the Spirit will do.

And that brings me to my main point this morning  
which is to ask you this question:  
Do you think it is possible. . .even desirable. . .  
for us to function as paracletes to one another—  
to come alongside and stand with one another  
and support one another during times of loss and fear,  
times of disappointment or discouragement or despair?

Indeed, it seems to me that when we do so,  
whether acting as individuals or corporately, as a body,  
we actually and truly become the living presence  
of the Advocate Jesus promised by becoming  
consoling and encouraging communities of the Spirit.

In other words, in a real way, I am inviting **you** to help **us** move--  
to move beyond our cultural, societal and personal fears  
of admitting and naming our losses. . .and in so doing,  
help us to become a true “spiritual” community—  
that is, an “in-spirited” or “in-spired” or “in-breathed”  
communal sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.



Years ago I read this: “The reason mountain climbers  
are roped together is to keep the sane ones from going home.”  
Now, whoever said that was obviously making a joke  
because we know that climbers are roped together  
to keep them from getting lost in a blizzard or a fog  
or to keep from going over a cliff.

But there is more than a piece of truth to be found in this joke  
when we recognize that when things  
become really treacherous on the mountain  
and fear sets in, that many a climber has got to be thinking:  
“This is crazy! I'm gonna to go home.”

Well, when it comes to the life of faith—  
and especially, to the life of believers undergoing losses--  
our lives of faith can often be something like that  
when we feel like we are at the very end of our rope  
and there is no knot in sight to hang on to.

And Jesus knew that his disciples would have days like that--  
and so he told them that we are all tied together by the Spirit. . .  
that the Spirit will come and teach us how to love one another  
and so connect us to God, and to each other.

And tied together by the Spirit, our trust is renewed in the one  
who is leading us forward on our journey of faith. . .  
the one who encourages and strengthens us  
when believing seems absurd or when losses seem overwhelming.

“I will not leave you orphaned,” says Jesus. “I am coming to you”--  
but not like an old friend returning from a long journey away,  
but rather coming to us and being with us  
in an entirely different way--in and through and by and with his Spirit.

And, for me, what this promise of Jesus means  
is that by our coming alongside one another. . .  
by our leaning on and depending on one another. . .  
by our standing with one another and caring for one another,  
we actually become. . .or become one with. . .the Spirit of Jesus—  
the Holy Spirit—in this world.

In other words, the Spirit that Jesus promised looks a lot like you.  
The name of the Spirit sent by Jesus bears your name.  
The presence and power of the Spirit is made real and visible  
in what you do and where you go. . .

and in how you live out Christ's calling to you  
to be an advocate speaking on behalf of others  
who cannot speak for themselves. . .  
and in your living lives of love in defence of and for others.

So, you see, you matter!

Who you are and what you do matters:

It matters to you and to the world, especially today,  
because, in the midst of loss and anxiety,  
we all need a word of comfort, encouragement, and hope.

And I want you to know what a privilege it is for me  
to come alongside you twice a month-- to speak to you. . .  
to speak on your behalf. . .to help in whatever way I can  
to encourage you in doing the Spirit's work. . .together. . .  
to support your in being the Spirit together. . .  
in being the Spirit's hands and feet, eyes and ears in the world,  
in being advocates and comforters to one another. . .  
and doing that and being that together.

And may God bless you. . .and continue to bless us. . .  
in that holy and life-giving and life-changing task. Amen. SDG

**Song of the Day      I Will Never Leave You Orphaned**

STUTTGART 8.7.8.7 ("Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus")

"I will never leave you orphaned,"  
Jesus, you once told your own.  
When we're overwhelmed and frightened,  
show us that we're not alone.

Thank you for the Holy Spirit  
who is present every day,  
giving love that we might share it,  
giving us the words to say.

In affliction, we find comfort  
through our Friend and Help and Guide.  
When we're sad and cannot bear it,  
you are with us— by our side.

Then, in comfort, we find challenge  
As you call your church to be  
mercy-bearers, justice-seekers  
in your new community.

Christ, in comfort and in challenge,  
May the church hear what you say:  
“I will never leave you orphaned.”  
May we trust your word today.

