**The Lutheran Church of the Covenant**

“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



*Sixth Sunday of Easter*

*May 14, 2023*



We welcome you to worship here at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant! Here are a few notes to make you feel more at home as we praise this God of new life together!

* Bulletins and Communion (wheat or gluten-free wafers, wine or grape juice options) are available to be picked up at the back of the sanctuary.
* Portions marked with \* are when we invite you to stand as you are able to do so.
* We encourage you to participate throughout the worship by speaking the **bold** print and singing along with the hymns!
* There will not be a separate time for an offering, so a basket is placed in the back for those who wish to support our local ministry as well as the wider church.
* We will commune from our respective seats, where the presiding minister will invite you to open your respective cups with the Communion elements. We believe this meal is for everyone who wishes to partake, regardless of church affiliation or lack thereof. This tangible gift of God’s love is meant for the world to enjoy!

***Our Worship Leaders & Staff***

Ministers All People

Presiding Minister The Rev. Bradley Ross

Organist Dave Krizan

Musicians United Handbell Choir

Lector Allan Treichel

Parish Administrator Jennifer Lasher-Dobush

Custodian Vince Besednjak

*The Lutheran Church of the Covenant*

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*Maple Heights, OH 44137*

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**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

 *Jesus does not abandon his followers. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering around the Lord’s table the Spirit will transform us to be the body of the risen Christ in the world.*

Prelude *Earth and All Stars* United Handbell Choir

Welcome & Greetings

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

**Christ is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

\*Thanksgiving for Baptism

*We praise God for the gift of baptism that forever unites us through God’s love with one another, and sets us free to serve as disciples for the sake of the world.*

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,

by whose hand we are given new birth,

by whose speaking we are given new life.

**Amen!**

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,

we are welcomed, restored, and supported

as children of the new creation.

Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

Holy God, holy and merciful, holy and mighty,

you are the river of life,

you are the everlasting wellspring.

In mercy and might you have freed us from death

and raised us with Jesus, our resurrection and the life.

In baptismal waters, our old life is washed away,

and in them we are born anew.

Glory to you for oceans and lakes,

for rivers and streams.

Honor to you for waters that wash us clean,

quench our thirst, and nurture both crops and creatures.

Praise to you for the life-giving water of baptism,

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of the new creation.

Satisfy the world’s need through this living water.

Where drought dries the earth, bring refreshment.

Where despair prevails, grant hope.

Where chaos reigns, bring peace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,

who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns forever.

**Amen!**

\*Gathering Hymn  *Earth and All Stars* ELW #731

\*Greeting

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

Hymn of Praise *This is the Feast*  ELW pg. 101

Prayer of the Day

**Gracious God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great compassion, receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world, your steadfast love and wondrous peace, through Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!**

First Lesson Acts 17:22-31

*In Athens, Paul faces the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to Greeks who know nothing of either Jewish or Christian tradition. He proclaims that the “unknown god” whom they worship is the true Lord of heaven and earth who will judge the world with justice through Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead.*

 22Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,
 ‘For we too are his offspring.’
29Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. 30While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Word of God, word of life! **Thanks be to God!**

Psalm Psalm 66:8-20

*The bold verses are sung by the congregation using the tone below:*



Antiphon*: Bless our God, you peoples; let the sound of praise be heard.* (Ps. 66:8)

 8Bless our **|** God, you peoples;
  let the sound of **|** praise be heard.
 9**Our God has kept us a- | mong the living**
  **and has not allowed our | feet to slip.**  *Antiphon* 10For you, O God, have **|** tested us;
  you have tried us just as sil- **|** ver is tried.
 11**You brought us in- | to the net;**
  **you laid heavy burdens up- | on our backs.**
 12You let people ride over our heads; we went through **|** fire and water,
  but you brought us out into a place **|** of refreshment.
 13**I will enter your house | with burnt offerings**
  **and will pay | you my vows—**
 14those that I promised **|** with my lips
  and spoke with my mouth when I **|** was in trouble.
 15**I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the | smoke of rams;**
  **I will give you ox- | en and goats.**  *Antiphon*
 16Come and listen, all you **|** who believe,
  and I will tell you what God has **|** done for me.
 17**I called out to God | with my mouth,**
  **and praised the Lord | with my tongue.**
 18If I had cherished evil **|** in my heart,
  the Lord would **|** not have heard me;
 19**but in truth | God has heard me**
  **and has attended to the sound | of my prayer.**
 20Blessed be God, who has not reject- **|** ed my prayer,
  nor withheld unfailing **|** love from me.  *Antiphon*

