

Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren

Long Green and Kanés Rds., near Glen Arm, MD

April 3, 2016

Worship 10:00 am Sunday School 11:10 am

Large print hymnals are available see an usher

This room is equipped with a sound loop for the hearing impaired

Second Sunday of Easter

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.
(Revelation 1:8)*

Beginning with Praise (9:50 am) "Who are these" (insert)

Announcements

Prelude/Preparing the way

*Call to Worship Revelation 1:4b-6

*Hymn "Thine is the glory" 269

*Opening Prayer

Affirming Faith 713

Sharing a joy, a concern, a word of testimony or praise
(please be brief, and aware of God's listening presence)

Hymn "God sent his Son" 345

Pastoral Prayer

Returning our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory (Please sign the attendance pad and pass it on)

Imagining Gospel John 20:19-31

Hymn "Who are these" (insert)

Message *"Receive, Forgive, Believe"*

*Passing the Peace

*Hymn "Christ is alive! Let Christians sing!" 279

*Benediction Revelation 1:4b-6

*Postlude

* Rise in body or in spirit
* * * * *

Call to Worship

As we begin worship on this second Sunday of Easter, we find ourselves in the middle of a blessing. On the walls on either side of us, we see old, old words from the last book of the Bible. In Revelation, this blessing was for seven churches in Asia long ago, but it extends to every church in every age. The first phrase on your left speaks of God. The second turns to the crucified and risen Christ, a blessing which extends over to right side of our gathering, completed with an “Amen.” Note the various ways it describes the One who died that we might live, and who lives to lead us.

Now, let us stand in the middle of this blessing from God who surrounds us, and who – through the Holy Spirit - dwells within us. Look and listen ... and be blessed.

Grace to you and peace
from him who is and who was
and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us
and freed us from our sins by his blood,

and made us to be a kingdom, priests
serving his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.

Revelation 1:4b-6 from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*,
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the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
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Remain standing, and sing:
“Thine is the glory”
#269 in your hymnal.

Opening Prayer

O living Christ,
come to us in the glory of your risen power;
come to us in the humility of your wondrous love.
Come and reign among us!
Let new life course through our veins,
new love bind us together,
and new vision spur us on to follow you forever.
Even so, come Lord Jesus. AMEN

Hymnal #677,
from The Iona Community, Scotland,
The New Book of Christian Prayers,
© 1986 Tony Castle. Edited by Tony Castle.
Crossroad/Continuum Publishing Company.

Please be seated.

Affirming Faith

An *affirmation of faith* is like a spark intended to start a fire. By itself, it does nothing. But when applied to the tinder of a community gathered by the Holy Spirit, there is a flame, as these people seek to live out the words. Our Brethren forebearers were not enamored with creeds, believing that the whole New Testament provided this spark. Creeds can be used as a test, and can seek to put out God's spark, rather than ignite God's people to greatness.

Our Mennonite cousins, with whom we share our hymnal, are not as averse to creeds. In fact, #713 in the back of this hymnal, was written in 1969 especially for their previous hymnal. It follows a Trinitarian pattern, speaking of Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. Then it talks of us as God's people – the church. I invite you to join in this affirmation of faith. As you do so, ponder the phrases that are like a spark to you. These words don't define everything, neither do they put a choke-hold on faith. They are but a spark intended to start a fire. Let's together give them voice.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
who was promised to the people of Israel,
who came in the flesh to dwell among us,
who announced the coming of the rule of God,
who gathered disciples and taught them,
who died on the cross to free us from sin,
who rose from the dead to give us life and hope,
who reigns in heaven at the right hand of God,
who comes to judge and bring justice to victory.

We believe in God,
Who raised Jesus from the dead,
who created and sustains the universe,
who acts to deliver God's people in times of need,
who desires everyone everywhere to be saved,
who rules over the destinies of people and nations,
who continues to love us even when we turn away.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who is the form of God present in the church,
who moves us to faith and obedience,
who is the guarantee of our deliverance,
who leads us to find God's will in the word,
who assists those who are renewed in prayer,
who guides us in discernment,
who impels us to act together.

We believe God has made us a people,
to invite others to follow Christ,
to encourage one another to deeper commitment,
to proclaim forgiveness of sins and hope,
to reconcile people to God through word and deed,
to bear witness to the power of love over hate,
to proclaim Jesus the Ruler of all,
to meet the daily tasks of life with purpose,
to suffer joyfully for the cause of right,
to the ends of the earth,
to the end of the age,
to the praise of Christ's glory.

Returning our Tithes and Offerings

When we pray, we place ourselves and others into God's hands. Our words don't really do anything. They don't "make" God do anything. God is God, after all, the One who is and who was and who is to be, the alpha and omega, our beginning and our end. God knows our thoughts, our requests, our concerns, our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our joys before we ever figure out how to give them voice. Still, the One who is with us always, till the end of the age, is an active part of our conversation – which is what prayer is: a dialog, a back and forth connection, a conversation based in a loving relationship. Of course, as I said, God is God. We're not exactly buddies. There is silence as big as eternity between all our words. Still...

