



Camrose United Church
Sunday April 11, 2021
Seen, Heard, and Known
Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

Coming into Worship

In the faith stories shared through the ages,
and in our current life experiences
we are encouraged to listen for God's voice
and to respond to it.

We are now living into the Easter season of the church. One of the root meanings of the word Easter comes from the old English Eostre, meaning "dawn". The dawning of a new day brings with it so many new possibilities.

Our liturgical colours are now White and Gold. White, which is all colours of light combined, represents goodness, innocence and God's faithfulness. While gold has been used as reflections of glory, triumph, wealth, richness and extravagance, it is also associated with illumination, love, compassion, courage and wisdom.
White and gold combined are colours of celebration.

The stories of Eastertide, speak to us of Jesus return in those first days, but also how the community responded to God's call and Jesus admonition to
Love each other and to work together.

In this time when we hear stories of
God's dawning... of God's goodness... of God's faithfulness
May our hearts be drawn toward places that challenge us
to find and follow the Holy in all our days and actions.
Come, let us worship and learn together

Hymn: ♪ VU175 This Is the Day That God Has Made

Scripture Reading:

John 20:19-31 *New International Version*

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

19 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!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 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."

26 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!" 27 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."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The Purpose of John's Gospel

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 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.

Wondering:

As I thought about this scripture, I wondered...

Why do we become skeptical when we find ourselves in unfamiliar times and places?

How strong is my faith?

Do I need to see to believe?

I wonder what other stories were not recorded?

Hymn: ♪ We Walk by Faith, and Not by Sight

Prayer for Awareness and God's grace.

Resurrected Christ,
the one who has overcome death and doors alike,
we recognize that any gathering of believers is sacred.
God, we know that you meet us exactly where we are.

But there are times when we are overcome by fear;
times when our faith fails,
times when we close ourselves off to you.
times when we ignore the needs of others.

There are times when
we hold on to our worldly possessions with tight fists,
we let our differences tear us apart
we have turned away from the suffering in the world
we have made mistakes

Forgive us, God.

Come to us again,
showing us the power of love to triumph over evil
showing us the power of love to connect us
showing us the power of love to lift us from
the mess into the mystery.
May we see your love in each new day you offer us.
Amen.

Words of Assurance

On this Holy Earth, in this life filled with Holy possibilities
God sees what we cannot.
God sees the full extent of the struggles we face.
God sees, loves, empowers, and keeps us in grace.
God's forgiveness is ageless and abundant.
God is with us. We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

Scripture Reading:

Acts 4:32-35 New International Version

The Believers Share Their Possessions

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Scripture is our song for the journey,
the living word passed on from generation to generation
to guide and inspire.

**God calls us to be doers of the word
and not hearers only.**

Reflection:

Easter Sunday is celebrated as a day of light and love and the gift of new life: Jesus rose from the dead, giving a glimpse of the power of God.

We rejoice. We should and we need to.

This story teaches us that God can and will lift us from terror, horror, hurt and a cruel world, into a place of calm, healing and love that we can only imagine. This story invites us to stand up for truth and justice, the weak and the vulnerable, to know that God will be right beside us every step of the way.

But this Easter thing we celebrate is, a momentary flash in the pan. The brightness of the light and the love of that day and time were quickly dimmed by the human realness of fear, of worry, of stubbornness.

In our first reading, we encounter those disciples again... the ones who often questioned, the ones who weren't quite sure, the ones who sometimes didn't have the courage to stand up for what they believed in. We meet them as they hid.

They recognized that, because of the events of the previous days, they could be targets for the Roman Empire. They had probably spent their Passover Sabbath worrying about what had happened.

Then they heard reports of Jesus rising from the dead – what was with that? Who believed that could happen? And if it had what were they supposed to do about it?

Into these terrified hearts and troubled souls, Jesus appeared to them through locked doors and windows. As happens in these COVID times when we, too, find ourselves huddling in small groups of family to be safe, Jesus came to them in their fear and said "Peace be with you."

Knowing their frustration, their problems with being locked down, locked in, Jesus basically said “Calm yourselves, it will be alright”

He told them what they needed to know. Not everything that had happened to him, but enough that they would be assured that there was hope to live forward into.

Then we meet Thomas. Thomas wasn't there when they got the first Jesus news. We don't know why he wasn't there. Perhaps he was looking for food for the group, perhaps he was trying to find out more information about the Roman plans, perhaps he was looking after other Jewish families who were afraid. We don't know.

