



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL
Partners in Christ's Service since 1890

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

At Home or Small Group Worship for April 19, 2020

OPENING HYMN – *audio available on the church website*

#222 Christ is Risen! Shout Hosanna!

Meg McGarry, vocals

Christ is risen! Shout hosanna!
Celebrate this day of days!
Christ is risen! Hush in wonder:
all creation is amazed.
In the desert all-surrounding,
see, a spreading tree has grown.
Healing leaves of grace abounding
bring a taste of love unknown.

Christ is risen! Raise your spirits
from the caverns of despair.
Walk with gladness in the morning.
See what love can do and dare.
Drink the wine of resurrection,
not a servant, but a friend.
Jesus is our strong companion.
Joy and peace shall never end.

Christ is risen! Earth and heaven
nevermore shall be the same.
Break the bread of new creation
where the world is still in pain.
Tell its grim, demonic chorus:
"Christ is risen! Get you gone!"
God the first and last is with us.
Sing Hosanna everyone!

CALL TO WORSHIP

God's strong and loving hands are outstretched to all Creation.
Let the world stretch forth and grasp God's hands with joy.
God's open hands are as the gate of righteousness.
Let us enter in to God's abundant life and give thanks.
In God's hands are new life, strength, and salvation.
Let us be thankful and sing unto our God with gladness.

OPENING PRAYER

O Risen Christ, we recognize your wounded hands; they tell us that you know what it is to struggle and suffer and to prevail in the power of love. Let us grasp your hands, that they may lead us into a deeper place of peace. As we empty our burdens into your loving arms, open us the joy of abundant life in you! Amen! Alleluia!

GLORIA PATRI #35

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son
And to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning
Is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Prayer Hymn #263

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place,
I can feel his mighty power and his grace.
I can hear the brush of angels' wings,
I see glory on each face;
Surely the presence of the Lord; is in this place.

Silent Prayer

PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving and Gracious God, meet me that I may encounter your peace. Center my life on faith instead of fear. Renew my spirit, increase my ability to love, and clarify my vision of a world redeemed.

As your church, we profess our love for the risen Christ. Enable us to recognize Christ more often than we do. In your love for us, O God, we thank you because you allow us to ask our questions and raise our doubts. In our quest to know you, you give us the room we need to explore and figure things out. May our hearts continue to be opened to the many ways that you choose to reveal yourself to us.

As your disciples, we are called to be your witnesses in this world. Help us, O God, to live as your able servants, joining in Christ's work, to heal a hurting and broken world. We pray for the world and ourselves as we continue to cope with the stresses and strains of a global pandemic. We pray for our family and friends and ask your blessings to be upon them. We pray for those who are ill, for those who grieve, for those facing hardship. We pray for a future that includes a cleaner environment, more thoughtful relationships, less violence and strife.

Remind us for what is possible; inspire us to be the change we seek. Christ is no longer fixed upon a cross. He no longer lies within a tomb. Christ is risen and walks the roads we walk. We are not alone. We pray, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

OUR LORD'S PRAYER

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 sins, as we forgive those who sin 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. Amen.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – *audio available on the church website*

SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE– *audio available on the church website*

John 20: 19-31

When 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 of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, 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 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." A 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." 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." 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 come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 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.

SERMON

Unlocking

Rev. Mike Daly

The story of Jesus' resurrection appearance to that group of frightened disciples, including doubting Thomas, has always been one of my favorite bible stories. For one thing, it offers assurance that Jesus does not condemn those of us who get nervous or afraid. And, Jesus never condemned those of us who were ever skeptical or doubted.

Some of you might recall that when I was in eighth grade, I wrote my Confirmation paper about why I didn't believe in God. A good story for another time.

A dear friend of mine says that he loved this story when he was a small boy because, in this story, Jesus has the powers of a superhero! As a comic book reader, he was fascinated by superhero powers. And for a good reason! Wonder Woman could deflect bullets with her bracelets and fly in an invisible airplane. Captain Marvel got his extraordinary powers by saying, "Shazam!" Superman could fly, break down any wall, and use his X-ray vision to see through walls. And Jesus could pass through locked doors.

On that first Easter night, the disciples were huddled together behind locked doors, because they had a lot to be afraid of. They could be accused of stealing Jesus' body. They could be punished for guilt-by-association with Jesus' teachings of a new kingdom replacing the old one. They could be scorned and cast out by those who knew they had failed. Whatever the reasons, they are cowering, and the doors are locked.