It's a natural flow to move from prayer to the action of giving toward the ongoing mission of the church. However, do remember that our offerings are, like prayer, a back and forth affair. God provides, we return from what we have received. An offering is really just another way of praying. We call it "thanks giving." Our offerings are not limited to what we put in the plate. Our day-to-day living can be an offering, a prayer. Such an awareness changes how we look at the world around us, and the people who inhabit our days. How I relate to my neighbor is an offering, a prayer... Think about that as the organist and the ushers guide our giving.

Imagining Gospel

John 20:19-31

For this morning's gospel reading, we need to put on our "imagination," for we have the second of three stories told about the resurrection of Jesus in the gospel of John. The first happened Easter morning and, according to John, only Mary Magalene journeyed to where Jesus was buried. There she found his tomb empty, and ran back to the others with this news, which was not to her, at that point, "good news." "*They've taken his body,*" was her outraged and terrified report. Peter and the unnamed beloved disciple went to check it out, and found what she said was true.

Mary remained at the tomb after they left. There she encountered two angels, who asked why she was crying. Did she see them as heavenly beings at that point? Who knows! She repeated her report: "They've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him." Turning around, she encountered another man, whom she presumed to be a cemetery gardener. He asked the same question as the angels. Her response was just shy of an accusation: "*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.*" Then he spoke her name, and she recognized him. It was Jesus.

Our second resurrection story from the gospel of John takes place that evening. Here are the disciples locked in a room. Imagine you are one of them. You have heard Mary's second report: "*I have seen the Lord.*" Even so, everything else has you shaking in your boots. Listen, and imagine the gospel.

⁹ When 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,

Yes, you are afraid. Can you feel this fear? Your heart races. “Fight or flight” is as old as time itself. If we do not control our fear, it controls us. We understand the lock on a door. It keeps danger out. However, it also imprisons us within. We can become lost in fear. If it were not for the One who sets the captives free, that door would remain locked forever.

*Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”*

Can you hear him speak to you even now?

“Peace be with you.”

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

*²¹ Jesus said to them again,
“Peace be with you.*

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Ah, “disciples” now become “apostles” – those who are sent.

*²² When he had said this, he breathed on them
(blow)*

and said to them,

“Receive the Holy Spirit.

*²³ If you forgive the sins of any,
they are forgiven them;
if you retain the sins of any,
they are retained.”*

This is John’s version of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit – the very breath of Jesus... Take a deep breath. Breathe in the Holy Spirit – a cleansing, renewing, empowering breath. Living in this Spirit is like breathing. What has happened to your fear? Is it still imprisoning you behind a locked door? The apostle Paul later wrote: *“God did not give us a spirit of fear, but rather a spirit of power and of love and a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7). Elsewhere it says, *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”* (1 John 4:18)...

Take another deep breath, for our story is not over. One disciple was left out. (pick a volunteer to stand with you for the rest of the story - Thomas)

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

(prompt everyone to speak:)

“We have seen the Lord.”

But he said to them,

(prompt Thomas to speak:)

“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.”

Murphy’s law states: “Anything that can go wrong, will.” How about a “Thomas corollary?” – “If something amazing happens, it always does so when you’re not there.” ... Poor Thomas. He speaks for many of us who never seem to be in the right place at the right time. He also speaks for all who struggle with doubt – which, if truth be told, includes everyone in this room. How do you know if this is for real? I need to see. I need to touch.

Then, I'll believe. That's Thomas. Is that us?

²⁶ A 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.”

²⁷ Then 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.”

²⁸ Thomas answered him,

(prompt Thomas to speak:)

“My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him,

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

With that last sentence, it's like Jesus has turned his focus and is staring down through the centuries into our eyes. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” we sometimes sing. “Were you there when he rose up from the grave?” ... Truthfully, no. We weren't there. We are here, imagining the gospel story. And yet ... we believe!

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

Hymn

“Who are these”

(insert)

Who are these

270

Refrain: Who are these who are be - liev - ers now? These are they who have been shout - ing "Al - le - lu - ia!" They have seen the Sav - ior and have been filled with splen - dor. Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

1. We have met the ri - sen Bride - groom, clothed in robes of
2. With a love that's e - ver last - ing, Christ his life for
7. Praise to God, and praise to Je - sus, who has bro - ken
pur - est bright - ness. Freed from death and all sin's sor - rows,
us has giv - en, and his blood which flows so free - ly
death's strong bon - dage. Praise the Spir - it who sus - tains us,
now we sing with all the right - eous.
is a gift, a sign of heav - en.
now, through - out un - end - ing a - ges.

Passing the Peace

“Peace be with you.”

Benediction

We end with the same words with which we began worship this second Sunday of Easter - a blessing from the last book of the Bible. Though you may not see all of the words now that we are standing, speak with me those words you can see, and listen to those you cannot – which, by the way, is how we approach faith. We may feel more certain about some things along the way. Other things we take by faith, leaning on those who journey with us. However, we stand in the middle of this blessing from our God who surrounds us, and who – through the Holy Spirit - dwells within us. Let us share.

Grace to you and peace
from him who is and who was
and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us
and freed us from our sins by his blood,

and made us to be a kingdom, priests
serving his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.

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