

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 17, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

DIVINE SERVICE ONE



THE ENTRANCE RITE

PRELUDE *This Joyful Eastertide* Setting: Bernard Wayne Sanders

WELCOME

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ENTRANCE HYMN #482 *This Joyful Eastertide*

1 This joyful Eastertide

Away with sin and sorrow!

My love, the Crucified,

Has sprung to life this morrow:

Refrain:

Had Christ, who once was slain,

Not burst His three-day prison,

Our faith had been in vain:

But now has Christ arisen,

arisen, arisen;

But now has Christ arisen!

2 Death's flood has lost its chill

Since Jesus crossed the river;

Lover of souls, from ill

My passing soul deliver: *Refrain.*

3 My flesh in hope shall rest

And for a season slumber

Till trump from east to west

Shall wake the dead in number: *Refrain.*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly

deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.
Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

**This is the feast of victory for our God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

**This is the feast of victory for our God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

Power, riches, wisdom and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His.

**This is the feast of victory for our God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation.
Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.**

**This is the feast of victory for our God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia.

**This is the feast of victory for our God.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray. O God,

the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON Acts 17:16-31

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

"In him we live and move and have our being";
as even some of your own poets have said,
"For we are indeed his offspring."

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 66:8-20

Bless our God, O peoples;
let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept our soul among the living
and has not let our feet slip.

For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.

You brought us into the net;
you laid a crushing burden on our backs;
you let men ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will perform my vows to you,
that which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.

Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.
I cried to him with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
But truly God has listened;
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
Blessèd be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Peter 3:8-17

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so

that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL John 14:15-21

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 14th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (ESV)

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Text: 1 Peter 3:8-17, also Acts 17:16-31 and John 14:15-21

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

In the Gospel lesson just read, we hear Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure. He assures them that he will not leave them alone. Rather, he will send them the Helper – sometimes also known as the Comforter or the Counselor. This Helper is "the Spirit of truth" – the One we commonly call "the Holy Spirit." And yet, somehow, the Helper is also Jesus, for Jesus adds the words: "I will come to you."

Looking back at this preparation of Jesus from our vantage point, we can see that Jesus not only addressed the disciple's fear of being without their leader, but also pointed them toward profound truths that would soon be revealed. After Jesus would depart by ascending into heaven, the Holy Spirit would come to them on the Day of Pentecost. And when the Spirit arrived to lead the disciples on their mission, He would also lead them in articulating the truth of Christ's continued presence—doing so through the Church as it confessed the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

We in the church today still recreate these steps of revelation in our calendar. Next Sunday we will observe the Ascension. The Sunday following, we will celebrate Pentecost. And the Sunday after that we will mark the Festival of the Holy Trinity. These are joyous times in the church.

But today we are still in the Easter season, and the Easter Season this year has us reading texts from Acts and First Peter.

Today's reading from Acts is one which seems to speak to us with ever-greater strength as the years go by, for it describes a situation that many of us relate to more and more. In this reading, Paul enters the great city of Athens. Athens was one of the top cultural and intellectual centers of the world. Athens was filled with Philosophers – those who loved to think, theorize and put forth their ideas. The Athenians loved to debate. And they loved to hear new ideas. The writer of Acts says that they “would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.” That phrase is not a compliment. We get the idea that the Athenians liked hearing new things so that they could talk about them, and show how open they were to them, and then at the end of the day oppose them – explaining how much better their own ideas were.

Does this sound like the world we live in today – with our culture of pundits and talkers? Sounds like it to me.

Because of this similarity, we ought to take note of what Paul did in Athens. Looking at the verbs, we see that he *reasoned, conversed, preached* and *presented*. We also see that he peacefully endured the criticism and labels of others, because some called him a *babbler* and others used that word *foreign* to create suspicion about his message. Through it all, Paul kept on. And God opened a door. It wasn't long before Paul was invited to give a speech at the famed Areopagus. Before we get to the speech, we should point out how Paul's message was summarized. Luke, the writer of Acts, summarizes it as a message about “*Jesus and the resurrection*.” This summary should be a guide for us as we think about our messages today. You may recall that Paul once summarized his own message by saying “*we preach Christ crucified*.” But the story of Jesus must always include the resurrection too. Paul may have singled out the crucifixion at the beginning of his Corinthian correspondence, but by the end he was dedicating a whole chapter to the resurrection. The crucifixion and resurrection, we might say, are two sides of the same coin. They should never be played off one against the other. They both make up the central message of Jesus.

