

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH WORSHIP SERVICE – APRIL 19, 2020

Because He Lives

God sent His Son they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal, and forgive.
He bled and died to buy my pardon.
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future;
And life is worth the living just because He lives.

How sweet to hold a newborn baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives.
But greater still the calm assurance:
This child can face uncertain days because Christ lives.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future;
And life is worth the living just because He lives.

And then one day I'll cross that river;
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
And then as death gives way to vict'ry
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns!

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future;
And life is worth the living just because He lives.

CCLI Song # 16880
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INVOCATION

PASTOR: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen.

PRAYER

PASTOR: Let us pray: Thomas said: **"Unless I see the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side, I will not believe."** Lord, we are often skeptical people, driven by our senses, relying on that which we can hear, see or prove. But You ask us to see the invisible, to trust in the Spirit, and to have faith. Sometimes we get carried away by our emotions, by wishful thinking and by popular trends that pull us away from You. Lord, help us to be bold in our beliefs. Move us beyond mere trust in ordinary things and open our eyes for spiritual realities. Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

ALL: Amen.

CONFESSION OF SINS

PASTOR: Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

ALL: Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.

PASTOR: Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

INTROIT: *Exodus 15:2a, 6, 13, 17-18; antiphon: v. 1b*

PASTOR: I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The LORD will reign forever and ever.

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

I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: Acts 5:29-42

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

EPISTLE LESSON: *I Peter 1:3-9*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

HOLY GOSPEL *John 20:19-32*

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again. “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

APOSTLES' CREED (*spoken in unison*)

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.

Cornerstone

**My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.**

**Christ alone, Cornerstone,
Weak made strong in the Savior's love;
Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.**

**When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest in His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil;
My anchor holds within the veil.**

**Christ alone, Cornerstone,
Weak made strong in the Savior's love;
Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.**

He is Lord, Lord of all.

**Christ alone, Cornerstone,
Weak made strong in the Savior's love;
Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.**

**When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone;
Faultless stand before the throne.**

SERMON

Have you noticed the wide variety of personalities among people today? Some are extremely outgoing and talkative. They are optimistic and positive. For them life seems filled with joy. Just one blessing after another. Others of us tend to be negative, skeptical, pessimistic and disbelieving, tending to question things rather than just accept them.

For some people the glass is always half full. For others it's always half empty. Or if you are an engineer you ask, "Why isn't the glass the right size to begin with?" Personalities were different in Jesus day as well. Including among His followers. Peter, was extremely outgoing, positive and optimistic. On the other end of the spectrum was Thomas, whose name is often prefaced by, I think unfairly, the word "**Doubting.**"

The final snapshots from the life of Thomas, the ones with which we are probably most familiar, were taken on resurrection Sunday and the following Sunday. On both occasions the disciples were inside a locked room, when Jesus miraculously appeared. On the first occasion, Thomas was not present, and we are not told why. However, when the other disciples told him "**We have seen the Lord!**" his response was classic disbelief: "**Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe!**"

He wanted proof that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. But can you blame him? Can you imagine seeing someone die, knowing he was buried, and then hearing from friends that they had seen him alive? If they insisted on that you might feel a need to confront them. That was the situation for Thomas. Thankfully we know the rest of the story! The following Sunday, Thomas was present with the disciples when Jesus reappeared. Jesus, after greeting the group, immediately turned to Thomas. He invited this skeptical follower to place his finger in the scars on His palm and put his hand in His side, and stop doubting and start believing!"

While we may never have struggled with doubts to the degree Thomas did, there may have been times when circumstances have driven us to discouragement, doubt, or even despair. We may have questioned our Christian faith. We may have doubted God's ability to heal our woundedness or meet our needs. We may have struggled with the betrayal of a friend or family member. If so, the lesson from the life of Thomas for us today is clear. Stop doubting and resume believing!

Devotional writer Selwyn Hughes wrote **"Those who doubt most, and yet strive to overcome their doubts, turn out to be some of Christ's strongest disciples."**

Those are very encouraging words. Questioning can lead to a deeper study of the word, and a stronger prayer life, with the result that our faith is deepened.

