



Second Sunday of Easter, April 7th, 2024

The Fig Tree Worship Resource

Call to worship & Lighting the Candle

Risen Christ, you live!
Speaking peace into the entombment of fear.
Revealing the wounds you still carry.
Inviting us to reach out in faith.
Equipping us to be your people.

Light the candle - Christ is with us.

Holy, Holy, Holy.
The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness is transformed. Hallelujah!

Acknowledging



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress*

As we gather, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and waters. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Singing - Community of Christ TiS 473

OR: Now the green blade rises TiS 382
OR: The day of resurrection TiS 361

Prayer



Gracious and loving God,
We thank you for this life;
for the wonder of creation,
for the beauty of the world around us,
for the mystery of love,
and the blessing of family and friends.

We thank you for Jesus;
who walks with wounded hands outstretched,
towards us and amongst us.

Risen Jesus, you come with peace
and trust us enough
to send us out to love the world.

But we know about Thomas
and the problem of doubt and faith,
because we waver between them ourselves.
We do not want to be misled by others,
and we are afraid of looking like fools.

We forget
that it is by the foolishness of the cross
that we are called into communion with you,
the crucified and risen one,
who brings forgiveness and restoration.

Call us again to believe and forgive our unbelief.
Offer us again whatever it is that we need;
to hear your voice,
to see your face,
or to touch your wounds.

Because your voice is crying out
through all creation.
Your face shines in every person.
Your wounds are all too present,
in the suffering of those near and far.

Call us then,
beyond hearing, seeing and touching,
into faithfully trusting you,
and loving one another in your name.

And all the people say: **Amen.**

Passing the peace

Peace be with you:
and also with you.

Listening

Read: Acts 4:32-35,
1 John 1:1-2:2
John 20:19-31,

For these words of faith
and for Jesus the Word **Thanks be to God.**



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Reflecting - Rev. Sandra Houghton

I would have to confess to having a soft spot for Thomas, who famously doubted the disciples' witness to the resurrection, as he struggled to believe that it could be true. My fondness for Thomas is not so much because of his struggle to believe, but rather because he is a flawed person. He makes mistakes and he says things rather bluntly. This he has in common with Peter, who is famous for putting his foot in his mouth and saying the 'wrong' thing. This is also something that my family and friends remind me that I'm likely to do.

Thomas struggles to come to believe in Jesus' resurrection. His struggles, and especially the way in which Jesus responds to his dilemmas and treats him so lovingly, give me heart. As I know that I am a flawed person, too. Poor Thomas. He has gone down in history labelled forever as 'doubting Thomas'! What a label to put on a person! As if the rest of those who were fortunate enough to see the risen Christ wouldn't have had doubts if they hadn't seen Jesus with their own eyes!

Let's face it. Even those who saw the risen Christ struggled to make sense of what their eyes could see but their minds couldn't, at least at first, understand as being true. Remember that when Jesus first appeared to the disciples in the locked room, they struggled to believe that it was their beloved Lord standing in their midst. It was only when they had the opportunity to see his wounded hands and side that they believed that it really was him. And yet, Mary Magdalene had already told them that she had seen the risen Lord. Didn't they believe her? Well, by their reaction, clearly they hadn't believed her.

I remember a minister saying that when Jesus first greeted the disciples with 'Peace be with you', that they wouldn't have taken it in as they would have been too perplexed and shocked. However, by the time that Jesus said 'Peace be with you' a second time he was probably shouting to make himself heard above the din. Such a hullabaloo would have broken out when they truly realised that it really was him standing there.

Did Jesus censure them for their struggle to believe that he had risen from the dead? Or for not believing Mary Magdalene's witness when she told them of her encounter with Jesus in the garden? No, instead of censure he provided them with what they

needed for them to be able to believe. He spoke to them, and showed them his wounded hands and side.

Thomas had the misfortune to not be with the rest of the disciples when Jesus appeared to them, and he did not believe their testimony of encountering the risen Jesus. We can argue that the witness to the resurrection by all those who were in that locked room should have been convincing. However, it remains that Thomas was not convinced of the truth of their testimony and set out his conditions for belief. Interestingly, most of these conditions are ones that Jesus had already fulfilled for the rest of the disciples. The only addition was that Thomas wanted to touch the wounds and the hole in Jesus' side, probably to assure himself that it was not a ghost that the others had seen, but rather a real flesh and blood person.

