May 17th, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

This Sunday is the 36th day of Easter.

“I will not leave you orphaned,” Jesus promises us in today’s gospel.

Many life experiences can leave us feeling orphaned or abandoned. The experience of living within a world-altering pandemic is certainly one that creates such feelings. Even as our local community takes initial, small steps to reopen, restart, and re-establish, those feelings of being orphaned or abandoned continue to persist and will continue to be uncovered within us in unique ways. There are deaths we have been unable to mourn. There are jobs and connections to workplace fellowship that will never return. The closeness of small groups and circles of friends seems is not what it once was.

Our connections through the Internet – email, webcams, blogs, and social networking – can link people across the gap of physical distancing but can further aggravate loneliness and isolation when these substitute for real intimacy in our changed world. How do we experience this loneliness? How do we encounter this longing for what used to be?  How can we belong in the midst of new patterns of caution? How can we feel hope and trust and love in the absence of hugs and handshakes and shared meals? How does Jesus’ promise that he will not leave us orphaned speak to these real-life concerns?

Let us pray with these questions as we join in our worship devotions.

***Let Us Be Gathered***

**Song**

Our gathering song today is a choral arrangement of “Jesus Love Me / We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus” provided through Augsburg Fortress.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/w7Uyg4qK4RM>

**Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.

Almighty and ever-living God,
you hold together all things in heaven and on earth.
In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children,
and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord,
who 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:*

 8Bless our God, you peoples;
  let the sound of praise be heard.
 9Our God has kept us among the living
  and has not allowed our feet to slip.
 10For you, O God, have tested us;
  you have tried us just as silver is tried.
 11You brought us into the net;
  you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
 12You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,
  but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.
 13I will enter your house with burnt offerings
  and will pay you my vows—
 14those that I promised with my lips
  and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.
 15I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the smoke of rams;
  I will give you oxen and goats.
 16Come and listen, all you who believe,
  and I will tell you what God has done for me.
 17I called out to God with my mouth,
  and praised the Lord with my tongue.
 18If I had cherished evil in my heart,
  the Lord would not have heard me;
 19but in truth God has heard me
  and has attended to the sound of my prayer.
 20Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer,
  nor withheld unfailing love from me. (Psalm 66)

*A reading from First Peter.*

  13Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. 17For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. 18For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. Christ was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 19in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him. (1 Peter 3)

*Word of God, word of life.
Thanks be to God.*

*The holy gospel according to John.*

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

  [Jesus said to the disciples:] 15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.
  18“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” (John 14)

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

**Reflection on the Readings**

An Advocate. The Spirit of truth. The One who abides with us and who is in us.

This is Jesus’ promise – the answer to our questions. But I know it’s not as easy as saying that alone. Especially when we feel so much loss and distance and separation.

Indeed, what the world feels in this time can be compared to grief that is experienced at the death of someone close. By chance, the juxtaposition of today’s gospel with the coming observance of Memorial Day, provides an opportunity to consider at least one facet of loss more deeply with respect to Jesus’ promise.

Since the holiday was first established after the conclusion of the Civil War, Memorial Day has been a time to acknowledge those we have lost to war – both those known and those unknown. More recently though, that remembrance has been extended in two directions. First, we often take time to remember

members of our family who have died as well. We visit cemeteries. We plant flowers. We place wreathes at the gravesides of grandparents and parents, brothers, sisters, and even children. The second way we have extended Memorials Day is that we increasingly recognize all who have fought in wars and sacrificed their health and well-being in some way. Those who have lost limbs or eyes. Those who suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This year, our Memorial Day observances, such as they can be within continuing pandemic conditions, are likely to grow further. They will include healthcare workers sacrificing and dying for the sake of their patients. They will include essential workers who have continued to work in dangerous and often ill-prepared environments. They will include ordinary people who have lost life, lost work, lost family, and lost hope as a result of COVID-19 and increasingly negligent government choices and decisions.

As a culture, we are not terribly good about talking about all the loss. Maybe it’s because such talk

challenges the eternally optimistic stance we are encouraged to take. Or, maybe it’s because it counters our celebration of youth and opportunity. Or, maybe it’s because it reminds us of our own mortality.

Whatever the reason, we often seem to lack the resources and the emotional wherewithal

to acknowledge the losses that we, and those around us, suffer. Even in a time of pandemic.