Thomas was transformed, saying, **"My Lord and my God!"** Those words do not hit us as powerfully as they would have hit the original disciples. Before that day, they called Jesus rabbi, meaning teacher. They called Him Christ, meaning the anointed one. But no one, before Thomas, had called Jesus, "God." The one who had been most honest about his doubts was the first to call Jesus, **"God."** He responded, **"My Lord and my God."**

We know Thomas as doubting but the real issue is disbelief. In John's Gospel, **BELIEF** isn't about an intellectual assent to some list of facts. Instead, belief is about a RELATIONSHIP. When Jesus died on the cross, so too did His relationship with Thomas. Thomas had believed in Jesus. Thomas had become a follower of Jesus. He had given Jesus his heart and his hope and that belief couldn't live beyond the grave. When Jesus died on the cross, WHO was there anymore for Thomas to have a relationship WITH?

Unless, that is, Jesus lived beyond the grave. Of course, Thomas wanted proof that Jesus was really, truly alive before he handed his heart over to be burned again! We all have doubts from time to time. That's a normal part of living the life of faith. We shouldn't begrudge Thomas for doubting.

What Jesus longs for is that we all might believe in Him by handing over our hearts and our hopes to Him. That He might bring to us, as well as to Thomas, the fullness of joy. That's what living an Easter life is all about. That's what Thomas wanted. He just needed to see it, touch it, and experience it before he was willing to risk relationship again.

Isn't that true for us all? Even if you continue to think of him as "Doubting Thomas", give him credit as the very first to recognize Jesus as **"My Lord and my God!"**

The great Easter truth is not only that we are going to live again after we die, but that we are made new right here and right now by the power of the resurrection. Today we hear of Jesus' appearance to the disciples: who were huddling in fear behind locked doors! Jesus appeared and "breathed on them." In John's Gospel, this is akin to the birthday of the Church which we see on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In the Luke and Acts story the experiences are separated but the truth is the same. The Spirit came. It filled the disciples with faith rather than fear and they began to take up the ministry of Jesus on earth. They became the Body of Christ. New, here and now, by the power of the resurrection.

There's a hymn called "Breathe on me, Breath of God."

**Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do.**

**Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.**

**Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine,
Till all this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine.**

**Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity.**

Should that not be our prayer? To be filled with the breath of God? To understand more fully the will of God? That's what Easter as a way of life is all about. And it's a way of life we live one day at a time. One step at a time. Trusting that even if we take a misstep, we never journey so far from God that the life-giving breath of that Spirit is beyond our reach. Even when it seems impossible to believe.

Imagine, missing one Sunday, and coming back to hear "Guess who showed up while you were gone?" Would you believe it? I'm a little intrigued, actually, about how quick we are to make Thomas the poster child for faithless doubt. The rest of the bunch don't acquit themselves so well either. The women at the tomb. The men who didn't believe the women's story. Peter who runs back to see for himself. And here are the "faithful" disciples, after the appearance of Jesus. Still in the locked, upper room.

Verna Dozier, the Anglican theologian, writes: **"Doubt is not the opposite of faith: fear is. Fear will not risk that even if I am wrong, I will trust that if I move today by the light that is given me, knowing it is only finite and partial, I will know more and different things tomorrow than I know today, and I can be open to the new possibility I cannot even imagine today."**

Thomas had doubts. But he refused to surrender to the fear which kept the disciples shut up in that locked room. He both ventured out and then had the courage to return. In that way, Thomas becomes for us not a symbol of faithlessness, but of courage. To trust that there are no doubts so profound that God cannot answer. To believe that Jesus cares enough to show up a second time ... a third time ... an umpteenth time.

To show up. To come to us to breathe that breathe of life on us. To breathe on us the breath of God until our heart is pure.

As we celebrate and journey into this Easter season, we do so with the awesome privilege and responsibility of being the Church in the world. Being Jesus on earth. Being the place where those who come seeking the risen Christ, doubts and all, seek that breath of new life that God offers all creation.

Is it possible that the story in today's gospel is not so much about Thomas' disbelief but about the failure of the disciples to act out theirs? Why should Thomas believe when the others were still cowering behind closed doors? Still not acting as if they'd seen the risen Christ? Will those who come to us, seeking the risen Christ, experience us as moving out into the world?" In spite of our doubts or closing ranks out of fear of the unknown? What would they learn about being a Christian by watching us?

