

April 19, 2020

Hymn LSB 474 "Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen"

- 1 Alleluia!
Jesus is risen!
Trumpets resounding in glorious light!
Splendor, the Lamb,
Heaven forever!
Oh, what a miracle God has in sight! Refrain

- ref Jesus is risen and we shall arise:
Give God the glory! Alleluia!

- 2 Walking the way,
Christ in the center
Telling the story to open our eyes;
Breaking our bread,
Giving us glory:
Jesus our blessing, our constant surprise. Refrain

- 3 Jesus the vine,
We are the branches;
Life in the Spirit the fruit of the tree;
Heaven to earth,
Christ to the people,
Gift of the future now flowing to me. Refrain

- 4 Weeping, be gone;
Sorrow, be silent:
Death put asunder, and Easter is bright.
Cherubim sing:
"O grave, be open!"
Clothe us in wonder, adorn us in light. Refrain

- 5 City of God,
Easter forever,
Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb,
River of life,
Saints and archangels,
Sing with creation to God the I AM! Refrain

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Opening Address

The Invocation: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Confession: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us then confess our sins to God our Father. Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

The Absolution: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer of the Day: Let us pray: Almighty God and Father, through your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, you have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The First Reading is written in the book of Acts, chapter 5, verses 29-42.

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

The Epistle Reading is from St. Peter's first letter, chapter 1, verses 3 to 9.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the

last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The Holy Gospel is according to St. John, chapter 20, verses 19 to 31.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, ^[a] Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, ^[b] was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Hymn LSB 475 "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing"

- 1 Good Christian friends, rejoice and sing!
Now is the triumph of our King!
To all the world glad news we bring:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

- 2 The Lord of life is ris'n this day;
Bring flow'rs of song to strew His way;
Let all the world rejoice and say:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

3 Praise we in songs of victory
That love, that life which cannot die,
And sing with hearts uplifted high:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

4 Your name we bless, O risen Lord,
And sing today with one accord
The life laid down, the life restored:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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The Sermon: “Peace for Those Who Do Not See: Thomas’ Easter Story and Yours”
John 20:19-29

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Christ is Risen! **He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Although we continue to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and His defeat of death for us, right now, we live in uncertain days filled with fear. We fear COVID-19 and how it might strike our friends, our families, and our community. We fear what might happen to the economy of our nation and our world if the social distancing necessary to protect our neighbors has to continue. We may fear for our own finances and employment. We fear for the future and for what the lives of our children will look like after this pandemic.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the disciples of Jesus were also filled with fear. They were afraid of the Jewish religious leaders. That fear was well-founded. These very same leaders had just put Jesus to death only two days before. If the religious leaders hated Jesus so much that they handed Him over to the Romans to be crucified, what might they do to the disciples of Jesus? This was the question that doubtlessly occupied their minds as they gathered, hidden behind locked doors.

Other questions might have occupied the minds of the disciples too. They may have wondered if Jesus really were alive. John and Peter had told them that the tomb of Jesus was empty with the grave clothes lying folded as if unused. They had heard the report from Mary Magdalene of how she had seen Jesus risen from the dead. But could they really believe it? They had not yet seen Jesus **themselves**. Was Jesus **really** alive?

The disciples wondered if Jesus really was who He said He was. Jesus said that He was the messiah, that He was one with God, that God was His Father, and that they were God’s children. But could this really be true? If Jesus were God’s Son, why would His Father allow the Romans to kill Him?

Doubts and questions caused the disciples of Jesus to fear: to fear the religious leaders, to fear the future, and maybe to fear whether or not they should have followed Jesus in the first place. This fear has caused them to hide. This fear has paralyzed the disciples.

Then, Jesus shows up. Jesus comes to answer their questions, silence their doubts, and calm their fears. Jesus does so with one word: “Peace!” Jesus says “Peace be with you.” He shows His disciples the scars of His crucifixion, so that they know it really is the Jesus they have followed. By showing up, displaying His scars, and using the common Jewish greeting, “Shalom, peace be with you,” Jesus is demonstrating to His disciples that everything is okay. It’s Him, the

Jesus they have always known, the Jesus who must have greeted them with this word, “Shalom” hundreds, if not thousands, of times before. Jesus’ appearing and speaking this word puts His disciples at ease, because it brings them back to a familiar place, where they were before the upheaval of the last few days.

But by speaking the word, “**Peace**,” to His disciples, Jesus is not just greeting them in the usual way. Jesus is not just another ordinary Jewish teacher greeting his students with “Shalom.” Jesus is different, because when Jesus says the word “**peace**,” **peace actually happens!** Jesus has the power to speak words that **do what they say**.

This is the Jesus who said, “Peace” to the wind and the waves of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and the storm stopped. This is the Jesus who said, “Fill the jars with water,” at the wedding in Cana, and the water became wine. This is the Jesus who said to the Roman official, “Your son will live,” and the boy was healed. This is the Jesus who said to the crippled man at Bethesda, “Rise and walk,” and the man did. And this is the Jesus who said to Lazarus, who had died, “Come out,” and Lazarus came out of his tomb.

But Jesus’ ability to speak a word and make it happen goes further back than His earthly ministry. As John tells us at the very beginning of his Gospel, Jesus is the Creator God, who said, “Let there be light,” and light happened. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is God, and when He speaks, **what He says happens!**

The same Jesus who spoke into the chaos of the dark and the deep before creation now speaks into the dark and chaos of His disciples’ fear. Jesus says, “**Peace**,” and John tells us, **peace happens**. “The disciples were glad,” as soon as Jesus speaks this word, “**Peace**.” Jesus’ word of peace creates peace in the disciples’ hearts, and their fear is gone! **The word does what it says**, it puts them at peace and drives their fear away, making them glad.

Jesus then gives the disciples the Holy Spirit, the ministry of forgiving sins, and a commission to go tell the Good News to others, just as the Father sent Jesus to them.

Someone is missing here though. Someone misses out on Jesus’ healing word of peace. Thomas is missing.

Thomas, John tells us, was not there when Jesus showed up and dispelled the fear of the disciples. So, Thomas is still left in his fear and his doubt. Thomas unfairly gets a bad rap in Christianity. Often, we call him “doubting Thomas,” but really, all the disciples were fearful and doubting. The only thing that makes Thomas different from the rest of the disciples in this story is that he **wasn’t there** when Jesus first showed up. Thomas wasn’t unique in his fear and doubting, just not present at Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples.

A little later, though, Thomas **is** with the other disciples. They tell Thomas that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead, and has appeared to them. Thomas, who has not yet received Jesus’ word of peace, is left in **doubt** and **fear**. He says, “I don’t believe it. Unless I can see Jesus with my own eyes and touch Him, I won’t believe it.” Thomas is still left in his doubts, because Jesus hasn’t spoken His word of peace to Thomas yet. In and of himself, Thomas just **can’t** believe it.

Then, the whole scene is replayed for Thomas’ benefit. The doors are locked again, as the disciples **shelter in place**. Jesus shows up, and Jesus again says, this time to Thomas specifically, “Peace.” Jesus goes even further with Thomas and offers to let Thomas touch the scars of His crucifixion. John doesn’t tell us whether or not Thomas actually does touch Jesus’ scars, but John does tell us what the word “peace” **does** to Thomas—Thomas who just couldn’t believe that Jesus was actually alive.

Jesus’ word “peace” terminates the doubt in Thomas’ mind, calms the fear in his heart, and awakens his faith, so that he can believe that Jesus really **is alive!**

The response that then comes from Thomas is the greatest confession of faith and the greatest proclamation of who Jesus is in the whole Gospel of John. When Jesus speaks His word of healing peace to Thomas, Thomas replies, “**My Lord, and my God!**”

The word of the risen Christ Jesus **does** what it says.

This word brings peace.

This word calms fear.

This word awakens and nourishes faith.

This word causes its hearer to believe in, confess, and proclaim Jesus as Lord and God.

In the anxious times in which we live, we are a lot like Thomas. Like Thomas and the other disciples, we are **afraid**. We fear that we may get sick from COVID-19. We fear that our finances and our economy may suffer from the havoc that this virus is wreaking across the world. We fear for our neighbors, for our families, and for ourselves. Deep down, though, what we really fear is death. The is the ultimate fear behind every fear. We are afraid of death.

Like the disciples, we may also have doubts. When we are honest with ourselves, this pandemic may cause us to wonder if everything is going to be all right, or if disaster will strike us. We may have wondered if everything God has promised us is true. We may wonder about God’s love for us and God’s promise that He works all things for our good. Like the disciples, we may have had a hard time believing what our Lord has told us.

Like the disciples, we are even stuck hiding behind locked doors! This pandemic has forced us to stay in our homes and has separated us from friends and family. While we know that this is what we must do to protect the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors, it is hard on all of us. This pandemic has separated us from our fellow believers, from our Church family, and even from the body and blood of Jesus Himself.

Like the disciples, we are afraid, we have doubts, and we are alone.

And like the disciples, Jesus comes to us with His healing word of peace.

In this very moment, Jesus Himself comes to you as fully and completely in His word as he did to Thomas and says: “Peace!”

Jesus comes **to you** in the midst of your fears and says **to you**, “Peace.”

Jesus comes **to you** in the doubt caused by COVID-19 and says **to you**, “Peace.”

Jesus comes **to you** in your isolation and quarantine and says **to you**, “Peace.”

When Jesus says this word “Peace” **to you, it does what it says**. Jesus’ word of peace calms your fears, restoring and awakening your faith to trust His promises, and brings Jesus crucified and risen **to you**.

