

**Second Sunday of Eastertide**  
**April 19, 2020**  
**Lycoming Presbyterian Church**  
[with some liturgical material courtesy the Presbytery of Milwaukee]

*Possible Hymns:*

- *Thine is the Glory, 291*
- *Blessed Assurance, 67*
- *Take My Life and Let it Be, 458*
- *Trust and Obey, 454*

*Prelude*

*Bells and Greeting*

*Announcements*

*Call to Celebrate*

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

1 Peter 2:4-6, NRSV

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Let us rejoice! The risen Christ is among us and greets us with the message of Peace!

**Like the disciples, we rejoice at the good news! Like the disciples, we also have our doubts.**

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

**Open our hearts, O God, so that we too may have faith and not feel weighed down by our doubt!**

The risen Christ invites us to receive the Holy Spirit and to share the Good News.

**Let us be filled with the spirit and embrace the peace of Christ.**

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

We confess together as a community of faith because we acknowledge the reality of sin in the church, the world, and our personal lives, and so we ask God for forgiveness and help in amending our lives. And the proof of God's amazing love is this: while we were sinners Christ died for us. Because we have faith in him, we dare to approach God with confidence, assured of a forgiveness already given through Christ. So, in faith and penitence, let us confess our sin before God and one another, first together and then in silence.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**You have shown yourself to us, O God, by Word and Spirit, with signs and wonders, in flesh and blood, yet we still struggle to live and believe the good news of Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us; forgive us. Enter into our lives and cast out our fear so that we may come to**

**trust in you and have life in Jesus' name. Amen.**

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

Friends, hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Know that we are forgiven and be at peace. **Amen.**

### ***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 Ghost  
Born of the Virgin Mary  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate  
Was crucified, dead, and buried  
He descended into hell  
The third day he rose again from the dead  
He ascended into heaven  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead  
I believe in the Holy Ghost  
The holy catholic Church  
The communion of saints  
The forgiveness of sins  
The resurrection of the body  
And the life everlasting

### ***Gloria Patri***

### ***Children's Talk***

*Supplies: large rocks, basket, or bag*

*Leader puts heavy stones into a basket or bag, after asking question or making a statement.*

When we read the Bible today we hear the story about one of Jesus' friends named Thomas. Thomas couldn't believe that Jesus had come back to life, even though their other friends told Thomas they had actually seen Jesus. Thomas had a lot of questions. He couldn't be happy like his friends who had seen Jesus alive because Thomas didn't know if it was true.

Sometimes we can have a lot of questions, especially questions about God.

How come I can't see God? *(stone placed in bag)*

How could Jesus come back to life? *(stone placed in bag)*

If God can do anything, why are people poor or hungry? *(stone placed in bag)*

Why do people get sick or die? *(stone placed in bag)*

These are lots of heavy questions. Another thing can feel heavy are our emotions.

I feel sad. *(stone placed in bag)*

I feel mad. (*stone placed in bag*)

You can imagine this bag is pretty heavy now. When we have too many unanswered questions or lots of unhappy feelings, it can be hard to play or go to school or be with friends. We need help. Jesus is someone we can ask for help. [*slowly remove stones from bag*].

When we pray, we can ask Jesus to help us understand and to answer our questions; we can ask Jesus to help us feel better. Then it's easier to play or go to school or be with friends.

Let's pray to Jesus right now: dear Jesus, we have a lot of questions. Thank you for listening to our questions and helping us to understand. Amen!

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

God of all who doubt and believe, by the gift of your Spirit enable us to hear with our ears, to see with our eyes, and to touch with our hands your Word of life - Jesus Christ - our Lord and our God. Amen.

*Lesson and Reflection:*

**Listen please -- John 20: 19-31**

<p><sup>19</sup><b>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,</b></p>	
	<p>Evening – Sunday, the first day of the week – every evening breaks to a new dawn.</p> <p>Doors locked.</p> <p>If you're locking others out, you're really locking yourself in.</p> <p>Lots of talk by Presbytery these days about fear of the changes afoot. But is this fear, fear? What we have isn't fear, it is worry.</p> <p>Their fear – phobos – was being abandoned by Christ and rounded up by the Jewish bosses for themselves to be crucified.</p> <p>That's fear. What we've got is worry, anxiety.</p>

	<p>As a wise old missionary said to me one day about missionary hardships:  “Lacking a good refrigerator doesn’t mean you are carrying the cross of Jesus. Don’t confuse inconvenience with sacrificing for Christ.”</p>
<p><b>Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.</b></p>	
	<p>Traditional greeting, salutation. We hear it still today with the Hebrew ‘shalom’ greeting or the Arabic ‘salam alekim.’</p> <p>I picture Jesus grinning mischievously:  “Yes, it really is me.”</p>
<p><sup>21</sup><b>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”</b></p>	
	<p>Yes, repeated, so this is more than a traditional greeting or salutation – he really means it – and by giving them his peace he is commissioning them to be his ambassadors, sent forth to speak for and as him – ‘apostylein’ in Greek; in English for ambassador, apostle.</p>
<p><sup>22</sup><b>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.</b></p>	
	<p>This is John’s version of Pentecost – very Trinitarian! The breath filling them, insipiring, inspiriting them. Father, Jesus, Spirit! Who, how, when! From, through, by!</p> <p>The idea of Godness, Godness made intelligible, Godness received and shared! Like love. The essence of the eternal idea of love means nothing unless given form (kisses, words, actions). The form means nothing unless the receiver understands that she, he loves me and returns it. That’s the</p>

	Trinity – all action toward us. The Trinity isn't how we understand God, it is how God dynamically acts toward us.
<sup>23</sup> <b>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”</b>	
	<p>Now, there's two ways we can take this. First is fairly one dimensional – giving the disciples (aka the church) the ability to judge or forgive. You got the power! And the established church said, “Thank you very much.”</p> <p>Second, we dip deeper into the well where this really is a warning to them, coming from the guy who said from the cross to those who put him there: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”</p> <p>If you forgive, when you forgive, they are forgiven and thus you open up doors, freeing you from being controlled by the hurt and evil. But, and here's the warning: if you fail to forgive, if you retain their sin (holding the sin against others), then all suffer and new life is stifled for them and for you. You both remain trapped, imprisoned.</p> <p>It's up to us to decide how we will act.</p>
<sup>24</sup> <b>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So 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.”</b>	
	<p>The Twin. I wonder where his twin brother or sister is?</p> <p>For this conversation, Thomas gets tagged as ‘Doubting Thomas.’ Really? Fact is, Thomas wants to believe. He</p>

	<p>wants it to be true. It's just that he's a common sense kind of guy and this makes no sense at all. He needs tangible proof, not of Jesus, but of their testimony. He's not sure of them, of what his other disciples, his friends, are telling him. He needs to see it, feel it, touch it, hold it, for himself. Is this doubt or caution? Doubt or illogical?</p> <p>Well, the funny thing is how you and I never have gotten what Thomas gets. John's gospel was written decades after Jesus, written at a time, such as ours, when nobody saw anything. They only heard about him. And that's enough. The Living Word.</p>
<p><sup>26</sup><b>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."</b> <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>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."</p>	
	<p>Attorneys will tell you that eye-witnesses are the least accurate of witnesses at a trial.</p> <p>What's more interesting is that Jesus delays manifesting himself for a week.</p> <p>For a week!</p> <p>Yes, and guess what? Thomas is still there! He's committed to his friends. He's hasn't run away or abandoned the possibility. He's committed to the possibilities...</p> <p>Jesus indeed has a way of ignoring the</p>

	doors we shut in his face.
<b><sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>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.</b>	
	<p>What is this all about?</p> <p>So that we many have life. This is a special word, this word life. It's not 'bio', meaning biological life.</p> <p>It is 'zoe,' meaning spiritual life.</p>

Thomas says: show me. Like most of us, he gets it backwards.

All the miracles, all the showing – it didn't change anyone in the Gospel. What changed them was when they heard what Jesus had to say.

Theirs was an attitude to receive.

John Calvin, father of Presbyterianism, spoke about it as predisposition. Now I know when you say, "John Calvin," the buzzword, "predestination," comes to mind; yet to Calvin the word, "predisposition" is far more prominent.

*...and that there is here no reason to lose faith in the promises of God,  
who does not stop the rain from falling from heaven,  
although rocks and stones do not receive the moisture of the rain.  
John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV:XVII:34*

Are you impervious rock, resisting? Or soil ready to receive the sun and rain?

Are you pre-disposed to have a good time when you go out to a party? Or are you pre-disposed to be miserable?

If you have to stand in an hour long line waiting to go through the metal detectors at the airport, are you pre-disposed to be angry, upset, inconvenienced? Or are you grateful they want to make sure you don't get blown up halfway across the Atlantic?

When you come to a church are you pre-disposed to get or to give? No wonder a fair number of persons flit from church to church hoping, looking, for the real church that will really show them

God and really give them what they are looking for. How many come to church looking for affirmation? I know here they will love me. Until, of course, somebody in the church disappoints them. Then this church is really unloving and unfriendly and they really don't know Jesus. And so these sad souls bumble bee about the garden hoping for the honey.

And given our new style of homebound hospitality, are you predisposed to be annoyed, upset, fretful, or predisposed to feeling imposed upon, beginning to panic that this is some kind of nefarious conspiracy? Or are you open to learning from these times, willing to listen to reliable information, will to rediscovering others, becoming more alert and empathetic? Are you predisposed to doubt or open to how faith is at work in us?