When Paul gives his speech at the Areopagus, he brings it to a conclusion by proclaiming the resurrection. The resurrection is the final word.

But we should also notice how he gets there. Paul begins his speech on his hearer's own turf—starting with an observation about their religiosity and moving to their own proposition that there is an unknown god. Paul then claims, by contrast, that God – the true God – is known. And he proceeds to tell them the knowledge of this true God – the one who is revealed through the Scriptures and given in Christ. He tells them that the one true God is a Creator, who does not live in temples because he is a God of all. This God is generous and determinative and knowable. This is the God who has created people as his offspring, and yet is also beyond the capture of people's imagination. What's more, this is a God who has expectations of his people. God commands people to repent, for he will judge the world in righteousness. Jesus is the one who will carry out this judgment – as evidenced by his resurrection from the dead.

At this point Paul's presentation ends. We note that it ends with a statement of Law, without going on to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. Some feel that Paul was cut off by his listeners, who immediately started scoffing when he mentioned the resurrection. Others feel that Paul intentionally ended there to make the message personal—directing his hearers to think about God's call to repent. Either way, Paul did plant here the seeds of the Gospel. He used the word *righteousness* – a word he often used to direct people's attention to the fact that God declares us righteous in Christ. And even his use of the word *judge* carried with it the idea of Christ bringing us something good. We see this connection just a few chapters earlier in the Book of Acts, where Peter says: “*And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of*

sins through his name" (Acts 10:42). Christ may be coming as our judge, but he has also paid the price for our sin.

When Paul finished his presentation, he was mocked by some. But others wanted to hear more. Such is the case whenever the message of Jesus is presented.

As we now think about this reading from the Book of Acts, we certainly perceive that it has many lessons for us. But chief among them is simply the need for the church to be in mission. Just as Paul boldly took the message of Jesus to Athens, and to Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, and many other places during his years of mission work, so also the church today is to be actively involved in missions. We are to look for open doors where we can present the Gospel of Jesus Christ as God's means of bringing repentance, righteousness and preparation for the judgment to come.

St. Peter, in our other reading today, also speaks about mission work, but does so in a different way. He gives what we might call (to use that phrase again) the other side of the same coin. Peter speaks of our need to give a defense of our faith. *"In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."*

When we hear the word *defense*, we immediately think of defending the faith from its critics. And this is certainly one understanding of the word. The Greek here is *apologia* – from where we get the word *apologetics*, the study of defending the faith. However, Peter's full sentence reminds us that this is not the only understanding of the word. Sometimes it just means to give an explanation. Peter tells us that sometimes we will be asked about the reason for the hope we have. In these cases, a mere observation from others, and not a critique, becomes our open door for mission.

As we think about Peter's words here, we should remind ourselves how important it is for us to keep a hopeful countenance about us. People will see our hope. Hope, as we know, is often in short supply in this world.

Peter also adds a further word of instruction: make your defense *"with gentleness and respect."* These words echo those from the beginning of today's text, where he said: *"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."*

I don't know about you, but I was sure hopeful that when this Covid19 Pandemic hit, it would at least cause us in our society to be a little gentler and more respectful of one another. Perhaps in some ways it has. But in other ways, the same bickering and attacking and partisanship that existed beforehand remains. And some days it seems even worse.

I suppose there are reasons for the hard talk. Some people are moved to it by their raised levels of anxiety and fear. And we can understand this, to a point. People are scared. What's sad, though, is that other people have simply decided that hard talk and attacks are what is needed to get things done. And they feel very justified in their method. Still others profit from all the chaos. In stirring the pot and instigating wars of words, they benefit.

This is a time when our world needs people who can operate from a place of gentleness and respect. People who are filled with hope.