Second Lesson 1 Peter 3:13-22

*The author of 1 Peter encourages Christians to remain faithful even in the face of defamation and persecution. In baptism we are made clean to act in accordance with what is right.*

 13Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15but 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; 16yet 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. 17For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. 18For 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, 19in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20who 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. 21And 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, 22who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Word of God, word of life! **Thanks be to God!**

**\***Gospel Acclamation



\*Gospel John 14:15-21

*In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.*

The Gospel according to John, the 14th chapter. **Glory to you, O Lord!**

 [Jesus said to the disciples:] 15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.
 18“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They 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.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord! **Praise to you, O Christ!**

Sermon

Hymn of the Day  *For All the Faithful Women*  ELW #419

\*Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God,**

 **the Father, the Almighty,**

 **maker of heaven and earth,**

 **of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,**

 **the only Son of God,**

 **eternally begotten of the Father,**

 **God from God, Light from Light,**

 **true God from true God,**

 **begotten, not made,**

 **of one Being with the Father;**

 **through him all things were made.**

 **For us and for our salvation**

 **he came down from heaven,**

 **was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary**

 **and became truly human.**

 **For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;**

 **he suffered death and was buried.**

 **On the third day he rose again**

 **in accordance with the scriptures;**

 **he ascended into heaven**

 **and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

 **He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,**

 **and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,**

 **who proceeds from the Father and the Son,**

 **who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,**

 **who has spoken through the prophets.**

 **We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.**

 **We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

 **We look for the resurrection of the dead,**

 **and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

\* Prayers of Intercession

United in the hope and joy of the resurrection, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

God our faithful companion, you promise to never leave us and to guide us in wisdom and truth. Empower our Covenant family to serve as mirrors that reflect and magnify your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Wondrous God, all the earth sings praises to you. Grant your care to the creatures, plants, and places that are suffering, and equip us to respond to their song. Make us agents of restoration and refreshment for all your beloved creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Universal God, you call all people of the world your precious children. Watch over all the nations justly, show mercy to all who are oppressed, and speak truth to power through your prophets. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Holy Spirit, you continue to live among us to grant us peace. Make your presence known to those who feel abandoned or alone, and to all who are sick or grieving. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You hold us in your loving care. We pray for mothers and mother figures. Console all who long to be mothers, children estranged from their mothers, anyone grieving the death of a mother, and mothers who have lost a child. Support all for whom this day is difficult. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Almighty God, you give life and breath to all things. Sustain us by your love until we join all the saints in glory. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Rejoicing in the victory of Christ’s resurrection, we lift our prayers and praise to you, almighty and eternal God; through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. **Amen!**

\*Sharing of the Peace

The peace of the risen Christ be with you always! **And also with you.**

Music Interlude

\*Great Thanksgiving

 

It is indeed our delight

that we give thanks and praise to you, loving and gracious God,

for the glorious resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ,

who in dying has destroyed death,

and in rising has brought us to eternal life.

And so, with Mary Magdalene and Peter and all the witnesses of the resurrection,

with earth and sea and all their creatures,

and with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim,

we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



\*Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, living, and loving God,

we praise you for creating the heavens and the earth.

We bless you for bringing Noah and his family through the waters of the flood,

for freeing your people Israel from the bonds of slavery,

and for sending your Son to be our Redeemer.

We give you thanks for Jesus, who, living among us,

healed the sick, fed the hungry,

and with a love stronger than death,

gave his life for others.

In the night in which he was betrayed,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,

his life-giving death and glorious resurrection,

we await your promised life for all this world you still adore.

Holy Spirit, breathe on us and on this bread and cup:

carry us in your arms from death to life,

that we may live as your disciples,

clothed in the everlasting grace of Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours,

Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,

both now and forever. **Amen!**

**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.**

\*Invitation to Communion

Taste and see the joy of new life for us all!

**Thanks be to God!**

Communion

Music Interlude

Prayer after Communion

Gracious God,

in you we live and move and have our being.

With your word and this meal of grace,

you have nourished our life together.

Strengthen us to show your love

and serve the world in Jesus’ name.

**Amen!**

\*Blessing

The God of all,

who raised ☩ Jesus from the dead,

bless you by the power of the Holy Spirit

to live in the new creation.

**Amen!**

\*Sending Hymn *Now Thank We All Our God* ELW #840

\*Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

**Christ is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Go in peace. Serve the Risen Christ!

**Thanks be to God!**

Postlude

Praying Together

**... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating:** Gayle Agg, Sheena Cameron, Joan Clarke, Christina Copeland, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Donna Franz, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Jane Gradert, Dylan King, Elaine Knerem, Jason Lanese, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Welker, Maud Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Shannon Meskill, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family, Karla & Drew Perry at the death of Drew’s father Doyle Perry.

**LAST WEEK**

 General Fund receipts for week ending 5/7/2023: $2297.75

*To the glory of God and in loving memory of Alex Hohenstein: a memorial was given by Barg Gaglione.*



We hope you can join us next Sunday, May 21, immediately following the worship, as we hear the latest updates about our ministry at Covenant!

*From all of us at Covenant:*



***Lectionary Blog: On Knowledge***

Our church family had a bit of an accidental quiz recently as we discussed congregational space and usage. Someone asked why there was a special chair with a basin in front of it. A new member excitedly said that he knew the answer: it was for foot washing on Maundy Thursday. Then a woman found a small storage cabinet in the sacristy and wanted to know if the dead, drying plants were supposed to be there. Still another person exclaimed that they were the palm fronds from the previous year’s Palm Sunday worship, drying out to be used for ashes in the upcoming Ash Wednesday service. We had a fun time as people with various exposure to church traditions shared their questions, experience and knowledge. This week’s lectionary passages address different levels of information, and how the body of Christ works together to share knowledge.

In his speech in Athens, Paul displays an impressive knowledge of Athenian culture and society. He knows about the various idols and monuments in Athens and is able to quote Greek poets in his sermons. In a move that was perfectly calibrated to prick the egos in one of the most learned places in the world (Athens was named after Athena, after all, the Greek goddess of wisdom, war and handicrafts), Paul points out that he knows something that the Athenians do not.

The Athenian altar “to an unknown god” became an occasion for Paul to point out something they worshiped in ignorance. The one, true God, who made the universe and all the humans on earth, created people so they would seek their Creator. God is not far off, giving the people an impossible task. Instead, God is close and, in fact, closer than ever. Jesus lived, died and was resurrected so that all people would come to know the God who loves them. Paul offers knowledge to the Athenians of a previously unknown God, chiefly through the person and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Gospel reading from John, Jesus offers knowledge to his disciples as well, but not to everyone equally. Jesus will send the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, as *another* intercessor to be on the side of the disciples. Sadly, the whole world is not able to receive or even see the Spirit of Truth. However, the disciples will be able to see and receive the Spirit because they *already know*her (see note below).

Yet, Jesus doesn’t leave all the revelatory work to the Spirit. He told the disciples that he would come back for them after going away. And once the disciples saw Jesus again, they would know, for certain, that he was in the Father, that they were in Jesus and he in them. This “abiding within” is one of the central hopes in this Gospel of John. The disciples would finally know and experience what it would be like to abide in Jesus as Jesus abides in God the Father. Jesus revealed this experiential knowledge to his disciples, I argue, when they saw him raised from the dead.

What does this all mean? We cannot and must not reduce a relationship with God, Jesus and the Spirit to a set of facts that one can “know” or not. The kind of knowledge that Paul and Jesus are offering is less about knowing *something* and more about knowing *someone*. I’m thinking about how the Spanish verb *saber*is related to knowledge and ability whereas *conocer*communicates the idea of being familiar with something or someone. We are invited and called to become deeply familiar with Jesus, God and the Spirit through abiding with Godself through Christ, not just have some knowledge about God. We don’t follow a far-off God but one who is intimately close and wants to know and be known.

