**Second Sunday of Easter**

**Service of the Word** (*modified)*

*April 19, 2020*

***Preservice Music and Bell Peal***

**Opening Hymn: CW # 148** v. 1-3, 5 *The Strife is O’er, the Battle Done*

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The strife is o’er, the battle done; Now is the victor’s triumph won;

Now be the song of praise begun. Alleluia!

Death’s mightiest pow’rs have done their worst, And Jesus has his foes dispersed;

Let shouts of praise and joy outburst. Alleluia!

On the third morn he rose again Glorious in majesty to reign;

Oh, let us swell the joyful strain! Alleluia!

Lord, by the stripes which wounded you, From death’s sting free your servants, too,

That we may live and sing to you. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

M: ♫ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ †, and the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. We, therefore, confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

**C: Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

The perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ has removed our guilt forever. We are, therefore, God’s children and by his strength will continue to live for him. Amen.

In the joy of this relationship with our God we pray…

O risen Lord, you came to your disciples and took away their fears with your word of peace. Come to us also in Word and sacrament, and banish our fears with the comforting assurance of your abiding presence; for you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**First Lesson** : **Acts 2:22-32** (EHV)

*When Jesus first arose, the disciples kept locking themselves in an upper room for fear of being arrested next. Following Pentecost they went boldly forth. They were even so bold as to accuse people of the murder of Christ (just as you and I are responsible for his death), but rejoiced because his resurrection proves that all our sins, the very ones which put Jesus on the cross, are forgiven.*

Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man recommended to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know. 23 This man, who was handed over by God’s set plan and foreknowledge, you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross. 24 He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of death, because death was not able to hold him in its grip.

25 “Indeed, David says concerning him:

I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will rest in hope,

27 because you will not abandon my life to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence.

29 “Gentlemen, brothers, I can speak confidently to you about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath that he would seat one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he saw what was coming and spoke about the resurrection of Christ, saying that he was neither abandoned to the grave nor did his flesh see decay.

32 “This Jesus is the one God has raised up. We are all witnesses of that.”

**Second Lesson: I Peter 1:3-9** (EHV)

*Peter was the bold preacher of Pentecost. So also in his letter he forcefully reminds us that by Jesus’ resurrection we are guaranteed of a relationship with Christ, the Father and the Spirit. That relationship carries us through in times of trouble.*

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. 5 Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

6 Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials 7 so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

**Easter Proclamation** *(spoken)*

M: Alleluia! The Lord is risen!

**C: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

*Response (sung)*

**C: ♫ Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! These words are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Gospel Lesson: John 20:19-31** (EHV)

*Locked away, the disciples cannot hide from Jesus. But he seeks them not to confront them about their weakness and fear, but to strengthen them. Even Thomas, the one who will not allow himself to be strong in faith, is granted the opportunity to see and touch Christ, so that he may know beyond all doubt that Christ is risen.*

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you!” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” 22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

24 But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples kept telling him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26 After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Hymn of the Day: CW # 165** v. 1-6 *O Sons and Daughters of the King*

O sons and daughters of the King, Whom heav’nly hosts in glory sing,

Today the grave has lost its sting! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

On that first morning of the week, Before the day began to break,

The Marys went their Lord to seek. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

An angel bade their sorrow flee, For thus he spoke unto the three,

“Your Lord will go to Galilee.” Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

That night th’apostles met in fear; Among them came their Lord most dear

And said, “Peace be unto you here.” Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

When Thomas afterwards had heard That Jesus had fulfilled his word,

He doubted that it was the Lord. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

“Thomas, behold my side,” said he, “My hands, my feet, my body, see;

And doubt not but believe in me.” Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Sermon: John 20:19-31**

**I Am Blind—And I See!**

What a week it was! Accusations, anger, dismissiveness, tears, all punctuated the discussions between disciples. Stubborn Thomas vs. all the rest. They knew Jesus had risen, but he simply would not trust them, and they couldn’t break through that obstinate heart.

But whole sermons could be written about all the stubborn disciples (come to think of it, I’ve preached that sermon)! Our gospel lesson on Easter morning shared that when the women came back from the empty tomb to report that Jesus had risen “these words seemed to them like nonsense, and they did not believe them,” (Luke 24:11).

That afternoon as Jesus walked with two disciples to Emmaus, they told Christ (who had hidden his identity) that they had heard of the resurrection, but just couldn’t wrap their heads around it. Jesus rebuked them, “How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,” (Luke 24:25). Luke reports that when first seeing Jesus that night, the eleven “still did not believe it because of joy and amazement” so Jesus gave them further evidence, when taking a piece of broiled fish “(he) ate it in their presence,” (24:40-43 NIV 84).

So, let’s not compliment the others as being so much more receptive to the truth. They beat Thomas to faith in Jesus’ resurrection by only 7 days! Thomas gets a bad rap as “doubting Thomas”, for there were many more doubting disciples than just one. He has another nickname given that is more helpful in understanding this text. Thomas is also called “Didymus”— “The Twin”.