And by hope, we don't mean a naïve optimism that believes no one needs to be concerned. Rather, we mean the hope that God gives – a faith that allows one to retain control and do what is right. It's a trust in God which causes one to remain gentle and respectful in the face of hard work and hard times. Hope doesn't need to take shots at others. Hope doesn't need to put others down. Hope believes in God's blessings. Hope allows us to bless others. Bless them with our prayers. Bless them with our forgiveness. Bless them with our kindness. That's where Peter goes in his letter. *"Bless,"* he says, *"for to this you were called."*

And then he adds: *"that you may obtain a blessing."* God blesses those who bless. That's his promise.

We can extend blessing to others because we have first been blessed by God. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by saying: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."* In Christ, we have all the spiritual blessings that we need. Including our forgiveness, our protection and our care.

As we go about our calling to bless others, may we do so with confidence and hope, knowing that God is with us. May we be bold in our witness and wise in our defense. May we proclaim Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead. And may we do everything with the praise of God in our hearts. As today's Psalm has taught us: *"Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip."* Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #844 Lord of All the Nations, Grant Me Grace

**1 Lord of all nations, grant me grace
To love all people, ev'ry race;
And in each person may I see
My kindred, loved, redeemed by Thee.**

**2 Break down the wall that would divide
Thy children, Lord, on ev'ry side.
My neighbor's good let me pursue;
Let Christian love bind warm and true.**

**3 Forgive me, Lord, where I have erred
By loveless act and thoughtless word.
Make me to see the wrong I do
Will grieve my wounded Lord anew.**

**4 Give me Thy courage, Lord, to speak
Whenever strong oppress the weak.
Should I myself the victim be,
Help me forgive, rememb'ring Thee.**

**5 With Thine own love may I be filled
And by Thy Holy Spirit willed,
That all I touch, where'er I be,
May be divinely touched by Thee.**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING If You Love, Keep My Commandments By: Thomas Tallis

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

For the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him, that through hearing the Word of the Lord many may be brought to faith and to the knowledge of the truth, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church of God here and everywhere, that all who confess Jesus Christ may be united in doctrine and witness, defended against all the assaults of the enemy, and eager to gather together around Your Word and Sacrament in love for one another, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this parish, for the work of the Kingdom in our community, and for the resources to accomplish all that God desires, that His name may be glorified among us and His purpose fulfilled in our words and works, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the agencies and institutions through which we love our neighbor and provide for those in need, for the destitute and homeless, and for everyone who suffers unemployment and underemployment, that we may aid them in their needs and assist them to find honorable labor to supply all their needs, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the lonely who suffer the burdens of life without friendship or family, for those depressed or weary of pandemic measures, and for the fellowship of the Church, that we may bear one another's burdens and live in community with Christ as our head, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and those who suffer, [*especially _____*], that God would grant healing to their bodies, peace for their minds, and consolation in their grief and sorrows, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For love of godly things, that we may delight in God's Word and walk in His ways; and for the Spirit, that we may be led into all truth and kept from error and false doctrine, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nation, for those who lead our nation, for the end of the pandemic, for peace among nations, and for an end to terror and violence, that we may work for the common good so that justice may prevail, life be protected and truth abound, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

O Lord, our God, as we recall the obedient life and life-giving death of Your Son for our salvation, we pray You to strengthen our faith and to make our hearts bold, that we may not fear but address our prayers to You in all humility. Hear us on behalf of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, who even now stands before You on our behalf, pleading our cause with His own blood, until that day when we are delivered from the changes and chances of this mortal life and stand before You in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #477 Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven

**1 Alleluia, alleluia!
Hearts to heav'n and voices raise:
Sing to God a hymn of gladness,
Sing to God a hymn of praise;
He who on the cross a victim
For the world's salvation bled—
Jesus Christ, the King of Glory,
Now is risen from the dead.**

**2 Alleluia, Christ is risen!
Death at last has met defeat:
See the ancient pow'rs of evil
In confusion and retreat;
Once He died, and once was buried:
Now He lives forevermore,
Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer,
Whom we worship and adore.**

**3 Alleluia, alleluia!
Glory be to God on high:
Alleluia to the Savior
Who has gained the victory;
Alleluia to the Spirit,
Fount of love and sanctity!
Alleluia, alleluia
To the triune Majesty!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven Setting: Stephen R. Johnson

Acknowledgments

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