And, right when they need him most, Jesus appears! Like a superhero, well.... let's say, like a savior. He says, "Peace be with you." Faith is restored. Fear is replaced with rejoicing.

But, Anna Carter Florence, professor of preaching at Columbia Seminary asks, 'Have you ever considered how downright terrifying resurrection is? Because what

you think is finished turns out to be just a new starting point. What you think is a dead-end, turns out to be a fork in the road. Resurrection changes all the rules, and that is the best and worst possible news.'

What could God have in store for us in this post-Easter world? What does God intend to do with our locked-door selves?" Could there be courage waiting for us, the courage to speak the truth we really believe? The courage to reach out for help when we need it. Could there be friendship waiting for us, friendships we have possibly overlooked or avoided? Could there be new life waiting for us, a life we had once imagined, but then shelved?

All along, the disciples had been praying for this resurrection. They prayed for a post-Easter world but did so without really knowing what it fully meant. And now, here it is, just as Jesus said. Yet none of those predictions, none of Jesus' wisdom, prepared them for how terrified they would be when it happened. And isn't that comforting, in a twisted sort of way? —to know that even when we hope and pray for resurrection and new life, it never feels safe?!

So what would it take for us to unlock those doors and let go of those fears? Jesus does not let the disciples flounder in their fears for long. Jesus offers them peace and reminds them that he is still at work in the world, and so are they. "As the Father has sent me into the world, so I now send you." "If you forgive anyone, they are forgiven." It is time for your faith to conquer fear and bring the kingdom of God to the world.

This is how the living body of Christ is to work. And, this is why we join together to become a church, Christ's body. Together, we seek to learn, practice, and grow in faith. We work out our fears. We inspire each other with our passion. We share our faith and our gifts so that the locked doors of exclusion – indifference – intolerance - elitism are rejected and no longer barriers to making God's kingdom a reality. Church people make good things happen by enacting good upon the world. We have to, because if what happens in church stays in church than we have no real purpose.

One of the things I celebrate about our community of faith is our strong commitment to mission and reaching out in compassionate ways to those in need. I also appreciate that we are not afraid of our doubts. We can and do ask questions. We do not force people to struggle alone with deep questions because they are afraid of how others might react to their doubts. We are able to agree with

Frederick Buechner, who wrote, “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*)

When Jesus says to Thomas, "Touch me, thrust your hands into my scars," Jesus was not rebuking Thomas for his doubts. Rather, he was giving Thomas the proof that he needed. Jesus did not say to Thomas, "Now, close your eyes and try to believe real hard." Nor did he say, "Thomas, if you would just have more faith, be more like the other disciples, you wouldn't have a problem." Instead, Jesus gave Thomas the proof he needed. Out of love, he gave him tangible proof.

Christianity is not just a wonderful spiritual ideal. Who gets worked up over a spiritual ideal, anyway? Christianity is the living body that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enacts spirituality into a tangible, visible reality.

The resurrected Jesus meets all of his disciples, including Thomas. Though Jesus' words don't reach Thomas, his hands do. Jesus is no ghost; he is no magician; he isn't even a superhero. He is the living messiah. He is with us. American poet X.J. Kennedy, in his poem *Walking through Walls*, puts it this way: "Passing through doors unopened he appeared in his disciples' midst as might a wind hurtling through branches."

Faith is a beautiful wonder. Jesus rising from the grave is wonderful news! He told us such things would happen, and now he is here to help us see him and believe in a world transformed. Never let a search for perfection or a commitment to doubt stop you or distract you from participation or belief. Your spiritual life is too important.

Again and again, the Spirit of Jesus meets us where we are, startling us and embracing us and breathing on us and sending us to be the embodiment of love and hope for others. The Good News is clear. When you least expect him, and when you most need him, Jesus appears. May we have the eyes to recognize him.

Amen

OFFERTORY MUSIC— *audio available on the church website*

God provides for us in ways that we do not always recognize.

I Surrender All
Meg McGarry, vocals
Dave Benziger, guitar

Weeden

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

HYMN – *audio available on the church website*

#218 Thine is the Glory

Meg McGarry, vocals

Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave clothes
where thy body lay.

[Refrain:]

Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.

Lo! Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom;
let the church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing.
for the Lord now liveth;
death hath lost its sting. (Refrain)

No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of life!
Life is nought without thee;
aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless love.
Bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above. (Refrain)

BENEDICTION

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.