I found this on an Anglican website as I was looking around this week. **"I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly, God was speaking: 'My name is I AM'. I waited. God continued. 'When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WAS. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WILL BE. When you live in the moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM'."**

To live in the moment- neither regretting the past nor fearing the future- is to experience the abundant life that God promises us. Unfortunately, many of us are like yo-yos when it comes to our spiritual lives. What can and does get in the way is what is called "the yo-yo approach" to spiritual life. We give it to God and then we take it back. We give it to God and then we take it back again. Sometimes we don't

even know we've done it. Until all of a sudden, we are again in a locked room, hiding for fear of something. It is when we dare to trust the promise, to live in the moment that life abundant happens. Not in the echoes of the Alleluias of Easter past. Not in the fears of what the future holds. But in the Jesus who enters wherever we are and says "Peace be with you".

**Breathe on me, breath of God
So shall I never die
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity.**

Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am poor.
Through the storm, through the night; lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear, blessed Lord, linger near;
And when my light is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call; hold my hand lest I fall;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When the darkness appears and the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone;
At the river I stand; guide my feet, hold my hand;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am poor.
Through the storm, through the night lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

PRAYERS

PASTOR: Hear us, merciful Father, as we pray for ourselves, for the Church, for our nation and for all conditions and manner of people.

PASTOR: God of mercy, keep us from the doubts and fears that cripple us and prevent us from knowing the fullness of Your saving peace and gracious presence. Teach us to trust in Your Word and to believe with all our hearts, minds, bodies and strength in Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of grace, bestow upon Your Church Your Holy Spirit and all the gifts that come down from on high. Grant to us faithful pastors who will preach faithfully and ears to hear Your Word proclaimed. Give us boldness in our witness before the world and courage to speak Your name without fear. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of power, give courage and strength to those persecuted for the faith, and comfort the families of the martyrs. Keep Your Church from following the winds of change, and make her steadfast in the doctrine of the apostles and the faith once delivered to the saints. Help us to admonish those who have fallen away with Your Word and to restore with gentleness those who have wandered from the truth. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of might, counsel the nations and their leaders in the paths of peace and justice. Bless us with wise, faithful and just leaders who will protect the sanctity of life and defend us against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Make us wise and discerning citizens who use the gift of liberty for noble purpose. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of love, teach us to love one another as You have loved us. Guide us so that in our neighborhoods and communities we may manifest the love of Christ as well as His strength. Deliver us from all that would threaten our homes and families. Protect the police, firefighters, disaster-relief workers and medical personnel who attend to us, as well as the places where we live and work. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of comfort, give Your aid and relief to all who suffer want or need, to the sick in their afflictions, to those troubled in mind, and to those to whom death draws near [*especially...*]. Heal and sustain them according to Your gracious will, and preserve them in faith to eternal life. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: God of peace, give harmony and unity to Your people, both in our various vocations before the world and in our common life at this altar. Help us to receive with repentance and joy the gift of Christ's body and blood in this blest communion, that we may be strengthened in faith and enjoy the gift of a clear conscience through the forgiveness of our sins. Lord, in Your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

PASTOR: O blessed God and Lord, hear the prayers of Your people and teach us to trust in Your will to answer our prayers with all that is needful and beneficial, both for us and for all for whom we have prayed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

ALL: Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (spoken in unison)

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

PASTOR: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

ALL: Amen!

Living Hope

How great the chasm that lay between us;
How high the mountain I could not climb;
In desperation I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night.
Then through the darkness Your loving-kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul.
The work is finished, the end is written;
Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame.
The cross has spoken; I am forgiven;
The King of kings calls me His own.
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever;
Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Hallelujah! Praise the One who set me free!
Hallelujah! Death has lost its grip on me;
You have broken every chain;
There's salvation in Your name;
Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Then came the morning that sealed the promise;
Your buried body began to breathe;
Out of the silence the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me.
Then came the morning that sealed the promise;
Your buried body began to breathe;
Out of the silence the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me;
Jesus, Yours is the victory!

Hallelujah! Praise the One who set me free!
Hallelujah! Death has lost its grip on me;
You have broken every chain;
There's salvation in Your name;
Jesus Christ, my living hope.
Jesus Christ, my living hope.
God You are my living hope!

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