

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(Have communion elements on hand prior to the start of worship.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREETING/CALL TO WORSHIP

—based on Acts 2:42-47

Sisters and brothers, we are gathered in the heart of Christ.
Therefore, let our hearts be glad and generous.
Many are the signs and wonders being done among us.
so, let us break bread together and share our lives in common.
Let us give what we can to all who have needs
so that all people, no matter who they are,
may regard us with good will.
Let us devote ourselves to prayer and to the gospel.
For this way God will add to our numbers every day.

OPENING SENTENCES

As we gather together this morning, let us focus on allowing the Holy Spirit into our hearts and spirits so that we are strengthened and made whole. Let us be devoted to God’s Word, and through it, hear God’s voice and follow it to eternal life.

PRAYER SEEKING RECONCILIATION

*Let us prepare ourselves to receive God’s gift of holy Scripture
by setting aside all that burdens our hearts and spirits.*

Source of all life, we confess that we have not allowed your grace to set us free. We fear that we are not good enough. We hear your word of love freely given to us, yet we expect others to earn it. We turn the church inward, rather than moving it outward. Forgive us. Stir us. Reform us to be a church powered by love, willing to speak for what is right, act for what is just, and seek the healing of your whole creation. Amen.

Let us keep a short silence to reflect on what we have prayed.

AN ASSURANCE

Hear the Good News: God hears our cry and sends the Spirit to change us and empower our lives in the world. We are forgiven, God’s love is unconditional, and we are raised up as God’s people, who will always be made new in the name of Jesus Christ.

A READING FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

Mary Ann Saito

Acts 2:42-47 *Life Among the Believers*

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

SERMON

“Re-Set”

The passage we just heard is about a people who were inspired and joyful. They were doing something new. A new chapter has begun in human history, and they were a part of it. Through the resurrection of Christ the world was shown, once and for all time, just how deeply God loves us and how powerful that love is. The people in this passage have seen that happen in their life-time: God had “re-set” the world, and the people in this reading from Acts of the Apostles were finding their way forward in it.

Specifically, these are the people who have just witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit. It has been more than fifty days since Christ had risen from the tomb. Some of the people in this passage were the ones who had been with the twelve disciples from before the crucifixion. They were the ones who had wandered off in despair after that terrible day. However, they were the ones who could not let it rest, but kept coming back by the place where Peter and the others were “holed-up” and waiting.

You could say: the disciples were “sheltering in place.”

What were they waiting for, they wondered? Why didn’t they just go home?

Something had happened—that much they knew, and they did not want to miss out on it. However, they just couldn’t put their lives on hold any longer. They needed to get back to work, back to life as they knew it.

Still, just to be on the safe side, they checked-in with the disciples every once in a while.

I can imagine them wandering back by the place where Peter and the others were living and waiting. I can imagine many of them looking up at the house, searching the window for signs of movement. Perhaps they furtively glanced up as they trudged to and from the marketplace, or the field, or the stables. Each time they passed, they hoped they would see something stirring, something new happening, something that would change them *forever*.

Finally, it happened! One day, as they are passing, they see a strange and wonderful sight. It’s Peter and the others, and they appeared to be caught-up in something like a mighty wind. It roared as it swirled and swept through the house and among the disciples.

The next thing the on-lookers knew, there appeared to be little flames dancing above the heads of the disciples. It was wonderful! It was terrifying!

I imagine it felt like the way it felt this week when the jets that flew over Manhattan—the Blue Angels and the Thunderbirds flying in formation over the city that has seen so much sorrow and loss.

The Blue Angels and the Thunderbirds flew to salute the first responders and medical personnel, and the many people who were still keeping the faith and trying to move forward.

They flew in in a roar of power and strength to inspire those who have been through so much.

I can imagine the sight people saw that day 2000 years ago in Jerusalem felt a lot like that. It certainly had that same effect. On-lookers were stunned as the Spirit swept in and began to work its will. Suddenly, people began to speak to one another, and all with perfect understanding even though many in the crowd were foreigners who spoke different languages. It was a miracle!

