

Living Faith Lutheran Church **Sunday After Easter April 19, 2020**

We are gathered together in worship ... although worshipping separately!

Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

(pause a moment and “listen” to Val play Amazing Grace!)

In today’s Gospel the risen Christ appears to His disciples and offers them the gifts of peace and hope and gives them His Spirit. We experience the resurrection in our Sunday worship and in our everyday lives. It’s a wonderful gift to know the risen and living Saviour, who gives us the same gifts in our baptism.

Gathering Hymn: 389 Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing. The cross stands empty to the sky.

Let streets and homes with praises ring. Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound, to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now, and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift and war, where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more, and lives where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth, can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth, revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive and comes to bring good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring with joy, with justice, love and praise.

Confession and Absolution:

Lord God, You not only show us how to obey Your word, but You help us to obey and live it. You not only show us how to love, but You help us to be loving. Jesus, You taught Your disciples and You teach us also, to see the lives of others through Your eyes. We confess that we are not perfect.

We have said and done things we regret. Too often we have resisted Your call to be Your voice in the world. Forgive us loving God. Give us Your righteousness, the strength to give our failures to You, and the courage each day to try again. O Lord, open our ears to really hear You, and our eyes to see Your way for us as we live resurrection lives. In the name of Jesus, Amen

People of God, receive the good news: God turns to us in love and tells us, *“I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live.”* All our sin is forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the free and abounding gift of God’s grace or us. Accept His forgiving love and know His peace. Amen

Hymn: # 801 Change My Heart O God

Change my heart O God, make it ever true, change my heart O God, may I be like You.
You are the Potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me; this is what I pray. *(back to first line)*

Prayer of the Day:

Holy and loving God, You are the strength of all who believe and the hope of all those who doubt. We have not seen the scarred hands of the risen Jesus. We have not touched His wounds, but we have faith that believes that Jesus lives and His words of peace and His gift of the Spirit are His gifts to us today. Those are the gifts that set us free to be Your people in our day. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen

First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

After the Holy Spirit came to the apostles on Pentecost, Peter preaches a powerful Gospel message ... that Jesus who died was raised from the dead by God.

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the 11 apostles. In a loud voice he spoke to the crowd. "My fellow Jews," he said, "let me explain this to you. All of you who live in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I say.

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this! Jesus of Nazareth was a man who had God's approval. God did miracles, wonders and signs among you through Jesus. You yourselves know this. ²³ Long ago God planned that Jesus would be handed over to you. With the help of evil people, you put Jesus to death. You nailed him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead. He set him free from the suffering of death. It wasn't possible for death to keep its hold on Jesus. ²⁵ David spoke about him. He said,

" 'I know that the Lord is always with me.

Because he is at my right hand, I will always be secure.

²⁶ So my heart is glad and joy is on my tongue. My whole body will be full of hope.

²⁷ You will not leave me in the place of the dead. You will not let your holy one rot away.

²⁸ You always show me the path that leads to life.

You will fill me with joy when I am with you.' (Psalm 16:8-11)

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, you can be sure that King David died. He was buried. His tomb is still here today. ³⁰ But David was a prophet. He knew that God had made a promise to him. God had promised that he would make someone in David's family line king after him. ³¹ David saw what was coming. So he spoke about the Messiah rising from the dead. He said that the Messiah would not be left in the place of the dead. His body wouldn't rot in the ground.

³² God has raised this same Jesus back to life. We are all witnesses of this.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9 Peter Praises God for the Living Hope we have through Christ's resurrection even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

³ Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us a new birth and a living hope. This hope is living because Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

⁴ He has given us new birth so that we might share in what belongs to him. This is a gift that can never be destroyed. It can never spoil or even fade away. It is kept in heaven for you.

⁵ Through faith you are kept safe by God's power. Your salvation is going to be completed.

It is ready to be shown to you in the last days. ⁶ Because you know all this, you have great joy. You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble. ⁷ Your troubles have come in order to prove that your faith is real. Your faith is worth more than gold. That's because gold can pass away

even when fire has made it pure. Your faith is meant to bring praise, honor and glory to God. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns. ⁸ Even though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him. You are filled with a glorious joy that can't be put into words. ⁹ You are receiving the salvation of your souls. This salvation is the final result of your faith.

Gospel Alleluia – say together:

We come to the Word to hear God's call to service

We come to meet the Christ who claims us

We come, rejoicing that God cares for us

We come for we are not our own ... God's love has made us His!

The Gospel: John 20:19-31 The risen Jesus appears to His disciples offering them a benediction of peace, a commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together. They had locked the doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, "May peace be with you!" ²⁰ Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were very happy when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, "May peace be with you! The Father has sent me. So now I am sending you." ²² He then breathed on them. He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴ Thomas was one of the 12 disciples. He was also called Didymus. He was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "First I must see the nail marks in his hands. I must put my finger where the nails were. I must put my hand into his side. Only then will I believe."

²⁶ A week later, Jesus' disciples were in the house again. Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them. He said, "May peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.

Sermon: Easter Changes Everything! John 20:19-31

Alleluia. Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Those are "Good News" words, aren't they? Speaking them makes us smile!

- they are words of good news ... and don't we need good news ... especially these times?

- this is the Good News of Easter! ... it's the best of news ... it's news to share, for sure!

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia

- it just sort of rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

- it was the highpoint of last week's Easter liturgy ... it was today's opening acclamation and will be for the next several weeks

- but here's what I wonder ... is it really that simple? That easy?
 - it's our Easter profession of faith ... a statement of our belief in the resurrection ... but it can be a statement that is often easier said than done ...
 - it's one thing to *say* the words, another to *live* them!

There is a similarity between the first believers and us today ...

- it has to do with fear ... today we find the disciples gathered behind locked doors
- our fears are different though ... they feared their government officials, physical violence ...
- we don't share those fears ... we have fear of the insidious virus that doesn't care where it goes ...
 - it thrives on anything it touches ...
- our fears are loss of jobs, sickness, loneliness, loss of purpose and joy, devastations, empty streets, empty churches, empty table

But **Easter changes everything** ... it renews our hope ... we know our "today" is not the end of the story

- the Easter message is for all of us ... "*He is not here ... He is risen! Do not be afraid*" ... those words are "gift" to us too
- we have the promise that the very real things we face are not the end of the story ...
 - we need not fear ... and because Jesus lives, our story will continue ...
- these things today are not the only reality, the prime reality ... like the disciples, we too have a calling, a mission to fulfill ... Jesus has sent us!
 - we have His story to keep on telling! And our own resurrection story to keep on living!

Today in our Gospel we return with the disciples to that earlier day ...

- they are fear-filled, locked in ... they are locked in fear
- John says they are afraid ... they are hiding ... they've locked the doors of their house
- enter Thomas ... what facts come to mind when you hear his name? He was a doubter. "*Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side ... I will not believe.*"
 - that fact is so prevalent that we call him Doubting Thomas.
- that's when Jesus shows up, and speaks His word of "*Peace*" to them ...
 - Jesus shows them his hands and his side and then *gives the Holy Spirit to them*
- Jesus reminds them who He is ... because they had trouble believing
 - and today, don't we know people who also need reminding of *who Jesus is?*
- the Word today reminds us that Jesus meets us too ... right where we are, and at just the right times ... and it is *there* ... like the fear-filled disciples ... we will see Jesus!
 - *there* ... we too will hear again His words of promise ...
 - *there* ... in our fears, questions, doubts ... Jesus breathes His life into us ... just as He did for the disciples

We know Doubting Thomas but let's not forget Confessing Thomas ... he's in today's Gospel

- his words: "*My Lord and my God!*"
 - and with those words Thomas has recognized and named a new relationship, a new worldview, a new way of being.
- somewhere between Doubting Thomas and Confessing Thomas is the story of resurrection in Thomas' life ... that was the new starting place for Thomas **Easter changes everything!**

Do you know the rest of Thomas' story? Do you know what he did, where and how he died?
- He died in India. He was the apostle to the people of India; He brought the Gospel of Christ to India.

- He died a martyr after he was run through with five spears by five soldiers
- really, that doesn't sound much like a doubter ... it sounds like someone for whom the resurrection of Christ was real, someone for whom the empty tomb made a difference and became his story! **Easter changes everything!**

There's a difference between *facts* and *story*.

- *facts* inform the mind, *stories* touch the heart. *Facts* transmit information, *stories* transform lives ...
 - the empty tomb is a fact ... but Resurrection is a story ... a real story
- so maybe we need to understand resurrection as the story of our life instead of a snapshot of Christ's life ...
- the *fact* of the empty tomb is not the story of the resurrection and the *facts* of Jesus life are not the story of Jesus ...
 - just as the *facts* of your life and my life are not the story of our life

The facts are just the starting point for the story. The fact of the empty tomb is the starting point for the resurrection story.

