

Introduction

The Easter season is a week of weeks, seven Sundays when we play in the mystery of Christ's presence, mostly through the glorious Gospel of John. Today we gather with the disciples on the first Easter, and Jesus breathes the Spirit on us. With Thomas we ask for a sign, and Jesus offers us his wounded self in the broken bread. From frightened individuals we are transformed into a community of open doors, peace, forgiveness, and material sharing such that no one among us is in need.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the day of our Lord's resurrection. By the grace of Christ among us, enable us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Acts 4:32-35

While the apostles testified to others about the resurrection of Jesus, the early Christian community shared what they owned or sold their possessions to help their fellow believers who were in need.

³²Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

³⁵They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Psalm 133

¹How good and how pleasant it is,
when kindred live together in unity!

²**It is like fine oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard,
upon the beard of Aaron, flowing down upon the collar of his robe.**

³It is like the dew of Hermon flowing down upon the hills of Zion.
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing: life forevermore.

Second Reading: 1 John 1:1--2:2

The opening of this letter serves as a reality check. The reality of God is light, but our confessed reality has been sin. God cleanses us from our sinful reality through Christ's death so that we live in fellowship with Christ and walk in God's light.

¹We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

^{2:1}My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31

The story of Easter continues as the risen Jesus appears to his disciples. His words to Thomas offer a blessing to all who entrust themselves in faith to the risen Lord.

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.

Prayers of Intercession

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love. saying “hear us, O God,” and responding, “your mercy is great.”

A brief silence.

You shower your church with grace, O God. Unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You proclaim the blessing of life forevermore. Like dew upon the mountains, refresh your creation. Restore waters, cleanse the air, and provide revitalizing moisture to parched land. Give your whole creation the promise of new life. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You direct the nations, O God. Guide all in authority, that they shepherd their peoples in the ways of your love. Defeat in us our impulse to war. Bestow the peace of Christ upon those in authority and breathe upon them the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You place within the heart of the church a spirit of sharing. Give us the power of your generous Spirit, that we provide for the needs of others (*specific needs may be named*). Announce your peace to those who are lonely, hurting, suffering, or afraid. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You give us fellowship with one another in this faith community (*name*). Shine the light of the risen Christ in our life together, so that we live in love for one another and our joy may be complete. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

You share the gift of eternal life. In thanksgiving and remembrance, we recall the lives and gifts of those who now live in endless joy (*especially*). Unite us with them in resurrection hope. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter...

Wounded Resurrection Power Restores Community

Jesus' resurrection confronts the sadness and loneliness of Thomas's doubt. Many people in congregations left last Sunday's celebration of the resurrection with feelings similar to those of Thomas. Somehow, Thomas was not in the right place at the right time to see Jesus show up in the flesh. No doubt, people in the pews can relate to Thomas's missed opportunity. Perhaps they were unable to attend a family Easter gathering. Maybe a bunch of friends had box seats to the hottest game in town, and they were not able to afford one. Maybe a chemo treatment interrupted an opportunity for career advancement. Human beings are endlessly plagued with feelings of not fully belonging to the group, and they desire a savior to use magical power to restore perfection.

Time and again, the disciples seek a messiah who overwhelms them and the world with crushing military might and magical cures. Today, the power of the resurrection is most realized in the real, deep wounds of Jesus' own body. Without those wounds and the real sacrifice that God made on the cross, Thomas's faith would always be hobbled by his overwhelming doubt. Yet people still ask: how can God's reality of overflowing love and life confront and transform our parched world and wounded bodies?

Jesus makes faith happen today by breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and blessing them with peace. He shows Thomas and all God's people that the life-changing resurrection embraces the wounds all people carry. God the Creator's peace, Jesus' wounds, and the breath of the Holy Spirit lead Thomas to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Then, Thomas trusts God to care for his body and his life. Just like Jesus' ministry prior to the cross, Jesus reaches for the outsider and restores Thomas to his place in the community.

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