



Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge

Sunday April 11, 2021

2nd Sunday of Easter Worship at Home

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Take a moment to quieten yourself, and to prepare for worship, bringing your heart and mind to this time with God. (you may light a candle for your time of worship)

Call to Worship:

Psalm 133

Behold, how good it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head, running down over the collar of Aaron's robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.

For there the Lord ordained God's blessing, life forevermore. Amen.

Opening Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

God of new life, we come to you, rejoicing in the mystery of the Risen Christ, present among us always, even when we least expect him. We marvel at your constant love, your victory over evil and death, and your resurrecting hope which embraces us in every circumstance. Trusting in these gifts, we seek to live as Easter people in every place and time. Strengthen us with the gift of your Holy Spirit in this time of worship, and bless us with your peace through Christ, our Risen Lord.

Yet even as we delight in Easter's promise, let us confess the ways we fail to live it out:

Merciful God, we confess there are times when our trust in you weakens, and we become anxious about many things. We talk about love, but we are gripped by fear of those who differ from us.

We cling to our personal agendas and forget you call us to live as a community of believers.

Forgive us for seeking our own interests before the needs of others. Open our eyes to the many signs of your love for us. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, rekindle our passion for you, so we can work together to witness to your love. As we pray using the words, He taught us:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 20: 19 – 31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him,

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection: "No Doubt about it"

It wasn't until I travelled to Mexico (on a Girl Guide trip) that I learned that each piece of silver has a mark on it; a mark placed by the jeweller or the manufacturer. This marking is the hall mark because when items made of silver were made, they were produced by a guild or union and at one time those guild members met in a large room called a hall.

The hall mark tells us two things. First it tells us that the item is actually what it appears to be made of pure silver and that it is not mixed with other cheaper materials. It is a guarantee of quality and purity. And secondly, it tells you where the product comes from. And in Mexico as we were shopping for our various souvenir items, we were to keep an eye out for the hall mark "MEXICO 925".

And in some ways hall marks can help us understand today's scripture readings from the Gospel of John. Thomas had not been with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection, and when they told him about it his first reaction was pretty normal, he didn't believe it! Thomas had a healthy scepticism, and like most people who have a healthy scepticism, he would not believe until he first had some proof, and he did not hesitate to tell the others that. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands", he said, "and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe it".

And Thomas' reaction is pretty similar to most people. Most of us, no matter what is said about how blessed it is for us to believe without seeing reality is that we want to see first. Like Thomas, we want some evidence before we accept as truth what other people tell us, particularly when they are telling us things that seem impossible. Thomas would not believe until he himself saw the marks on Jesus. I believe that no one can fault him for that, particularly since he was being confronted with a story that simply defies human imagination.

We know, of course, how the story of Thomas came about. Jesus appeared again to the disciples a week later, and the first person he speaks to, after he says to his disciples "Peace be with you", is Thomas. "Put your finger here", he says to Thomas. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." And Thomas seeing him, believes and says to him, and I can imagine the awe and conviction in his voice, "My Lord, and my God!" Tradition has it that later in life Thomas became the apostle to the nations east of Israel, and that he died a martyr's death in India. Because he saw the risen Lord with his own eyes he believed. He believed and went forth (as the other disciples did) and spread the Good News about Jesus. Jesus died so that we would know the love of God, and that he rose from the dead so that we might know that God's love is forever and that all who follow him receive eternal life.

The more technology we have available to us it seems like more and more people want proof positive results. Proof before they believe and say to Jesus: my Lord and my God? How do we provide some evidence that Jesus is risen from the dead? I know that Jesus said to Thomas after showing him the marks of his death, the marks of his love: "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." But I do not think quoting that verse to a sceptic will help very much. And I don't think either that Jesus was suggesting that we should not present proof to others of his resurrection as we attempt to fulfil the commission, he gave us to baptize and make disciples of all the nations. Far from it.

Indeed, when you look at the gospel reading today one thing stands out very clearly. The very first time Jesus appeared to his disciples in the upper room he showed them the marks of his love - this a full week before he showed Thomas the wounds that pierced his hands and his side. For this reason, I think what Jesus meant when he said - "Blessed are those who have NOT seen and yet have believed" is simply and precisely that. Blessed indeed are people who accept Jesus as their Saviour, their risen Lord, without having had any proof presented to them. Blessed are they who start walking in faith before they have all the answers to their questions, because they will start experiencing the benefits of faith straight away. In other words, Jesus was not suggesting that there are no blessings for those who believe only after seeing, he was only suggesting that doubt can get in the way of our experiencing those blessings.

Jesus presented the marks of his love to his disciples so that they might believe and go forth as his apostles and baptize and make disciples of all the nations. He showed the marks of his love so that the blessings that faith in him brings might become available to more people.

Today it is still the same. But rather than the marks of his love being shown in his physical body, they are shown, or are meant to be shown in us, in the people of his church, which is everywhere called the Body of Christ.

There is an old tradition in the Church that says that some of the Saints have shown the stigmata, that their hands and sides sometimes have bled and looked as if they were pierced by a sharp object, even though no such object has come near them; that marks would occasionally appear on their heads as if thorns had been pushed down upon them. It is a mystical tradition - this one of the stigmata, something beyond what we normally experience or witness, but it is a tradition that points us in the right direction for it states that there is something we can show to convince the world of our genuineness, that there is a hallmark that they can look for that proves that someone has fellowship with God and with Christ Jesus his Son. Quite simply that hallmark is a life that resembles his, a life of light, and of truth, and of faith. But the most notable part of the hallmark of Christ that we bear when we are truly in him and he in us - is our love for each other and our desire in that love to be fellowship with one another and work together in harmony despite all worldly differences that may exist between us.

A few years ago, I attended a community concert, and I delighted in watching the guest conductor. The choir members were as different in age, stage, as each one of us. But when the choir director/ the conductor raised her arm and gave the choir their direction they made beautiful harmony. This experience is an analogy not only of the early church and its believers, who are described in The Book of Acts as being one in heart and mind, but also of today's church and today's believers.

When I came home from my three years in Scotland I was struggling. My faith was strong but I was trying to find my place within my family and within my church family. I very much considered going to another church one that would be more exciting, and would be fulfilling to what I perceived that I needed.

A very wise person (a retired minister who was a good friend and mentor) sat down with me as I struggled to discern my direction. And he reminded me that despite all the experiences that I had that my home congregation had been praying for me, and continued to love me throughout the time that I was overseas. And so, I got down off my "hobby horse" of that experience and started to use what I had learned, and to share it with my home congregation – my church family. I came to love and to know my Lord more closely and came to realize that God was setting me apart for further work. It was not an easy time but it was God filled and a God blessed time to walk this walk with the Lord. I came home a stranger, my hall mark had been tarnished and it needed to be buffed up, and cleaned up, and prepared for further service.

Do we do this in our church. Do we help one another, and those whom we meet to love one another as Christ has loved us? Be patient and kind to one another. Forgive one another. Trust and believe in the Lord. And together we will be shown something that we are in constant need of, Christ's love for us!

I never had a problem believing in the resurrection because I saw the marks of Christ in his body in the people who claimed his name and who walked with me, and who walks with each one of us as we do our very best to live by his law. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe! But blessed too are those who have seen, blessed are those who have seen the marks of Christ in us and have believed! And blessed too are we who have those marks, blessed are we who have fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and who show it by how we love each other. We are a people who make can music because we have a conductor whom we can follow, we have Jesus to direct us. Look at those who have the hallmark of Christ upon them, those who walk in light and live by the love of their Master, and learn from them. Look for the hallmarks and pray that they may be seen in you, that God might purify you and place his seal of salvation upon you. AMEN

Sung Response: "Thine be the Glory" # 258

Thine be the glory Risen conquering Son Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won
Angels in bright raiment Rolled the stone away Kept the folded grave clothes Where Thy body lay
Thine be the glory Risen conquering Son Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won

Lo! Jesus meets us Risen from the tomb Lovingly, He greets us Scatters fear and gloom

Let the church with gladness Hymns of triumph sing

For her Lord now liveth Death hath lost its sting

Thine be the glory Risen conquering Son Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won

Our Offerings:

You are able to make your offering by sending a **cheque or using the PAR** (pre-authorized remittance). For Rockway contact Bonnie Roland (905-685-3985), 213 Rykert Street, St. Catharines, ON L2S 2B5 and for North Pelham contact Janice Aulph (905-892-5244) or mail 602 Metler Rd, Fenwick L0S 1C0 or drop them in the mailbox.

Prayer of Dedication Let us pray:

Generous God, we thank you for the hope and joy we find in your resurrecting power. Bless the gifts we bring so they may spread that hope and joy in the world you love. In the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Thank you, loving God, for your renewing presence in our lives, and for the many ways you make yourself known to us: in words spoken in peace, in actions that embody love, in creation that awakens wonder within us, and in worship that inspires faith and understanding.

With memories of the grace, you have shown us, and with confidence in you will yet show us more, we pray that all people will come to know the life-giving joy we find in Christ.

We pray for those who are feeling fearful, worried or overwhelmed, especially as the months of pandemic restrictions stretch on.

We pray for those who face violence and unrest each day, in countries around the world and at home in our own communities.

We pray for our national, provincial, and municipal leaders as they lead planning for our communities to recover from the pandemic. Give them wisdom and compassion,

We pray for our congregation, for churches in our community, and for Christians around the world, especially those who face persecution.

We pray for our neighbours, especially for those who live in poverty and those who know rejection and discrimination.

We pray for those who are ill, in pain or in grief. We remember before you, silently or aloud, those on our hearts today. *(Keep a time of silence)* Bring them comfort and strength, God our Maker, hear our prayers, and use us in ways we may not yet even imagine to respond to those around us with the love we see in Jesus Christ and the confidence we draw from his resurrection. With hopeful hearts we offer these our prayers in God's most precious name. Amen.

CLOSING BLESSING

Let your life be a sign of Christ's life so that others may come to believe that the Lord is risen indeed. This is the blessing of the Lord: life forevermore. Alleluia! Amen

Sung Response: Go Now in Peace

Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Don Besig & Nancy Price © 1988

**We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional
territory of the Haudensaunee and Annishnaabee**

**With the provincial Stay at Home order,
Worship and activities have been suspended at both churches.**

Mission Moment – Annakala Finds Answers at Shining Hospital

In Nepal, Annakala Nepali was living in significant discomfort. Severe problems with her fingers, along with loss of sensation in her legs and tingling in her body were followed by vision problems. In Annakala's community, many people prefer traditional healers to address their medical problems – Annakala decided to do the same. However, she still suffered after the visit. Her daughter-in-law, on seeing her in pain and suspecting that it might be due to leprosy, encouraged Annakala to visit the Presbyterian World Service & Development-supported Shining Hospital. Once she was admitted to the hospital, she was officially diagnosed with leprosy and started treatment, which has improved her symptoms and pain. Annakala is very grateful for the Shining Hospital's care, love and support.

Worship at Home for Sunday April 25th (WMS Mission Awareness Sunday) will be prepared by Rev. Nicole Reid, minister of Cornerstone Ministry, Dunnville. It is a Sunday when you are able to make a donation to our local WMS. More information will follow.

