APRIL 19, 2020 SERVICE

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

Ever-Living God, you are the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt. In this season when we have more questions than answers about the unknown, may we, who are not always able to see, be given the grace we need to have faith in you and receive the fullness of Christ’s blessing in the here and now, through the gifts that come through your ever gracious and living faithfulness to meet us right where we are. Amen.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

19When 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.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

  24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So 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.”

  26A 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.” 27Then 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.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

  30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But 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

Peace may feel a bit hard to come by these days.

What is there around us and within us that is actually peaceful?

The anxiety of the unknown is so palpable right now.

There is much cause for restlessness throughout these pandemic times,

and even if most have not become sick from this scary COVID virus,

no one is immune to the worldwide distress that has come with it.

Peace be with you, we hear Jesus repeat to his disciples

 who are found locked away in fear.

To those scared for their lives.

To those scared that there is nothing for them but tombs of death.

Or bewildering tales of empty tombs.

Peace be with you, Jesus repeats to his disciples.

As he shows them his death-scarred hands and side,

revealing that although he did die,

 he was not overcome by the worst of death.

There is something other than death for us in this life.

Peace be with you, Jesus repeats to his disciples.

And he breathes upon them the Holy Spirit to be received,

to breathe within us all the forgiveness needed after betrayal,

after running away and hiding,

after letting the beloved one be left alone to face the worst of it all,

after not being as brave as disciples pretend they can be,

before they face challenges that are too overwhelming.

Peace be with you, Jesus repeats to us, who are afraid and locked away, who are overwhelmed by what is before us.

Peace Jesus, even now?

Peace when our economy is crashing?

Peace when only some are shielded and can remain working

or receive a wage subsidy, and are others are not so fortunate,

and can barely pay bills and put food on the table?

Peace when people are losing their resilience to this chaotic mess,

and we are witnessing an increase of domestic violence,

more reliance on addictive substances,

and people are breaking down mentally?

Peace when so many people are struggling

with being cooped up in their homes, and are unraveling

because of the anxiety that comes with isolation

and not being able to connect with others?

Peace when our sick and elderly are dying in care homes and hospitals?

It’s hard to make sense of these times.

Hard to feel at peace.

Hard to think that Jesus has something to show us through our fear, through his death scarred experience.

Hard to believe that there is something life-giving here for us to receive.

Hard to feel that the breath of God is breathing within us

the wholeness and restoration that our souls, our whole society,

our whole world so longs to be real.

That we are not just left with some fleeting promise

 that comes from tales of tombs emptied of death.

And because it is hard to enter into the peace

given to us in the here and now,

we just honestly doubt it can exist.

Doubt that there is something here for us, for me,

and not just those who have glimpsed life and peace.

In this time of chaos where the stench of death is just too close

 to our noses, and the fear of the unknown to close to our souls,

we can doubt that the risen one has ever walked amongst us

with his nail scarred hands and feet,

with his Holy Spirit renewing and comforting breath.

We can question if this whole Easter thing,

this resurrected life in the here and now, and not just at the end of time, when our time here on earth is over, can even exist.

And when we doubt we are an Easter people,

is the time that we are to follow Thomas’ lead, to learn from the one who missed out on this amazing experience because he happened to be the only brave one to step out of that locked room,

maybe even the one who was getting their weekly groceries.

If we feel like we missed out,

it is the time, when we can say like Thomas: “Prove it Jesus.”

“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.”

Come on now, are you really here Jesus?

Peace be with me?

Holy Spirit is here to renew me, forgive me, and make me brave again?

Prove it.

Because I don’t need some fairytale right now.

I need something of substance to stand upon in this instability.

And why wouldn’t we say these things?

What all did we learn in the Lenten desert?

What all have we learned from the journey of the Jewish people,

 of Israel’s walk with God in the desert?

God wants to be wrestled with.

The Lord wants us to be brave enough to wrestle,

to ask of Jesus what we would ask of anyone else that we love,

and who loves us.

Are you with me? Prove it.

Do you love me? Prove it.

Am I promised to be given the gift of peace in this life?

Then give it to me.

Can life come out of death, out of this chaotic mess?

Then let me stick my living hands in your death marked hands

that can still somehow live, and make me believe.

Give me the grace to believe and have peace now, because I ache for it.

Now you may remember the words of our gospel:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Well good for them. Because that’s necessarily you or me right now.

We do not always see. We do not always believe.

So help us see and believe God.

Because we cannot possibly do this on our own.

And these locked doors that we are hiding behind,

although they are constricting, are just feeling too good right now,

and keeping us in fear.

So if this is where your faith is at this season, know you are not alone.

There is one who felt similarly.

And Jesus heard Thomas’ doubt, Thomas’ challenge,

Thomas’ need, and showed up for him.

And Jesus will hear your doubt, your challenge, your need,

and show up for you too.

Because grace doesn’t show up because we believe.

Grace shows up so that we may believe,

and we may have peace now.

PRAYERS

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Open the doors we close, O God, when we fear those who worship you in different ways. Guide us to unity and harmony so that we may come to respect and cherish our commonalities. Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

Open the paths we ignore, O God, when we prioritize financial gain and convenience over listening to the groaning of the earth. Inspire all to care for the world you have made so that living things might thrive.

Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

Open the rooms we lock, O God, to those who live without a homeland or place of safety. We pray that generous nations offer refuge and peace for all.

Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

Open the hearts we close, O God, to the cries of those in pain. We pray for those isolated physically or emotionally throughout this time of physical distancing, and also those struggling with incarceration, addiction, mental illness, chronic suffering, grief. We lift up to you all in need and affected by the COVID virus or the distress of it (*especially those whom we name aloud or silently within our hearts*). Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

Open the ways of love, O God, in the pursuit of peace throughout the world, and bless the efforts of healthcare professionals and frontline workers, all those who are working to bring relief to us at home. Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

Open the way to eternal life, O God, as we remember those who have died in faith. Free us from the fear of death, that we embrace the peace you have promised. Lord, by your grace, **open us up**.

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

BLESSING

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead

raise you to new life, fill you with hope,

and turn your mourning into dancing.

Almighty God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,

bless you now and forever. Amen.

PEACE

My friends, Christ’s peace be with you always,

and show you all the life that is found in nail-scarred hands.