

Our Celebration of Easter continues.

Sunday, April 19, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church

Greetings:

As we read the appointed Gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter we may feel a common bond with the disciples. We are also behind closed doors this season, a bit fearful of what may come or what can happen. Yet we know now that the Risen One is with us, so we live with hope and profound joy in his presence, even in our anxious moments. We are Easter people, always living in the wonder and joy of Easter.

This week committals and interments were held for Arnold Kruschenske, Gerry Binhammer, Audrey Lehman, Donald Boland and Ellen Gorr at Zion's cemetery. We remember them with love and affection and pray that their families will be comforted and held in God's grace, blessed by the promise of our Easter life, lived together in Christ.

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 and eternal God, the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt, may we, who have not seen, have faith in you and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Readings:

1 Peter 1: 3 – 9

Psalm 16

John 20: 19 – 31

Homily:

Over the 50 days of the Easter season we will hear many stories of the Risen Christ appearing to his disciples and followers. While these stories are all quite different from each other they all have a common thread. It is Jesus who meets the disciples, who seeks them out, who renews their faith in him. Not a single one of the Easter stories have the disciples seeking the Risen Christ. They are either walking away from him, or picking up former occupations or diversions to forget him and his words. They are demoralized and disillusioned...saddened and confused...no longer capable of hope or faith.

Had it not been for Jesus seeking them out, they would never have returned to him. The disciples would never have been able to use the bumper sticker, "I Found Jesus," because Jesus was invariably finding them, seeking them out, taking them home.

We hear one of those stories of Christ seeking out his disciples this morning. Thomas was not in the room when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples as the Risen One. Perhaps he

had needed some time away from everything...feeling overwhelmed or cynical.

Thomas was part of the reason why Jesus returned to the room the next week; but not the only reason. John's Gospel tells us that the first time Jesus came to the disciples the doors were locked...the second time he came to the disciples the doors were merely shut. Jesus is slowly pulling his followers out of their fear and anxiety. He is leading them to that point where they can be the bold witnesses of the resurrection they eventually become, but they still need his encouragement and comforting presence.

We do not know the reason why Thomas returned to the Room and the other disciples and followers of Christ. He could just as easily have walked away for good. But he seemed to have a deep longing for Christ's presence and a love for his brothers and sister in Christ...and that pulled him back. There was still a spark of faith left in Thomas...and the Risen One was not about to let the world snuff that out. Jesus meets everyone one of Thomas demands, with gentleness and grace.

This Easter story reminds us that faith has far more to do with hope than certainty. Faith can be a longing in our hearts and minds...and a sense that God is tugging at our sleeves to get our attention. What we want to celebrate today is that Christ himself is so faithful towards us. He simply did not give up on his disciples...he does not give up on us either...even when we struggle with doubt, even when we find ourselves walking away from Christ and his church, even when we pick up other diversions to occupy our hearts and minds...the Risen One will

come to us. We are never lost to Christ, for he who was lifted up shall draw us all to his life.

Notice how Jesus greets the disciples when he meets them: “Peace be with you.” He did not come to criticize them for their weakness, their failure, their lack of understanding. No, he came to comfort them and restore their hope.

Those in the Church would very soon start to greet each other in their letters and in life with the words, Grace and peace to you. Grace was always first in their greetings, because it is God’s grace at work in our lives that brings us peace. This God, who will not let us go, who treats us with such gentle kindness, is the source of our peace. We are not abandoned in our struggles to be faithful to God in our weakness or our failures. Instead, we are accompanied by God - forgiven, encouraged, cajoled, loved and strengthened. This is the source of the peace that passes all understanding – the grace of God that will not let us go.

There is great comfort in how Christ graciously meets Thomas’ moments of confusion and doubt. He stays with him and helps him believe the truth of the resurrection.

There is a blessing for us in this, for Christ treats us in a similar way. He comes to us in each other’s words of comfort and encouragement, in the words of scripture that speak their hope and comfort to our hearts, and in the sacraments...in the water, in the bread and wine that brings us his very life. He is with us when our faith is sparkling with joyful exuberance and when our faith is clouded with doubt and bewilderment. Even when we spend

most of our lives running away from Christ and his Church we will see him finding ways to meet us, for this is how much Christ loves us and will not let us go.

If we play spiritual hide and seek with Christ he will always win because he never stops looking for us. And for that, along with our beloved friend St. Thomas, we shall always be over grateful. **Amen.**

Prayers of the Faithful:

With Easter joy in our hearts, we celebrate the resurrection of Christ our Lord. Even in the midst of our fear and uncertainty we find our hope renewed by the words of your Gospel. Strengthen us, help us always move from fear to faith, and fill us with joy as we share Christ's victory over death. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones who we cannot be with this Easter. We pray for all who are ill and in need of your healing touch. Hold them in your mercy, and surround them with your holy presence. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who mourn. May our sharing in Christ's risen life bring them comfort as they say farewell to their dear ones who now dwell with Christ in our Heavenly Father's home. We shall see them again, and our hearts will be filled with joy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who do work that now endangers them as they provide for our basic needs. Watch over them, protect them, and bless their holy work. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We look forward to the future, for wherever you lead us we will go trusting in your grace and mercy and the compassion you have shown to us in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer you taught us. Our Father...

May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us always in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen**