May 10th devotions

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

This Sunday is the 29th day of Easter. The gospel reading for this Sunday is from John 14 and includes the verse in which Jesus declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

***Let Us Be Gathered***

**Song**

In 1958, the World Council of Christian Education convened in Tokyo, Japan. The theme of the convention was, “Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life,” and a new hymn was commissioned to support this theme. The song by Tokuo Yamaguchi, a Methodist minister in Japan, is forged as a prayer during a time when the world awoke to a global village of horror and hope and when fear and suspicion were mingled with new possibilities. The song recognizes a context of confusion and need throughout the world. It sees servants old and young scattered in many places and yet gathering at the cross of Christ, facing change as nature’s secrets are torn open, pleading for Jesus’ healing presence, looking for peace in the midst of distress, and praying for help to work in an age of renewal.

Today, 62 years after it was written, this wonderful hymn gathers us in worship. Here is a link to listen to the hymn, “Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather.” Hana Bryson sings stanzas 1, 2, and 4 using the original Japanese lyrics of the hymn: <https://youtu.be/7VrKCtB08zo>.

*1.  Here, O Lord, Your servants gather,*

*Hand we link with hand;*

*Looking toward our Savior’s cross,*

*Joined in love we stand.*

*As we seek the realm of God,*

*We unite to pray:*

*Jesus, Savior, guide our steps,*

*For You are the Way.*

*2.  Many are the tongues we speak,*

*Scattered are the lands,*

*Yet our hearts are one in God,*

*One in love’s demands.*

*E’en in darkness hope appears,*

*Calling age and youth:*

*Jesus, teacher, dwell with us,*

*For You are the Truth.*

*3.  Nature's secrets open wide,*

*Changes never cease;*

*Where, O where, can weary souls*

*Find the source of peace?*

*Unto all those sore distressed,*

*Torn by endless strife:*

*Jesus, healer, bring Your balm,*

*For You are the Life.*

*4.  Grant, O God, an age renewed,*

*Filled with deathless love;*

*Help us as we work and pray,*

*Send us from above*

*Truth and courage, faith and power*

*Needed in our strife:*

*Jesus, Savior, be our way,*

*Be our truth, our life.*

Let us pray.

Almighty God,
your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.
Give us grace to love one another,
to follow in the way of his commandments,
and to share his risen life with all the world,
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

***Let Us Hear God’s Word***

*A reading from the Psalms:*

 1In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame;
  deliver me in your righteousness.
 2Incline your ear to me;
  make haste to deliver me.
 3Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold;
  for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.
 4Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me,
  for you are my tower of strength.
 5Into your hands I commend my spirit,
  for you have redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth.
 15My times are in your hand;
  rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.
 16Let your face shine upon your servant;
  save me in your steadfast love.” (Psalm 31)

*The holy gospel according to John.*

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

  [Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going.” 5Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”
  8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. 12Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” (John 14)

*The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.*

**Reflection on the Readings**

“Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

In reading this line from today’s gospel, my very first thought went to Missouri’s “Show-Me State” nickname. Maybe that was because I’ve also been reading and reviewing details from the “Show Me Strong” Covid-19 recovery plan for Missouri?

Anyway, I’m guessing that many of you the story of how Missouri received its nickname; but, if I ever knew at all, that history was not in my memory. So, I did a little research and found that there are actually quite a few stories about our state’s nick name.

The one that seems to be the most widely known is about a speech made in 1899. In that year, Willard Duncan Vandiver, who served in the United States House of Representatives from 1897 to 1903, attended a naval banquet in Philadelphia. During the banquet, he declared, “I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me.” Whether he started it or not, it seems that Vandiver’s speech helped to popularize the saying.

But there is another well-recognized story about Missouri’s nickname that hits closer to home. In that version of the “Show-Me” legend, we are shown the way to the mining town of Leadville, Colorado. There, the phrase was first employed as a term of ridicule and reproach. A miner’s strike had been in progress for some time in the mid-1890s, and a number of miners from the lead districts of southwest Missouri had been imported to take the places of the strikers. The Joplin miners were unfamiliar with Colorado mining methods and required frequent instructions. Pit bosses began saying, “That man is from Missouri. You'll have to show him.”

It makes me want to ponder, “Did Thomas and Phillip have Missouri connections? Did their descendants end up living as miners in Joplin? Did God say to Jesus, ‘Those disciples are from Missouri. You’ll have to show them.’”

Regardless of the answers to those questions, it does seem that Jesus was expressing at least a slight amount of ridicule and reproach when he echo-questioned back to Phillip, “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

But at least Jesus doesn’t leave it there!

The gospel began by saying that Jesus will prepare a place for each one of us – rooms in a place where we can be together once again (and not separated and distanced by disease). Thomas and Phillip seem to get stuck in the “where” – the physical location of God. And it seems that their next questions will be, “How soon? How fast? Are we there yet?”

In many ways, the concerns and questions and eagerness of Thomas and Phillip are similar to our own these days as we look to government and leaders to show us the way to recovery and reopening, as we wonder how fast that can happen, and as we seek confidence, assurance, and hope in knowing that someone is taking responsibility and giving good instructions without all the “frothy eloquence.”

But this is when Jesus steps in and shows us what we need to know and believe. And here is what that is: Jesus’ was speaking less about a place than a relationship. He was speaking more about  our relationship with him and God the Father.

Jesus’ words of promise tell us that in Jesus we know all we need to know about God. Those words tells us that just as we can have a relationship with another human person, we can also have a relationship with God that will one day be as real and obvious as are our relationships with one another. And that relationship begins right now, no matter where we are and no matter what else we may face.

From the day we were baptized, Jesus has been our way, our truth, our life – not as a threat, but as a way of hope, a truth of love, and a life of trust. Trusting and believing in that baptismal promise, we don’t need to worry about the far off paths, the seemingly distant destination, or the mountains or valleys on the horizon. There is no need to panic. There is no need to make up our own rules. There is no need to rush things that aren’t yet ready.

There is no need because Jesus shows us himself each day. Every time we say, “Jesus, you’ll have to show us,” he does. He shows us, through the power of the Spirit, that he is here. He shows us that he is enabling us to love others and to be in relationship in new ways. He shows us, as exhausted and traumatized and distant from one another as we might feel in this new world, that he will “save us in his steadfast love” (as the Psalm puts it), that he is still with us, that we know him and he knows us, and that, because of this, we are separated neither from God nor each other.

**Hymn of the Day**

Let us join together in singing, “You Are the Way” (ELW #758). Choir leaders from one of our sister ELCA congregations, Saint Peter’s Church in New York City, guide our singing through this video link: <https://youtu.be/65Gvcw_rzwc>. (Music and words included in the video.)

**Prayers of Intercession**

Still worshiping from our homes, but with our hearts bonded into one, let us pray for all who are in need, responding to each petition with words from today’s psalm, “make haste to deliver us.”

*A brief silence.*

Build us up, mothering God, that like living stones we embody the strength that only you can give. Nurse all the baptized with the milk of your word. As you provided the early church with the apostle Matthias, fill now the churches’ needs for leaders to serve your holy people.

*A brief silence.*

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

Form us to be humble participants in your complex creation. We praise your power in evolving a magnificent earth, from flowering trees to tropical rainstorms, from black holes to beloved pets. Lead us to respect your wondrous earth with both all that creates and all that destroys.

*A brief silence.*

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

Assist state and community leaders to find and follow your ways of justice. Guide their way through the challenges of pandemic and poverty. Protect governors and legislators from sickness and burn-out. Despite our own considerable needs, keep us mindful of the needs of others, especially refugees and prisoners.

*A brief silence.*

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

Accompany those who are sick, sorrowful, or confused. Comfort them in suffering, ease their distress, and carry their burdens. We beg you to protect us from the coronavirus, and we pray for Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all others we name in our hearts before you.

*A brief silence.*

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

Sustain those who mother infants and children. Uphold the parents and grandparents who now must school their children. Provide enough food and resources for families. Grant safe pregnancy and delivery to expectant parents, and minister to those who endure infertility and miscarriage. Bless the countless relatives, medical workers, and hospice volunteers who give to others mothering care. Embrace all for whom today’s cultural celebration of mothers is difficult.

*A brief silence.*

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

We remember before you for all who have died in the faith, those struck down by the coronavirus, and those whom we name now in our hearts.

*A brief silence.*

At the end, bring us all to you, who are our way, our truth, and our life.

O God, incline your ear to us: Make haste to deliver us.

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Offering Prayer**

Merciful God,
our ordinary gifts seem small,
but you make of them an abundance,
just as you do with our lives.
Feed us again at your table
for service in your name,
in the strength of the risen Christ.
**Amen.**

***Let Us Be Sent in Service***

**Song**

Faith Inkubators, based in Stillwater, Minnesota, is a Lutheran-rooted organization that produces family and intergenerational ministry and education resources. Among those creative resources are such things as the musical “Luther: The Rock Opera” (<https://www.luthertherockopera.com/>) and the video that leads today’s upbeat and sign-language friendly sending song, “I Am the Way.”

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/MkABcNofouI>. (Sign-language words included in the video.)

Let us pray.

*A brief silence is kept before the prayer.*

Almighty God, you give us the joy of celebrating our Lord’s resurrection. Give us also the joys of life in your service, and bring us at last to the full joy of life eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.

The God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The God of all grace  ☩ bless us now and forever. Amen.

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