

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

In today's gospel the risen Christ appears to the disciples and offers them the gift of peace. Even though worry, doubts, exasperation, and frustration surround us, we experience the resurrection in our everyday lives.

One way to see that is in remembering that Easter is not a day but rather an entire season. Easter is celebrated as a "week of weeks" – seven times seven days plus one. That's fifty continuous days for us to proclaim the resurrection and rejoice in the new birth and living hope we receive in baptism. This Sunday is only the eighth of those fifty days!

Let Us Be Gathered

Song

Let us join together through song in celebrating the Easter resurrection that continues in our lives each and every day. In this video, Pacific Lutheran University's Choir of the West sings "Exultate." Though the original text source of Exultate is unknown, Mozart's well-known setting dates this particular version to the mid-18th century. Somewhat of a patchwork of psalm fragments, the text is one of celebration and ecstatic praise. This setting employs only the first stanza of the text, and is written for eight-part chorus. Pacific Lutheran University is located in California.

Here is the link: <https://youtu.be/2OAqAYMn3eg>.

Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God,
the strength of those who believe and the hope of those who doubt,
may we, who have not seen,
have faith in you and receive the fullness of Christ's blessing,
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 First Peter:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1)

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁹When 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, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

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

²⁶A 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, "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."

³⁰Now 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. (John 20)

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

Reflection on the Readings

The doors were locked for fear. A week later, the doors will still shut and locked. The fear isn't so much for ourselves, but just as much for others – for their safety, for their health, for helping those essential workers who must go out to do so in places that are as protected as possible. That doesn't mean there is no going out at all. Of course, one or the other of must occasionally venture out for needed supplies and required tasks: to pick up curbside groceries, to take Gabby for her doggy exercise and walks, to take a photograph at the church building, to get a drive-up Sonic Happy Hour drink between 2:00 and 4:00 pm. (Alright, maybe the last one isn't quite so essential or required, but the servers there are doing very good work while wearing face masks and gloves and sanitizing the red "order" buttons after each customer! And, who knows? Maybe Thomas the Twin also needed to get a cool drink while he was out completing essential tasks for the other disciples?)

From the gospel as told by John, we don't know how many weeks the disciples needed to remain in a house with shut and locked doors and how many weeks Thomas had to gear up and venture out on behalf of the others. Maybe it was just one week. Maybe it was two or three. Maybe it was many more.

Regardless of how long it was, the good news that Jesus brought to all of them was not news to go running back out into the markets and restaurants and bowling alleys. Jesus' message was not, "The danger is now over." He wasn't saying, "Go back to normal."

No, Jesus' words were none of the above. In fact, for the disciples, nothing would ever be "normal" again. At least it won't be normal in the way it used to be. Instead, his message to all is, "Peace be with you." Both times that he comes into that closed up house, he says, "Peace be with you."

To me, there is something extremely hopeful in those words. They implicitly speak of a future. They speak of a hope. They speak of the possibility of something new. They speak of an assurance and a promise upon which we can rely.

"Peace be with you." These words are also a blessing to us — to people who are still mostly behind locked doors. We cannot see how things will all turn out and, at least sometimes, we certainly doubt what has happened. We can wonder if there is conspiracy in everything we hear. But through and beyond such temptations and fearful thoughts, Jesus' words are full of blessing on those who do not see and those who do not have all the answers.

The Gospel according to John is written so that, though we do not see him, we may believe in the risen Christ. The reading from First Peter says rightly that though we do not see him, we love him. And today, this very Sunday, Christ comes to us, wherever we are sheltering and keeping social and physical distance. Today, Christ comes to us in each of our houses and homes and brings peace, forgiveness, and the Spirit of life and hope.

We cannot reach out together this Sunday (and likely several more yet) to touch his body in the holy communion. Still, with our ears and eyes, we touch Christ's wounds in the scripture itself. In God's Word, we are once again made witnesses to the resurrection for the sake of all our neighbors.

Alleluia!

Hymn of the Day

Let us join together today with the people of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Athens, Georgia, in singing "Be Not Afraid." If you have a copy of our hymnal and worship book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, at home, this is song #388. Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/GFgd1P6Q9BY>.

*Be not afraid.
Sing out for joy.
Christ is risen, Alleluia!*

Prayers of Intercession

Praying in our homes while gathered together in the Spirit of Christ, we ask God to bestow peace upon a needy world, using these words from Psalm 16: Protect us, O God, for we take refuge in you.

A brief silence.

Faithful God, we pray for the church around the world. Enter into our countless separate houses with your gift of peace. Guard the health of our bishops, pastors, teachers, and musicians. As Christians around the globe are united in their suffering through the coronavirus, so unite us also in the hope of life in the Risen Christ.

A brief silence.

Protect the church, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Creating God, we pray for the earth that you have given into our care. As human society is quieted by sickness, give your plants and animals, lands and seas, a time to renew and replenish themselves. Nurture the fields that will supply our food.

A brief silence.

Protect the earth, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Righteous God, we pray for the nations. Give peace to our troubled world. Bless the efforts of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Strengthen democracies. Bring an end to violence between nations, across borders, within countries, between gangs, and inside homes. Uphold the governors of our land. Bless our country with integrity in government, attention to the needy, persistence in facing the pandemic, and wisdom in proceeding into an unknown future.

A brief silence.

Protect the nations, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Compassionate God, we pray for all in any need. Comfort the bereaved. Accompany the sick, especially the multitude who have contracted Covid-19, and those we remember in our hearts, especially Vallie, LaVaune, Patty, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we now name. Visit the homes of all who are isolated, and hold the lonely and fearful in your arms. Grant your peace to the millions of unemployed; give them food for today and hope for tomorrow. Help us find a home for refugees. Support medical care workers in their endless and sometimes fruitless tasks of attending to the pandemic patients. Provide needed medical supplies for hospitals.

A brief silence.

Protect the needy, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Gracious God, we pray for children and youth. Shelter them from all sickness. Keep homebound children safe from hunger and abuse. Nurture teenagers with a vision of life beyond this pandemic. Give them assurance as they are separated physically from friends and mentors. Give to all children and youth forbearance beyond their years.

A brief silence.

Protect children and youth, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Loving God, we pray for ourselves. Renew our spirits with the living hope of Christ's resurrection, and hear also the private petitions of our hearts.

A longer period of silence.

Protect us, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

Eternal God, we praise you for the lives of all who have died in the faith. Sustained by the promise of healing and resurrection, free us from the fear of death, and bring us at our end with all the saints into the joy of your presence.

A brief silence.

Protect your people, O God,
for we take refuge in you.

With bold confidence in your peace which passes human understanding, we offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, now and forever.

Amen.

Offering Prayer

Please continue to remember and support the ongoing ministries of our church during this time. Offerings may be mailed to Peace Lutheran Church, 3100 N St Louis Ave, Joplin MO 64801. Connect with Peace Lutheran's web page at <https://www.peacejoplin.org/> to see news and updates!

Let us pray.

Merciful God,
our ordinary gifts seem small for such a celebration,
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

"Thine is the Glory" is a wonderful hymn highlighting our joy in the resurrection. Today, let us be led in this song by the virtual Easter choir of St. Andrew the Great Church in Cambridge, England.

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

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.

Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us now and forever.
Amen.

Peace be with you! Alleluia!

Together in Christ,
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