We don’t know how or when this pandemic will end. We can’t see the future, and we can’t see how we’re going to come out of this current situation. We can’t see Jesus either, but we know by faith that He is real. We know by faith that Jesus died for **our** sins, and that He rose again to defeat **our** death. We are the ones Jesus was talking about when He said to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

You cannot see Jesus, but He comes to you anyway. Right now, this very moment, He comes to you in the middle of all of this craziness, in the midst of your life turned upside down, into your sheltering in place, and says to you, “Peace.” We may hear His voice through recordings and digital media, but, brothers and sisters, the Jesus who walks through locked doors has no problem coming to us through technology. Jesus comes to you, **who have not seen**, and He speaks to you His Word **that does what it says**. He says, “Peace.” And when He says that, Jesus **awakens faith** in your heart and fans it into flame, the faith to trust Him right in the midst of life’s worries that cause us to have doubts as Thomas did.

So by the power of faith created by the Word of Jesus, today, we join our voices together with Thomas and proclaim of Him who died and rose for us: “**My Lord, and my God.**” Amen.

And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in that faith, unto life everlasting, Amen! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Prayer of the Church

Hear us, merciful Father, as we pray for ourselves, for the Church, for our nation and for all conditions and manner of people.

Brief silence

God of mercy, keep us from the doubts and fears that cripple us and prevent us from knowing the fullness of Your saving peace and gracious presence. Teach us to trust in Your Word and to believe with all our hearts, minds, bodies and strength in Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of grace, bestow upon Your Church Your Holy Spirit and all the gifts that come down from on high. Grant to us faithful pastors who will preach faithfully and ears to hear Your Word proclaimed. Give us boldness in our witness before the world and courage to speak Your name without fear. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of power, give courage and strength to those persecuted for the faith, and comfort the families of the martyrs. Keep Your Church from following the winds of change, and make her steadfast in the doctrine of the apostles and the faith once delivered to the saints. Help us to admonish those who have fallen away with Your Word and to restore with gentleness those who have wandered from the truth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of might, counsel the nations and their leaders in the paths of peace and justice. Bless us with wise, faithful and just leaders who will protect the sanctity of life and defend us against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Make us wise and discerning citizens who use the gift of liberty for noble purpose. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, teach us to love one another as You have loved us. Guide us so that in our neighborhoods and communities we may manifest the love of Christ as well as His strength. Deliver us from all that would threaten our homes and families. Protect the police, firefighters, disaster-relief workers and medical personnel who attend to us, as well as the places where we live and work. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of comfort, give Your aid and relief to all who suffer want or need, to the sick in their afflictions, to those troubled in mind, and to those to whom death draws near [*especially* _____]. Heal and sustain them according to Your gracious will, and preserve them in faith to eternal life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, be with those who grieve the loss of those whom they love. Point them to the promise of the resurrection and the gift of everlasting life to all who die in Christ. Deliver us

from the distractions of things that do not matter, that we may focus on the needful things of Your Word and Sacraments and so be found faithful when our Lord returns in His glory. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of compassion, bless us with the good gifts of the earth, with the fruits of our honest labors, and with a kind and generous heart. Accept the worship of our hearts and voices along with the tithes and offerings we bring as part of our gratitude and thanksgiving. Open our eyes and hearts to the needs of the poor, that we may serve them in Your name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of peace, give harmony and unity to Your people, both in our various vocations before the world and in our common life at this altar. Help us to receive with repentance and joy the gift of Christ's body and blood in this blest communion, that we may be strengthened in faith and enjoy the gift of a clear conscience through the forgiveness of our sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O blessed God and Lord, hear the prayers of Your people and teach us to trust in Your will to answer our prayers with all that is needful and beneficial, both for us and for all for whom we have prayed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Let us pray the prayer Jesus has taught us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His favor and give you peace. Amen.

Final Hymn LSB 470 "O Sons and Daughters of the King" v. 1, 4-9

- 1 O sons and daughters of the King,
Whom heav'nly hosts in glory sing,
Today the grave has lost its sting!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

- 4 That night the apostles met in fear;
Among them came their master dear
And said, "My peace be with you here."
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

- 5 When Thomas first the tidings heard
That they had seen the risen Lord,
He doubted the disciples' word.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

- 6 “My piercèd side, O Thomas, see,
And look upon My hands, My feet;
Not faithless but believing be.”
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 7 No longer Thomas then denied;
He saw the feet, the hands, the side;
“You are my Lord and God!” he cried.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 8 How blest are they who have not seen
And yet whose faith has constant been,
For they eternal life shall win.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
- 9 On this most holy day of days
Be laud and jubilee and praise:
To God your hearts and voices raise.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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Closing Address and Announcements

Postlude: "Our God Reigns" v. 1, 4, and 5