Ah, yes, ever searching for the answers that suit us, little realizing the right question is far more interesting.

Thomas says: show me. Like most of us, he gets it backwards.

Like falling in love. Did you first understand everything there is to know about him or her so you could fall in love? Or did you realize you had fallen in love and then wanted to know all you can?

From ancient theologian Anselm's "Proslogion:"

*For I do not seek to understand in order to believe,  
but I believe in order to understand.  
For this too I believe, that unless I believe I shall not understand*

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Hold your breath. Go ahead, give it a try.

Tough to do. Every instinct demands that you breathe. You can't live on your own life support system, your own closed system. You only build up carbon dioxide. Truer now with a virus that makes breathing difficult.

No breath, no living; no living, no doing:

- And the last thing each of us will do is exhale
- And the first thing we do is inhale.

I had the privilege to see all three of my babies born and that moment of their first breath.

Before, in the womb, it was the oxygenated blood via umbilical cord.

- Bornn of the painful freedom from mom -- apartness.
- Blue babies becoming ruddy
- That first wonderful gulp
- Womb fluid draining from lungs
- Air filling

- Ball of flesh, this ball of blood, needing breath to be alive

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<sup>22</sup>**When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.**

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It’s the difference between ‘*bio*’ and ‘*zoe*.’ The difference between the creature and the created. Biology: this world, this nature, this confinement. *Zoe*: spiritual life, this freedom. Jesus of the present tense.

The new human born when the old self dies. This old nature of ‘*bio*,’ biology, obviously needs more than improvement – more than vaccines, dialysis, hip replacements, pacemakers, dieting, blood pressure medication -- it needs replacement, transformation. It needs ‘*zoe*,’ the Greek word for spiritual life. A new creation -- not of matter, for matter must follow matter’s physical destiny of decay -- this I know when I count the gray appearing in my hair -- but a new human of the spirit within this bio body, breathing in new life by Holy Spirit, the breath for a new humanity born from us joining his cross and grave.

Real humanity, at last!. Life finally fulfilled as only Jesus defines life.

This is exactly what happens when we baptize our babies. Baptism is a calling to new life in Christ, not to a religion or doctrine or morality.

Momma, in giving up, gives the infant the first birth. Christ, in giving in blood and breath of Holy Spirit, gives them second birth, setting the infant free from the world into which it has been born, free from all that tyranny of biology of class, race, gender, fear, sin, mortality. Now free for life in God.

Resurrection means freedom. Easter means freedom from so we can be “freed for...”.

Free from all that clutter and baggage that world brings, free to be God’s peculiar people. Free to give people reason to praise God. Besides, The only body God’s got is us.

*...not as the world gives do I give to you...*  
*John 14: 27b*

The real lesson from Thomas isn’t that he doubted (when he really didn’t). The real lesson is that Thomas hung in there. He waited with them, he remained, hoping to see Jesus.

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**Hymn:**

## **We Bring our Gifts to God**

Thomas found himself weighed down by doubt. He insisted on proof before he could believe. Sometimes we experience the same doubt when given the opportunity to make our offering. We question what expenses might come our way and whether we can afford to be generous. We ask how the money will be used and whether it will make a difference. You are invited to set aside the weight of those doubts and experience the joy of trusting in the goodness of the Lord to sustain us. Please consider giving online or by check this week.

### **Offertory**

### **Doxology**

### **Prayers of the People**

God of mercy, we are afraid. We are afraid for our loved ones, for our neighbors and our communities, our nation and all nations, for ourselves. Help us to honor the feeling of fear without becoming paralyzed by it, without becoming hardened, without turning inward because of it. In life and in death we belong to you, made certain by Jesus' resurrection, so fresh in our minds. Send your Spirit to fill us with courage that is bigger than fear, that we might be holders and carriers and sharers of hope in you.

God of tenderness, we pray your presence with healthcare workers who have seen and who have experienced painful and haunting things in the midst of their struggles to be restorers of health. Comfort them in their grief as you comfort all who have been touched by death, which comes in many forms. Give us the strength to be those upon whom they can lean, to be those who can listen.

Hear are prayers for all those dealing with today's challenges: granting courage, wisdom, patience, courage, compassion and empathy.

God of green things, around us the world still shows signs of life as it has done spring after spring for millennia. Open our eyes that we might receive the miracle of small, new leaves, the miracle of the flight of birds and butterflies, the miracle of kindnesses in small gestures. May we see the evidences of goodness and, even more so, may we be the evidence of goodness, we pray. We ask all of these things through Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

In Jesus' name we pray, saying:

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, for ever. Amen

### **Closing Hymn:**

### **Bearing the Light to the World**

### **Saying the Benediction**

### **Singing the Benediction – join hands in a circle – Blest Be the Tie**