From the Bible, and from other historical records, we know of no brother or sister who would be Thomas’ twin. It may be a nickname, given by others, which describe a characteristic; just as today we give nicknames based on something about the person. (Can you believe I once was called “skinny bones”?)

Thomas may have had a somewhat dual personality. Of that we do have biblical evidence.

Prior to Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem, which caused all the disciples fear, for they knew this could end badly, Thomas firmly declared, “Let’s go too, so that we may die with him,” (John 11:16). “I don’t know about you guys, but I’m sticking with Jesus!” What an excellent, emphatic faith!

Here in our text he just as resolutely says, “I won’t believe anything you say about Jesus.” Which Thomas is showing up today, the good twin or the evil twin? When it comes to faith, isn’t he a bit “all over the place”?

Wait a minute, now we’re talking about me. Don’t we all have that dual personality of good twin/evil twin when it comes to our faith? That is a deep biblical concept, but shall we just say that we have our good days of faith and our bad days? Which one is showing up today, our inner good twin, or our evil twin?

Thomas didn’t see Jesus that first week, and he refused to see when told of it. Jesus rebuked him, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” But I can’t be so quick to condemn Thomas’ lack of conviction. That famous hymn goes, “I WAS blind but now I see.” No, I AM blind—and I see. I am those twins, the doubter and the believer. God help me become more of the latter.

I need the help, because I am blind. When it comes to that unbelievable resurrection story, do I wish I had proof? Boy, do I!

How grateful I would be for Jesus to be “in my face” right here, right now. “Eat a piece of fish or show me your hands and feet. You gave the first 10 that chance, why not me?” That’s what Thomas was asking for. “Let me see, and touch, and experience.”

We want that because our experience is so contrary to resurrection. Dead people don’t live again. Thomas knew that. It was hard to get past that.

Recently in our mailings, in regard to COVID-19 I have referenced the Bubonic plague as far worse than anything we’re experiencing now. Bubonic plague troubled the earth for centuries, until it was finally defeated mid-last century by penicillin. Doctors are geniuses! Except they’re not. They haven’t raised a dead person to life. That--Thomas and I--we want to see!

In fact, I want to see the power of God anywhere. When prayers are raised to God for slowing the spread of disease, where’s the evidence? When we pray for each other, who are not affected by virus, but only by broken bones, or pneumonia, or diabetes, or mental health issues, or addictions, where’s the power of God?

You see, that’s where I have to say, I am blind. We have prayed in church for members, friends and relatives, and guess what? They’re better! Our members report that prayers have been effective for them and their friends. Can’t we believe them? God is proving his power all around us every day. Sometimes, I just don’t see. God forgive my blindness!

In one sense we are in good company—or bad company depending on how you look at it. With loving patience, our Savior frequently said, “You of little faith,” why did you doubt, or fear, or debate, or worry, or “fill in the blank…”? Peter was walking on water by Jesus’ invitation, then he looked at the waves and felt the wind and began to sink. The disciples were worried about not bringing enough bread along for a journey, so Jesus asked, “How many baskets of leftovers were there, when I fed the 5,000?” “Twelve.” “Don’t you get it, you of little faith? I’m showing you power all the time!” (Mark 8). Such a weakness we have.

Then we realize that failing to believe is a sin. No different than murder or adultery, distrust of God goes against God’s will. Jesus said, “This is the work of God: that you believe in the one he sent,” (John 6:29). If we don’t believe Jesus, or anything Jesus says or does, including his physical resurrection, we are contradicting what God expects of us.

The scriptures give multiple examples of people, who, for the love of money, fame, or power have “wandered from the faith.” They are condemned, even as St. Paul wrote, “(they were) handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme,” (I Timothy 1:20). It is a dangerous and damnable thing to distrust God. Blind to the truth of God is not a state of affairs to remain in.

There’s good reason that St. John follows the report of Thomas’ doubt with the immediate assurance, “Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Peter reminds us, “We were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” (II Peter 1:16). We have reports of real events so that we trust all of them. St. Peter was not a perfect believer, nor was St. John. Just like them, some days I am blind. But they were inspired by God so that we might see.

We see, first, the disciples with all their warts and blemishes. Do you think that Peter, if he could do something about it, would want his record of denial deleted? Wouldn’t you guess that Thomas would prefer that we never heard this text? But Moses also was fearful. David could be hot-headed and certainly adulterous. Jeremiah the prophet was a whiner, Solomon a backslider into idolatry. But St. Paul tells us why we know these things. “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope,” (Romans 15:6). These were recorded so that we might see the grace and power of God, in that each was strengthened in their faith and firmed up in their actions flowing from faith. Evil twin and good twin they were! If God could restore them to faith, he can work within us to firm it up.

In Scripture we see miracles which help firm up our faith. After the raising of Lazarus, we are told that many of the Jews who “saw what Jesus did believed in him,” (John 11:45). In fact, the very first miracle Jesus did, turning water into wine, “revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him,” (John 2:11). A primary theme in John’s gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God, proven again and again by the words and miracles of Christ.