- whatever facts you woke up to on Easter Monday are simply the starting point for your story of resurrection ... and we all have our starting places!
- what is your starting place? ... whatever your life is today, whatever your circumstances are ...
 - that's the starting point for the next chapter of your story of resurrection
- if you're dealing with deep loneliness, sorrow and loss, fear, confusion or darkness ...
 - that's your starting point ... and that's the room which Jesus enters this Easter
- perhaps illness, old age, disability, or uncertainty are facts of your life ...
 - that's your starting point and the place in which Jesus stands with you now ...
- and if joy, gratitude, and celebration are the facts of your life today, that's the starting point for your story of resurrection now

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Have you ever considered the incredible audacity of those words?

- have you thought about the reaction of those first followers of Jesus to those words?
- the odds against them were enormous ... really, their prospects looked dismal!
- these followers were a tiny minority made up of nobodies ... facing powerful people who wanted them silenced ... some wanted them dead!
- but these disciples persisted ... and the Book of Acts and the Epistles remind us the church grew!

How in the world did that happen? Well, read again Peter's sermon (Second Reading)

- as Christians in today's society seeing increasing antagonistic attitudes toward the church ... wouldn't we like to know!
- just the week before Easter the disciples had experienced much disappointment, guilt and sorrow
- but ... on Easter morning they were gifted with Alleluias!
 - the pain of the past faded away in the glory of the risen Lord Jesus
 - and neither their failings, their grief, fears or their doubts could prevent what God had promised
- keep on reading in the Book of Acts and other Epistles and we see they were to face more trouble and anguish ... even chained in prison they praised Him!
- they suffered willingly for Jesus, because He had won for them all of God's grace and mercy.

- their story makes us want to let the resurrection so grip us and convince us of God's great promises!
Easter changes everything! Easter changes us!

We realize of course, that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that such things are accomplished

- but I believe another very important factor had a part in that early Church growth activity ...
 - that Alleluia morning ... Easter ... that glorious day ... that miracle of miracles ...
- it was the resurrection of Jesus that truly gripped and empowered those disciples and the early Church for their ministry and mission in a hostile world
- the resurrection was the centerpiece of their preaching ... because it had changed their lives! ... indeed ... **Easter changes everything!**
- and as we by faith also fully embrace anew the reality of our Lord's resurrection ... it does the same for us!
 - those disciples were Easter people ... and so are we!

The walls and the locked doors of their house could not keep Jesus out.

- and the Easter Good News is ... Jesus steps into the midst of our "house" too
 - and breathes peace and life into us ... He breathes peace and hope into us ...
 - He breathes peace and courage into us ... He breathes peace and strength into us!
- so take a deep breath, take it all in, let it fill and enliven you ... Let it give you hope, courage, and strength to open the doors of your life ... to begin a new chapter to your story!

The Easter message is for everyone, everywhere ... it's a powerful message ... it's the answer to the most universal of human fears and problems: death comes to all ... but that's not the last word!

- Easter, therefore, is for all people ... our family, our neighbours, where we do our business
- the disciples of the risen Jesus ... once they came out of their locked room ... they knew they had the answer that everyone, everywhere needed: life, new life in the risen, living Jesus!
- they had fresh hope! A fresh vision of their future! The very real promise of Jesus with them!
 - and we see they just couldn't keep it to themselves!

Easter changes everything ... Easter changes us ... Easter is for everyone
Alleluia. Christ is risen ... The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia

(I have added one of my favourite songs at the end of the service today. I hope you take time to savor the words of "In Christ Alone!")

Hymn of the Day: When Thomas Heard from Jesus (Tune- Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation)

When Thomas heard from Jesus, "Now come and follow me,"
he surely went with gladness, for there was much to see.
He witnessed Jesus' teaching and saw his healing touch;
he found a faith to guide him, a friend he loved so much.

When Jesus spoke of heaven, bold Thomas dared to say,
"We don't know where you're going! How can we know the way?"
He wanted understanding of what he could not see.
Then Jesus reassured him, "The way is here, through me."

When crowds began to murmur and leaders raised their cry,
brave Thomas spoke out firmly, "Let's go with him and die."
He ate at Jesus' table, partaking wine and bread;
yet later with the others, he saw the cross and fled.

What joy on Easter evening when many saw the Lord!
Yet Thomas was not with them and would not trust their word.
When Christ appeared before him, his doubts were quickly gone;
he gladly knew that evening the joy of Easter dawn.