Then Peter began to speak to all of them. He told them that what they were experiencing was the work of the Spirit. He explained how this Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he would send them a Spirit to guide and to lead them. This Spirit would live in their hearts and in the midst of their lives so long as they accepted and embraced it.

Peter went on to talk about all that had happened with Jesus; how he was, indeed, the Christ, the Messiah they had been waiting for. The empty tomb was their first sign. Peter also recounted all that had been foretold in Scripture. This, too, was a sign. Now the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit was yet another sign that God was doing something new and important in the world—and they were invited to be a part of it. They were invited to re-set their lives and to live with hope and joy together.

In the passage we heard today, many had embraced it and were now a part of this new community.

It is important to remember that these first followers of Christ *after the resurrection* were Jewish—the mission to the Gentiles had not yet begun. Many were inhabitants of Jerusalem. They were Jews who still went to Temple, knew of the Laws of Moses, and knew and kept all of the laws and traditions of the Jews.

Yet, something new had happened. Something they could not deny or ignore. Even though they kept all of the old ways, they now understood them differently.

They had experienced a “re-set”—God’s “re-setting” of their lives in the world.

The passage we heard tells us that people were so excited and hopeful that three thousand immediately jumped at the chance to become a part of this new life on earth, and that more were being added to their number each and every day.

Clearly, they were a people who were hungry for change—and not just any change—they were hungry for life, *new* life. They hungered for a life that was filled with caring and justice.

This is what we see in this passage. God’s justice and love is what is being practiced—people are being included and fed; they are praying together, they are welcoming each other as equals; they are sharing their thoughts and insight with each other as they meditated on Holy Scripture and the teaching of the apostles.

All of these things are the marks of a faithful community, but also a community that has awakened to the notion that *this* is where and how their deepest needs and longings for life were

going to be fulfilled. This is a community that is willing to joyfully sacrifice for each other—some who are rich are gladly bringing their treasure to the community; all are breaking down barriers of class and position and becoming one community, one people, one body—the body of Christ in the world...

...It is important to note that while their joy and their commitment was real, this perfect model of the beloved community did not last for all time. We know that because we have the vantage of our 21st century knowledge of history.

Yet, this “best version” of Christian community did not completely vanish from the earth, either. We still look back to it. We read about it. We talk about this amazing way of living. We wonder what it could be like to live surrounded with such an out-pouring of love and support.

And I believe most of us yearn for such a life—if not for ourselves, for our children. We long to give them a world that is safe and secure; a world where they will never be alone or without friends; without resources.

The thing is: this is what God wants for us, too.

This is what the resurrection was all about—it was about God telling us that, no matter what happens, God’s love is never going to fail us. The resurrection is God’s love being stronger than every power on earth—even hate; even death.

Every story we have heard since Easter is yet another story of the resurrection being offered to humankind—the disciples and the people in Jerusalem—but also to us, too...

...In fact, one of the conversations going on in a lot of circles right now is about the life and the reality we are living with right now.

No, ***God did NOT send the Coronavirus as a way of re-setting the world.***

God is not the author of misery. However, God can use this time-out we are all experiencing.

God can do this by using this time to bring into focus just how we are using our time on this earth and in this community of faith, the talent God has given each one of us, and the treasure we have gathered through hard work but also through God’s blessing.

Are we using these good things to bring healing and hope to as many people as possible? Do these things remake a part of the world so that people can rebuild their lives? Are we using our God-given gifts to participate in God’s work of transformation?

This is our good news: that, once again, the resurrection is being offered to us—that is: we are being offered the opportunity to participate in the loving gesture God has made toward us and the world through Christ’s resurrection. We are being invited to know the same joy, the same dignity, the same feelings of purpose, security, and love that those first followers of Christ knew after that first descent of the Holy Spirit.

We can be like them: filled with the same hope and certainty as we continue into an uncertain future. We are together, and God's Spirit is still with us.

All of these questions are thoughts I hope you will take to God in prayer individually. However, these are also questions we need to answer *together*, too. *Your* insight and experience is going to be needed, and I hope you know how much it is wanted by all of us—because it is.