John, more than any other, records the many times Jesus said, “I am the Light”. Light is an important physical requirement for us to see. Recording what Jesus said and did sheds his light on us so that we might see and believe, just as Thomas came to that.

Will I always follow that light? As long as I live on this earth, I will have that evil twin within me. Paul summarizes it neatly with this statement from Romans 7: “For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate,” (v 15). This sinful nature within me wants me separated from God. This sinful nature within me keeps me blind. This sinful nature within me keeps me dead in my transgressions and sins.

This, then, is the miracle God wants to work in me, to make me alive! Luther spoke of the blessing of Baptism “drowning the old Adam” and bringing the new man forth in its place. Let’s drown the evil twin and let the good twin triumph instead.

Luther, of course, drew that analogy from Scripture. St. Paul shared with the Ephesians: “But God, because he is rich in mercy…made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved,” (Ephesians 2:4-6)!

 A miracle no less astounding than Jesus coming forth from his tomb, is my new self being raised up by God that I might truly live—alive in faith! Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians and for us is this: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his power is for us who believe. It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead,” (1:18-20). May the eyes of our hearts be opened by the power of the Lord.

Sometimes I am still blind. How often is Thomas’ trouble my own; clear witness doesn’t seem to be enough. I merit Jesus’ rebuke: “Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed.” But with his grace and power, I see the light! AMEN

**Hymn: CW # 165** v. 7-9 *O Sons and Daughters of the King*

No longer Thomas then denied; He saw the feet, the hands, the side;

“You are my Lord and God,” he cried. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Blessed are they that have not seen And yet whose faith has constant been;

In life eternal they shall reign. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

On this most holy day of days To God your hearts and voices raise

In laud and jubilee and praise. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Apostle’s Creed**

**I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe 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 is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there 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 sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

**Prayer of the Church**

O precious Savior, Jesus Christ, there is no work or sacrifice we can do to turn away God’s wrath from us. But eternal thanks be yours, because through your suffering and death on the cross you have won full pardon for our sins. The peace of this forgiveness was announced to us all when God raised you from the dead. Then you shared the word of peace with your disciples when you met with them that first evening. May we know, experience and believe that you are alive and have done all for us.

O Father, the reminders of your curse upon sin are still evident: in the thorns, thistles and weeds that plague the ground; in the toil, pain and disease that are so much a part of this life. Fill our hearts with the peace that such things hold no terror for us. We pray for those around us who are affected more than most by these troubles. Grant peace to the heart of Keith Schulrud who has been diagnosed with cancer. Give guidance to the medical staff who work with him that they may find the path of treatment that will help him most. Send your blessing to all who suffer, that they may know you are with them because of what Christ has done.

Holy Spirit, we thank you for giving us faith to accept God’s peace through Christ. Grant that we may remain steadfast in our faith. When we have those days of doubt or uncertainty, firm up our conviction that Christ is risen indeed, and that he rules all for our benefit. Lead us by your Word to trust every truth expressed in the Bible, even those who seem to contradict our experience. Open our eyes to the power of God, shown in Christ’s resurrection, that our old sinful self might be destroyed, and the new man of faith may come forth.

Gracious God, through these broadcasts, bring the blessed message of pardon and peace in the crucified and risen Lord to all, calling them to repentance and faith as well. These things we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus, also as we pray….

**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**

**Closing Prayer and Blessing**

Almighty God, we thank you for teaching us the things you want us to believe and to do. Help us by your Holy Spirit to keep your Word in pure hearts that we may be strengthened in faith, guided in holiness, and comforted in life and in death, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with your and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

**C:**  **♫ Amen. Amen. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn: CW # 153** v. 1, 3, 4 *Alleluia! Jesus Lives*

Alleluia! Jesus lives! He is now the living one;

From the gloomy house of death Forth the conqueror has gone,

Bright forerunner to the skies Of his people, yet to rise.

Jesus lives! Why do you weep? Why that sad and frequent sigh?

He who died our brother here Lives our brother still on high,

Lives forever to bestow Blessings on his Church below.

Jesus lives! And thus, my soul, Life is your eternally;

Joined to him, your living head Where he is, you too shall be;

You with him at his right hand Victor over death shall stand.

**Announcements**

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We gladly are sending out printed copies of the service each week, since we are not able to gather for public worship. If this is the best that we can provide at this time, we pray that you benefit spiritually from it. We did want you to know, however, that each email address of members that we have can save us $0.55 each week. If you are able to receive email, and haven’t yet signed up, please send the address to: osinfo@oursaviorswausau.org.

Overall, our weekly offerings have been gratifying, though as you might expect, the average is down from when we were last meeting together. Please continue to make your church your priority in the proportion that the Lord blesses you.

We will celebrate the Lord’s Supper following the service next Sunday from 10:30 am to 12:00 noon. Please read the monthly Newsletter for details.