What we do know is that, in this atmosphere of fear and terror, Thomas, a loyal disciple, needed to see for himself the glimpse of Jesus, the glimpse of hope, that others had seen.

It was not enough to be told: he needed to see.

Jesus didn't come back that very same day. Thomas had to wait a week before he received the answer he was asking for? I think that Jesus gave a gentle reminder that if others share information with you, and you consider them credible resources, you should act on that information.

As I look at this particular scripture in our COVID context, I see some parallels to our living today: we are threatened by something that is unpredictable; we are finding ourselves feeling trapped together and helpless to make good decisions; we don't trust the people around us when they share information; and we want answers quicker than they may be available or even if it is wise for us to have them.

Jesus' advice to those disciples was to be calm, to be at peace with where they were and to trust that God would be with them.

I wonder if that is the advice God is offering us today? To be calm, to trust those we know have the skills to offer us information – even if we haven't seen it for ourselves.

Thomas reminds me of the folk who refuse to believe what everyone else knows until they see it with his own eyes. But in our context, this means that someone we know and love must be made ill or die from COVID for us to see it exists. Jesus said, you are more blessed if you believe without seeing.

Our second reading is a jump ahead from those first days of Easter fear. We begin our journey through the book of Acts where we see how the community that followed Jesus tried to change their behaviour to fit their faith. They banded together for the good of all. They put everything they had together and then shared it out equally between all of the community members. Some put in more than others, but they all received the same out.

As they travelled into life from Easter morning, that time of fear and disbelief, the community realized that they couldn't stay hiding in a room, that there was other work to be done. So, when the time was right, they began to address other concerns.

In comparing ourselves to the disciples, we see that we still need to heed the advice and information about trusting the right people and following their advice, but that we must now be aware of others who need support and advocacy.

On Thursday this week, April 8, United Churches were invited to join our Moderator, Richard Bott, in advocating for Basic Guaranteed Income. Richard's voice was accompanied by other former Moderators and other church leaders from other denominations as they asked us to ensure that all receive the opportunity to have a certain, basic, dignified quality of life.

Let us hear the lessons of our faith: calm ourselves down; exercise the patience that is needed to wait for answers; look for opportunities to live the love that God gives us; be aware that there are many others worse off than we are who need us to bring Easter light in their life.

Let us be unafraid to ask our questions, but also courageous enough to live care in the world before we have all of the answers.

Let Peace be with us, and come from us into this hurting world.

Hymn: ♪ Come and See (choir)

Offering Invitation & Dedication

As we recognize today that God's presence is in our everyday living, we also recognize that we are called to be the physical embodiment of that presence in the world.

Let God be in our open eyes, open hands and open hearts as we offer the best we can for God's people.

**May the gifts of
our hearts, our labour, our treasure
enable the church to be
the light of God's Holy love in the world.**

Hymn: ♪ MV#145 Draw The Circle Wide

Pastoral Prayers

In the dawning of new opportunities to see and be God's love, we remember the gift of possibilities that God offers us in each new day.

Holy One,

We offer our prayers for those
who do not always experience those possibilities
to their fullest.

**We pray for the ones who huddle together,
afraid of violence, afraid of hunger,
afraid of danger, afraid.**

We pray for the ones who need you, O God,
but whose lived life experiences
have made them doubt the truth of caring.
May your peace be with them.

We pray for the ones who are willing
To try new things,
To make new communities,
To share what they have so that the world will be
a better, wiser, willing place.
May your peace be with them.

We pray for the ones who have lost so much,
their homes, their families, their loved ones.
**May your love fill in the cracks of their brokenness
with the gold of compassion, courage and wisdom.**

**We pray for ourselves,
that we would be bold enough to have
faith in the mystery that you offer us;
that we would be open to your unexpected presence;
that we would accept your truth, your way
and share it in our words and actions.
Amen.**

✠ Sending Forth and Blessing

In the reality of life,
there are Holy moments; and places
waiting for us to recognize and live into them

God is ready to help us find our moment.
In this Easter season,
God shows us the mystery and possibilities
that love brings.

May the creative love of God,
the inviting path of Jesus,
the power of the Holy Spirit
pull us into a life of abundance,
gratitude and blessings
and be with us now and always.
Amen.

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth,
showing us where we are and where we are meant to be.
The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with
us wherever we go.

✠ Sending Song: 🎵 Every Morning Is Easter Morning...

Inspired by:

2020 Seasons of the Spirit™ Seasons FUSION Lent • Easter 2021
Gathering, L/E 2021 (Year B) : Sunday by Sunday page 9; page 20.