*Note:* *Most of the language here in John 14, especially in verse 17, for the Spirit is gender-neutral. This is awkward in English, and I don’t want to depersonalize the Spirit by typing “it,” so I’ll use “her,” which is my default for speaking about the Spirit, reflecting Hebrew-language gendering when the Greek is inconsistent. Using blanket “him” when the Greek is mostly neuter obscures more than it reveals.*

*This Lectionary Blog, and other resources for the journey of faith, are available on LivingLutheran.org.*



*Cory Driver is the assistant to the bishop for emerging ministers and ministries for the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. His book on wilderness spirituality, Life Unsettled, is available from Fortress Press.*

Not Orphaned

“I will not leave you orphaned,” Jesus promises us in today’s gospel. God is not some ruthless heavenly spectator judging us as on reality television, relishing our failures, wishing to exchange us for a better or more attractive child, no curmudgeonly “Daddy Warbucks” in the sky. Rather, God comes to love us in Jesus, singularly loving and accepting, seeking our trust, promising to be ever-present with us in the Holy Spirit. This Holy Advocate moves us even when we don’t recognize its power, even when it seems “an unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Though we might battle an elemental loneliness, we have not been abandoned.

Many life experiences can leave us feeling orphaned or abandoned. Family can ease that feeling but also magnify it if our family relationships are strained or if our families live far away. Think of those in your congregation who count deployed soldiers among their loved ones in recent years, or construction workers and tradesmen who need to live in hotels far away from their families to keep making money for their families in the recent difficult economy. The Internet, webcams, Skype, and social networking can link people across the miles but can further aggravate loneliness and isolation when these substitute for real intimacy in our highly connected world. How do we experience this loneliness and this longing for home and belonging? How does Jesus’ promise that he will not leave us orphaned speak to these real-life concerns?

When Jesus makes this string of promises in John 14, saying that he will remain with us in the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, it’s hard to envision how this support comes to us sometimes. When we do not get to see or hear those we love, the simple gifts Jesus offers in body and blood, bread and wine shared with real warm neighbors have great power. Even when life keeps delivering bad news about how far apart we are from another, how broken our relationships are, “I will not leave you orphaned” is the godly reassurance that we are not alone.

John 14:15-21

The evangelist placed the discourse of John 14 before the crucifixion and resurrection: recall that Jesus gives over his Spirit in John 19:30 and 20:22. The discourse, narrated as if it were a quotation from Jesus on Maundy Thursday, is a theological reflection by the Johannine community about the love that characterizes the Trinitarian church. Only John refers to the Spirit as “advocate,” meaning “one who is called alongside,” a title for a first-century Greco-Roman defense lawyer. Other translations prefer Comforter.

Acts 17:22-31

By chapter 10 of Acts, Luke has moved the Christian proclamation from Peter’s role in Jewish Jerusalem to Paul’s role in the wider Gentile world. In Athens today a commemorative plaque marks the traditional site of this speech of Paul. This Areopagus was nearby the Parthenon, the city’s primary temple to Athena, and to the temples of other Greco-Roman deities. Paul’s speech is framed to convince polytheists, Stoics, Epicureans, and admirers of classical poetry about the truth of Christ’s resurrection.

1 Peter 3:13-22

After a section describing first-century Greco-Roman household codes of behavior, the author of 1 Peter spoke of the probability of persecutions. The author’s enigmatic comment about “the spirits in prison” assisted the medieval church in constructing its theories of purgatory and hell. The author’s likening baptism to Noah’s flood exemplifies the New Testament adoption of Old Testament narratives as Christian metaphor. The author clarifies that the flood is not literally a washing away, but rather a metaphor for the power of Christ’s resurrection.

*Comments from the Cloud of Witnesses*

*The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, the Spirit of virtue, a commanding Spirit. When we hear of the Spirit, the mind must form to itself an idea of an intelligent Being, infinite in power, of greatness without measure, bounded neither by time nor by ages, bountiful of its own goodness, to whom all turn who need sanctification, to whom all aspire who live in holiness, as though watered and assisted by its breath to arrive at their due perfection. This is a Being who perfects others, itself needing nothing; existing, as not needing to be renewed, yet giving life abundantly; enlarging through no addition, but at once complete; at rest within itself, yet in all places; the source of holiness, the light of the mind, and providing light from itself to every faculty of the soul that searches for truth. So the Spirit, to each one who receives it, as though given to that believer alone, pours forth sufficient and perfect grace to each one, and so is enjoyed by each one.* – Basil (*The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*)