Friends, these days of “sheltering in place” and wearing a mask every time we go out of the house; all the news reports of people sick, people dying; people losing their jobs and their homes—all of this is disorienting, heart-breaking, frightening. I know how dark it often feels.

I do not believe God wants us to deny any of these things that are happening. Rather, God wants us to see that the light of Easter morning is a light that is still with us, filling the world, but also lighting our way into the future—love is leading us into the next chapter in the life of the world. God's love is what is going to “re-set” our life and heal the world, and we are invited to participate with God in the new life God wants us to have.

So, I pray that each of us, and all of us together, will pray and meditate on what God can and will do through the Holy Spirit as it works through us. Life may seem chaotic and strange but the Spirit is here with us transforming, renewing, re-setting life—our life, mine and yours.

As we move toward another month of “sheltering in place,” I pray you will allow the Spirit to give you the strength and hope—the love God wants you to have, so that together, we can go forward with God to remake and to rebuild, to heal and make whole; to grow and gather-in. May we hold hope and God's love close, so that we go forward with God and “re-set” the world.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let there be a brief time of silence after each petition.

Shepherding God, in a dangerous world,
let us hear your voice and come and go through your gate.

We pray for the whole church, that we may be devoted to your Word and to universal fellowship, being generous with all who have need.

We pray for the earth, for green pastures and still waters, that we may restore them to the goodness and purity that they had at the time you created them.

We pray for the people of the world, their nations and leaders, that your wisdom and peace may govern all, so that no one will fear.

We pray for all those in need, for those in want, those ill and those dying, that we may be the banquet you set before them as we anoint them, feed them, and comfort them in your name.

We pray for ourselves and our families, and those we love. May no one live in fear; may all dwell in your presence.

Blessed are you, Great Shepherd, who, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, gives us goodness and mercy, leads us down right paths, and restores our souls, and teaches us to pray saying: “*Our Creator who art in heaven...*”

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God above, ye heavenly host;
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

HOLY COMMUNION

Liturgy written by Maren Tirabassi

INVITATION

Once again, for Holy Communion, I invite you to lend Christ your table.
I invite you to remember how on the afternoon of the resurrection,
Jesus was invited into a house in Emmaus and used the bread of that hospitality
to break and bless, to open the eyes of the disciples, and to renew their faith.

So, lend Christ your table, your bread, your cup and your heart,
for, “The Lord has need of it.”

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Pastor: We are one bread, one body, one cup of blessing.
Though we are many throughout the earth
and this church community is scattered,
in your many kitchens, and living rooms,
rest your hands lightly upon these elements
which we set aside today to be a sacrament.
Let us ask God’s blessing upon them.

**Unison: Generous God, there is no lockdown on your blessing
and no quarantine on grace.
Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing
upon every table where your children shelter in place,
that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love
and this Cup poured out to give hope to all.**

**Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you.
Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you.**

WORDS OF REMEMBERING

Pastor: We remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, and they were the first “remote” worship resources.

Our online service has a long heritage.

The Communion words sent to the church at Corinth were these:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

Pastor: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God: the Bread of Heaven.

Unison: We are one in Christ in the bread we share.

Pastor: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God: the Cup of Life.

Unison: We are one in Christ in the cup we share.

“Let Us Be Bread”

(Please join in singing the refrain after you have received the elements.)

**Let us be bread, blessed by the Lord,
broken and shared, life for the world.**

Let us be wine, love freely poured.

Let us be one in the Lord.

*After you have received the bread and wine please
cover the elements of this holy meal, and let us give thanks together:*

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that, by the very method of our worship, we have embodied the truth that Christ’s love is not limited by buildings made with human hands,

nor contained in human ceremonies,
but blows as free as the Spirit in all places.

Unison: Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives.

**May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love,
not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world, and may the
drinking of this Cup renew our hope even in the midst of pandemic.**

**Wrap your hopeful presence around all whose bodies, spirits and hearts
need healing, and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

May Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, be with you.

May the Spirit empower you to serve in Christ's name.

May God, who raised Christ from the dead, keep you forevermore.

Alleluia! Amen.