When the risen Jesus encountered Thomas, did he censure Thomas for his struggle to believe and for the conditions he had imposed for belief? No, he did not. Instead, he graciously offered to Thomas all that he required for belief. He invited Thomas to put his fingers in the marks on his wounded hands, and put his hand in the hole in his wounded side. This was truly compassionate love at its best. Jesus gently and graciously invited Thomas to give up his unbelief. The heart of this story is not Thomas' nor the disciples' lack of faith, but rather the way in which Jesus so generously offers himself.

To Jesus, it appears that Thomas' faith was more important than the grounds of his faith, so Jesus presented to him his post-resurrection body and exhorted him, "Do not be unbelieving but believing." This generous offer of grace from Jesus led Thomas to a confession of faith. It was a demonstration of the way that Jesus continued to care for his sheep.

Jesus' love for his own did not end with his death, rather this story acts to inform us that Jesus' love, compassion and care for his followers continues. The blessing that Jesus confers at the end of this story is a blessing on all who will follow. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." John 20:29b. It is our blessing, a blessing pronounced by Jesus for our benefit as we are part of that cloud of witnesses who have followed in the footsteps of Thomas and the other disciples. We are among those who believe despite not seeing with our own eyes the risen Jesus. Sometimes our believing might be fragile,



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reflecting the kind of doubt and struggle that Thomas experienced. But Jesus does not censure the one who has doubts and struggles, rather he will seek to give them what they need for faith.

Being perfect is not a prerequisite for experiencing the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and isn't that good news for us? None of us are perfect, least of all me. Yet Jesus calls to us, as he did Thomas, offering love, grace, forgiveness, guidance and strength. Thanks be to God.

Singing - These things did Thomas count as real, TiS 649

OR: Faith will not grow from words alone TiS 691

Offering

In gratitude and hope,
we bring our gifts to you, O God.
In dedicating them,
we dedicate ourselves again
to be your people in the world,
in the strength and enabling power of your love,
in Jesus' name. Amen.

Notices - today is World Health Day!

Prayers for World & Community

O Lord our God,
You hear our prayers before we speak,
and answer before we know our need.
Although we cannot pray as we ought,
may your Spirit pray in us,
drawing us to you and to our neighbours.

We pray for the whole creation:
may all things work together for good,
until by your design,
your children inherit the earth
and order it wisely.

We pray for peace in the world.
Disarm weapons, silence guns,
and put out ancient hate that smoulders still,
or flames in sudden conflict.

Create good-will
between every race and nation.

We pray for those who are poor,
those who are hungry,
in need of employment, homes or education.
Increase in us, and in all who prosper,
concern for the disinherited.

We pray for sick people who suffer pain,
or struggle with demons of the mind,
who silently cry out for healing;
may they be patient, brave and trusting.

We pray for the church,
that begun, maintained and promoted
by the Holy Spirit, it may be true,
engaging, glad and active, doing your will.

We pray for those who do not believe,
who are shaken by doubt,
or have turned, or been turned against you.
Open their eyes to see
beyond our broken fellowship
the wonders of your love
displayed in Jesus of Nazareth,
in the crucified and risen Christ.

(from UIW2 pp281-284)

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Singing - Christ is alive! TiS 387

OR: Send me Jesus, TiS 749



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Blessing

Risen, reigning Christ,
in you, the past, present and future
are brought together in one great hope.
Renew our faith in you,
so that the past may not hinder us,
nor the present overwhelm us,
nor the future frighten us.

You have brought us this far;
continue to lead us until our hope is fulfilled
and we join all God's people
in never-ending praise;
For your name's sake.
Amen

(from UIW2 p477)

peace be with you

John 20: 19-31

*breathless body bound
tomb sealed with stone
doors locked in fear
yet, you are here*

*persistent peddler of peace
intruder into gathered grief
rupturing the possible with promise
blood and water birthing
breathing new creation
from the dust of disbelief*

*coaxing our questions
enticing eager infant hands
to touch the wounds
until with wobbling faith we stand
and learn to say, acclaim, proclaim
your encompassing, indwelling name
and know you will not leave us*

*as you bless us
as you send us
as we stumbling go*

Poem by Jennie Gordon, from Dad & Daughter

*Reflection: Rev. Sandra Houghton
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