

## **April 11 Devotional - Second Sunday of Easter**

**From Pastor Jeff:** This will be my last devotional. As of April 15, I will be retired due to health reasons. I am currently in the middle of my chemotherapy treatments to be followed by a major surgery to remove the source of the cancer. I ask God to bless you all as you move forward in the ministry of your congregations.

### **Introduction**

The Easter season is a week of weeks, seven Sundays when we play in the mystery of Christ's presence, mostly through the glorious Gospel of John. Today we gather with the disciples on the first Easter, and Jesus breathes the Spirit on us. With Thomas we ask for a sign, and Jesus offers us his wounded self in the broken bread. From frightened individuals we are transformed into a community of open doors, peace, forgiveness, and material sharing such that no one among us is in need.

### **Thanksgiving for Baptism**

Alleluia! Christ is risen. **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ, let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ, for these waters where you make us new, leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.

We bless you, risen Christ, that your Spirit comes to us in the grace-filled waters of rebirth, like rains to our thirsting earth, like streams that revive our souls, like cups of cool water shared with strangers.

Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear. Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness. Send us companions on our journey as we share your life. Make us one, risen Christ. Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life. To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### **Greeting**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

### **Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the day of our Lord's resurrection. By the grace of Christ among us, enable us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **First Reading: Acts 4:32-35**

*While the apostles testified to others about the resurrection of Jesus, the early Christian community shared what they owned or sold their possessions to help their fellow believers who were in need.*

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### **Psalm 133**

How good and how pleasant it is, when kindred live together in unity!

**It is like fine oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, flowing down upon the collar of his robe.**

It is like the dew of Hermon flowing down upon the hills of Zion. For there the LORD has commanded the blessing: life forevermore.

### **Second Reading: 1 John 1:1--2:2**

*The opening of this letter serves as a reality check. The reality of God is light, but our confessed reality has been sin. God cleanses us from our sinful reality through Christ's death so that we live in fellowship with Christ and walk in God's light.*

<sup>1</sup>We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—<sup>3</sup>we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have

not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

<sup>21</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>22</sup>and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

**Gospel: John 20:19-31**

*The story of Easter continues as the risen Jesus appears to his disciples. His words to Thomas offer a blessing to all who entrust themselves in faith to the risen Lord.*

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**Message: "Was Jesus Alive?"**

So, Jesus the Christ rose from the tomb. But, are there any doubts about the resurrection?

I am sure that all of us believe that Christ arose or, do we? Are there any of us who sometimes feel like Thomas the twin? Or, Didymus, the Greek word for twin as he is called in the King James Version of the Bible? Some scholars feel that the name Twin is not because he had a twin brother, but that Thomas is two people. We know that he was a devout follower of Jesus and was willing to die with Jesus. In the story of Razing of Lazarus, Lazarus was very ill and Jesus was called to go and help his friend. Where Lazarus lived was a very dangerous place for Jesus to go, but it was Thomas who was willing to go and die with Jesus.

After the crucifixion, Thomas holds his ground firmly about the reports that Jesus arose. He says, "I will not believe, unless I see for myself." But, once Thomas sees Jesus, there is no doubt at all in his mind when he says, "My Lord and my God." Was Thomas a doubter or a believer? He was both, thus he was called Twin.

But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who believe without seeing." That would be me. I have not seen Jesus yet I believe, most of the time. That is why I like the story of Thomas. There are times that I do have my doubts.

I like to think that doubting can also be a good thing. Because of COVID-19 this past year we have been told many things. That we should stay home unless we are essential works. For many it has been possible to stay home, but not everybody has a clear choice. For those who were called to go to work as essential workers there had to have been some doubt about what to do. For those who stay home there has been doubt especially as the months turned into a year. Who should we listen to? Even Thomas didn't trust the words of his fellow disciples. Should we trust those who are telling us to stay home or go to work?

It all comes down to a matter of faith. When Thomas saw Jesus, he believed. But even then, seeing isn't always believing. I think that it is okay to doubt but sometimes the word of others is all that we have. I believe that this is one of those times. With faith comes blessing and healing.

A prayer by Dr. Craig Nesson (Wartburg Seminary) about those in the medical field.

**A Blessing of Healing Hands For Health Care Workers**

Yours are the hands full of experience and skill.

Yours are the hands reaching out with compassion,

Taking time to show care, swiftly taking action.

Yours are the hands gently touching your patients.

You touch families, too.

Yours are the hands that show you care.

You lift the hearts of those who suffer.

Your hands celebrate the joy of healing.  
Your hands bless all they touch with the spirit of compassion,  
Thank you for sharing your abundance and gifts,  
For touching lives and lifting spirits.  
Blessings and thanks for the many works of your hands.  
May your hands bring healing to all those you touch. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

You shower your church with grace, O God. Unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You proclaim the blessing of life forevermore. Like dew upon the mountains, refresh your creation. Restore waters, cleanse the air, and provide revitalizing moisture to parched land. Give your whole creation the promise of new life. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You direct the nations, O God. Guide all in authority, that they shepherd their peoples in the ways of your love. Defeat in us our impulse to war. Bestow the peace of Christ upon those in authority and breathe upon them the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You place within the heart of the church a spirit of sharing. Give us the power of your generous Spirit, that we provide for the needs of others. Announce your peace to those who are lonely, hurting, suffering, or afraid. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You give us fellowship with one another in this faith community. Shine the light of the risen Christ in our life together, so that we live in love for one another and our joy may be complete. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You share the gift of eternal life. In thanksgiving and remembrance, we recall the lives and gifts of those who now live in endless joy. Unite us with them in resurrection hope. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Lord's Prayer**

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.

### **Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

### **Dismissal**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### **Upcoming Commemorations**

#### **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian, died 1945, Friday, April 9, 2021**

Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who wrote profoundly, yet in an accessible manner. In the Second World War, he became a leader of the Confessing Church in Germany that resisted the Nazi movement. Linked to a plot to kill Hitler, he was hanged shortly before the end of the war.

#### **Mikael Agricola, Bishop of Turku, died 1557, Saturday, April 10, 2021**

Consecrated bishop of Turku, Finland, without the approval of the pope, Agricola began a reform along Lutheran lines. In only three years, he translated the New Testament and worship texts into Finnish, in the process establishing the rules of Finnish writing that are still used today.