That man of faith saw Jesus at breakfast by the sea;
at Pentecost he witnessed so others would believe.
O Lord, may we, like Thomas, keep growing day by day;
increase our faith and guide us, for Lord, You are the Way. (Carolyn Winfrey Gillette)

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the
Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at
the right hand of the Father, and He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Prayers for the Sunday After Easter

All powerful God, Hallelujah! Jesus is not dead ... but alive! We cannot imagine Your glory!
You have given us new life in the risen Christ. You have delivered us because You delight in
us. What a gift, Father. Thank You! Thank You! Lord Jesus, like Thomas in the Gospel, we
have the opportunity to contemplate Your wounded hands and side from which flows the river
of life which renews us. Make us gracious recipients. **Christ, our risen Lord ... hear our
prayer.**

Loving Father, the thing that occupies our every day, the thing which frightens our world is
the pandemic ... that insidious virus that wants to destroy everything it touches. Remind us
that we are not alone. You know our struggles of isolation, loneliness, grieving. Your world is
groaning, Lord. We ask You to hold Your people in Your loving care, in Your wide embrace.
We pray for healing, comfort, courage and an end to this rampant virus. **Christ, our risen
Lord ... hear our prayer.**

How grateful we are for those who put their own lives in danger in order to bring comfort,
courage, hope and healing to those sick and the dying. Protect them, loving God. They are
servants in numerous ways, living humble and selfless acts of love and kindness each in their
own work every day. Thank You for each and all of them! **Christ, our risen Lord ...
hear our prayer.**

Our strong God, when life's circumstances overwhelm us, stand with us, stir our gratitude and praise, giving us strength to overcome. Thank You Lord, for walking with us today. Ours may be a journey of grief, celebration or unknown activities, but You are leading so we can follow in confidence. May Your truth confirm our trust in You and in Your way. It is good to be in Your care. As we continue to sing the alleluias this week enable us live with the glow of that grace on our face. Thank You for resurrection, for life going forward. **Christ, our risen Lord ... hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, as You breathed Your Spirit into the fear-filled disciples, we pray that you would breathe Your Spirit into the church in a fresh way today. Renew Your church and leaders with Your power, unite us in mission and send us into the world with Your love. We ask You to empower the leaders of nations to work for the well-being of all. Send peace, hope and healing into every place where the pandemic has brought death, ruin, loss, weeping and fear. **Christ our risen Lord ... hear our prayer.**

For those in need in our congregation, we ask You to be close and look with compassion on those who have special needs these days: We remember Randi and Karsten Haukaas as Randi is in transition to a new home, and be present to Gwen, Ed. We pray for those living alone and those in Care Homes. (If I have missed any, please add their names). **Christ our risen Lord ... hear our prayer.**

Thank You for the abundance You graciously give Your people. Each of us is sustained through Your mighty power in the midst of troubles and afflictions that can make us feel desolate. Your love and forgiveness supply all we need. Let them also fill us with gratitude and a wealth of joy today. May we move slowly enough this week to hear Your voice so You can show us how to care for ourselves and reach out to others need. Enable our hearts to feel and reflect Your deep love for the world. We join our prayers with our scattered congregation, in the name of the Risen One, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. **Amen**

Share the Peace of Christ with those near you today. *May the peace of our risen Lord be with you.* After worship will you consider phoning a friend from the congregation and offer them the Peace of Christ!

Offering Prayer: Remember your church and others in need with your gifts.

Generous God, You have given us life, this community of faith, and the gifts we are privileged to give. Continue to move in our hearts to live generously, that we might use Your gifts to bring the hope, the peace and the blessings of Easter wherever we are. Into Your hands this morning we place ourselves for You to use in service to this world that You love, that all people may know the amazing news of Your living Son, our Savior and Lord of all. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction (I suggest you give this blessing to those you are with just now.)

May grace from God's own heart, peace from Christ the risen and living Saviour, and strength from the Spirit of life, be blessings for you today and through you to others ... always, all ways. all days!

Sending Hymn: #843 Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

Praise the One who breaks the darkness with a liberating light;
praise the One who frees the prisoners, turning blindness into sight.
Praise the One who preached the gospel, healing every dread disease,
calming storms and feeding thousands with the very bread of peace.

Praise the One who blessed the children with a strong yet gentle word;
praise the One who drove out demons with a piercing, two-edged sword.
Praise the One who brings cool water to the desert's burning sand;
from this well comes living water quenching thirst in every land.

Praise the One true love incarnate: Christ, who suffered in our place;
Jesus died and rose for many that we may know God by grace.
Let us sing for joy and gladness, seeing what our God has done.
Praise the one redeeming glory; praise the One who makes us one.

I want to share this special hymn ... a favourite of mine for many years. I hope reading it is blessing to you!

"In Christ Alone (Keith Getty, Stuart Townsend)

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave he rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath.
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.