Biblical reference: John 14

Tune: Whitt's *Psalmodia Sacra*, 1715, alt. (“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”)

Alternative Tune: GALILEE 8.7.8.7 (“Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult”). William H. Jude, 1877

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Offering Prayer (*over us and our gifts—including the gift of ourselves to God and to others*)

Blessed are you, O God, ruler of heaven and earth. Day by day you shower us with blessings. As you have raised us to new life in Christ, give us glad and generous hearts, ready to praise you and to respond to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

Abiding God, you have revealed yourself to us in the form of your Son, Jesus Christ. Embolden your church, as your followers, to reveal your love to everyone in our speaking and in our living. Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You are the creator of heaven and earth. Revitalize the health of oceans, rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers, and other bodies of water that give life to your creatures in Chapman Creek and the Salish Sea. Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You call all people of the world your children. Judge the nations justly, show mercy to the oppressed, and speak truth to power through your prophets. Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You come near to us when we are lost, and you hear our distress. When we need comfort and long for hope, especially in these days when death counts march upward, loneliness is everywhere, and relationships often become strained or stretched to the breaking point, you come alongside us and stand with us.

We pray for those who suffer in any way (*especially Erika and Pam, Steinar and Dorothy, Bud and Karsten, Gwen and Ed, Erin and Marianne, Inez and Ingrid, Walter and Carmen, and those we name before you now in silence or aloud.* . . . Please pause for as long as it takes to remember all whom we have lost or who are struggling with losses of any kind). Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your commands are good and merciful. Give us courage to take hold of our baptismal promises to work for justice, advocate for the voiceless, and free the oppressed and imprisoned in body, mind, or spirit. Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In and through the Spirit of Jesus, you remain with us always, O God, and your kingdom has no end. We remember the saints who have gone before us (*especially Rick and Dave*). Unite us forever in your final victory over death. Holy Spirit, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord, who has taught us pray:

**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.**

### **Benediction (Blessing)**

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord's face shine on us with grace and mercy.  
The Lord look upon us with favour and ✠ give us peace. **Amen.**

### **The Sending Song #390 "The Risen Christ"**

The risen Christ, who walks on wounded feet  
from garden tomb through darkened city street,  
unlocks the door of grief, despair, and fear,  
and speaks a word of peace to all who hear.

The risen Christ, who walks with wounded side,  
breathes out his Spirit on them to abide  
whose faith still wavers, who dare not believe;  
new grace, new strength, new purpose they receive.

The risen Christ, who breaks with wounded hand  
the bread for those who fail to understand,  
reveals himself, despite their ling'ring tears,  
enflames their hearts, then quickly disappear.

May, we, Christ's body, walk and serve and stand  
with those oppressed in this and ev'ry land,  
till all are blessed and can a blessing be,  
restored in Christ to true humanity.

*Following is a much briefer message based on today's Gospel reading to contemplate, and to draw comfort from, whenever you want or need it to do so this week. I came upon it after putting the service together but thought it valuable to include as yet one more way to hear, reflect on and be enriched by the Word and Promise of God.*

### **I'll Not Turn Away**

It's all about the relationship of love. Love is the first and the greatest of commandments, according to Jesus. This is the gospel of the Lord!

The two men seemed dissimilar in almost every way: their colour, their age, their education and careers, their families and sexuality, the worlds they knew and the lives they had lived. All of it registered as a natural, albeit unconsidered, divide.

When circumstances they could never have anticipated brought them together, the two began to accompany one another through years of capsized lives. They walked side by side in body and spirit, carrying along one another's stories, fears, losses, regrets, and joys, each daring to let them slip into his heart. Amid the ebb and flow of seasons, the unlikely companions discovered in one another stories that were their own. Something of each of them was in the other.

Call this grace: the wretched demons of loneliness that had haunted both men stumbled, adrift in the wake of the companions' fellowship.

Still, they knew that parting was ahead. The days of walking, conversing, and trusting the companionship would soon come to an end. So they began to speak of their impending separation in this way: "This is my promise: I'll see you on the other side of this." It was repeated with other words, which always meant "I will not turn away from you." Call this the gospel story.

Grace is found in mystery, when strange circumstances confound expectations. Love is found in experience, when trust is discovered and nurtured. In a form we are not looking for, another—the Advocate, Comforter, Counselor, Spirit—will come to us.

“I will not leave you orphaned,” says Jesus. “I am coming to you” (John 14:18). It’s all about the relationship of love.

*Finally, if the video of this morning’s sermon is not already attached or if anyone has difficulty opening and/or viewing it, it is also available on our parish website under the link named “Worship”. The website address is: [livingfaithlutheran.weebly.com](http://livingfaithlutheran.weebly.com) If you wish, you will also find a means of offering a donation to support our congregation’s life and ministry.*