Not sure what to say, we can find ourselves turning away from each other, giving each other time and space; but, in the end, often leaving a neighbor feeling all the more isolated.

But in the midst of this experience, Jesus proclaims something different.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you,” he says. “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” In other words, we are not isolated. And we – together – are not lost.

So, as we pray with the questions on our minds, perhaps the thing that Jesus is inviting us also to consider this week is whether our community – this assembly of Peace Lutheran Church and all the people whom we come into contact with in the course of our daily vocations — can become a place

where we are not ashamed of loss. Rather, can we recognize it as a difficult part of our human existence? And in doing that, can we reach out beyond the assembly itself in comfort, care, solidarity, and love?

How can we possibly do that? The answer is in Jesus’ promise. We have an Advocate with us. The Holy Spirit is by our side. To put it another way, we have a Coach – someone who builds us up, strengthens us, guides us through weaknesses, points us toward healthier approaches, and – most importantly of all – remains by our side all the way.

But when we recognize that the Holy Coach is there by our side it also opens space for us to see that we are not alone. We are part of team. And the Coach is also helping each of us be beside one another as well.

As we look ahead to what comes next, as we look with hope toward a time when we, the assembly, will be gathered again in worship, we can look with hope that the Advocate, the Holy Coach, will be there all the way helping us plan, helping us train, helping us practice and grow in health and faith and love.

**Hymn of the Day**

Let us join together in singing, “You Are Holy” (ELW #525). This is such a great song about God being at hand, coming near, and present with us that it is worth hearing two versions! In the first link, enjoy the children’s choir of American Lutheran Church in Tucson, Arizona, as they sing. In the second, take up singing yourself as YouTube musician MaryRuth72 accompanies your singing this week.

1st video link: <https://youtu.be/GEb7GmoRjZ4?t=31>

2nd video link: <https://youtu.be/NPHeQeRWgoc> (Words are also included in the video.)

**Prayers of Intercession**

As we welcome our God into the sanctuaries of our homes, let us pray for all the needs of the world, responding to each petition with words that echo today’s psalm: “O God, hear us.”

*A brief silence.*

Abiding God, come into all the homes around the globe from which your people offer their prayer. Bless Christian leaders as they guide the church through this pandemic. Show our pastors and our church councils the way forward. Grant your grace also to the devout in other religions of the world, and show your kindness to all who search for you, whether within or outside the church.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Creating God, revitalize the health of oceans, rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers, and other bodies of water that give life to your creatures. As we prepare for Memorial Day and entering the months of summer, we especially pray for waters, lakes, and rivers of the Ozarks. Form us unto a baptized body that protects the waters on which we rely.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Righteous God, instill in all the leaders of nations a desire for justice and the will to serve the oppressed. We pray especially for those nations in which dictatorship threatens the population. Guide our nation’s governors in their difficult pathway between the threat of disease and the dangers of scarcity and isolation. Bring our legislators into agreement about how to assist those in need. Give us patience in facing our current predicament.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Compassionate God, visit all who are in great need, those who suffer from the coronavirus, those living in loneliness and fear, those without jobs, and those who mourn their dead. Uphold those whose futures have been taken away from them. We pray for health care workers and for the residents in care homes, prisons, and refugee camps. For the countless persons who carry heavy burdens on their back, we pray, and we call out to you these names: Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and everyone else we name.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Benevolent God, give the world a vaccine for COVID-19.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Fatherly and motherly God, embrace all orphans. Support the agencies that attend to the world’s orphans. Shield orphaned children from traffickers. Give to all nations wisdom concerning the refugees who are children. Watch over all children whose usual care-givers are absent. Form us into your children who love all your whom you have made.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

Eternal God, your kingdom is here now, and it has no end. We remember the saints who have gone before us, those who have died of COVID-19, and those who we remember in our hearts. Unite us forever in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*A brief silence.*

For this we pray: O God, hear us!

With bold confidence in your love, merciful God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and 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**

In today’s sending song, Dutch teacher and music director Johan Verdouw conducts a small choir in leading our singing. Johan, based in The Hague, Netherlands, also directs and coaches the gospel choir Singing from the Heart.

Part way through the song, the video goes sideways. Don’t worry, it’s not you! (But it does seem fitting for these sideways days. Just remember that the Advocate is there by our side no matter how we see it! 😊)

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/JgeariXaG7g>.

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!