

Sunday, April 4, 2021

Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day, Year B

Prayer of the Day

O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Acts 10:34-43

Peter crosses the immense religious and social boundary that separates Jews from Gentiles in order to proclaim the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, so that God's forgiveness in Jesus' name would reach out to all people.

³⁴Peter began to speak to [the people]: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Psalm: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps. 118:24)

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the | LORD is good;
God's mercy en- | dures forever.

²**Let Israel | now declare,**
"God's mercy en- | dures forever."

¹⁴The LORD is my strength | and my song,
and has become | my salvation.

¹⁵**Shouts of rejoicing and salvation echo in the tents | of the righteous:**
"The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!"

¹⁶The right hand of the LORD| is exalted!
The right hand of the | LORD acts valiantly!"

¹⁷**I shall not | die, but live,
and declare the works | of the LORD. R**

¹⁸The LORD indeed pun- | ished me sorely,
but did not hand me o- | ver to death.

¹⁹**Open for me the | gates of righteousness;
I will enter them and give thanks | to the LORD.**

²⁰“This is the gate | of the LORD;
here the righ- | teous may enter.”

²¹**I give thanks to you, for you have | answered me
and you have become | my salvation. R**

²²The stone that the build- | ers rejected
has become the chief | cornerstone.

²³**By the LORD has | this been done;
it is marvelous | in our eyes.**

²⁴This is the day that the | LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be | glad in it. R

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The core of the Christian faith and Paul’s preaching is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the crucified and risen Christ appeared to the earliest of his followers, so we experience the presence of the Risen One in the preaching of this faith.

¹Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

The resurrection of Jesus is announced, and the response is one of terror and amazement.

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus’ body]. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had

been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Sermon

Easter 2021

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! What a great way to announce this day of days within the church. This Easter proclamation is one where we smile as we proclaim it, as we appreciate it. In one sense we cannot hold our enthusiasm back, we must smile.

Today we are celebrating the triumph of Jesus over death and the grave. Today we celebrate salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s only Son.

But we must also remember and acknowledge that the salvation proclaimed in our Easter texts, and most clearly demonstrated in Christ’s resurrection, lies not only in the end of death. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for salvation are grounded in a sense of deliverance now, restoration now, available in our present lives as sources of healing, hope, peace, strength, love and life of God.

And in this sense the age-old thought that the resurrection changed the world and it will never be the same, is one that we can attest to, and continue to proclaim and in which we can find solace each and every day.

Easter reminds us that the same power that raised Jesus doesn’t only promise us eternal life after death. It also promises for the present time all the possibilities that emerge from forgiveness, from the grace through which you and I are being saved, from the one who “is going ahead” of us, calling us into life.

And while all of us may indeed say “Amen” to that, a question still arises – how can we sustain Easter in our daily lives? How do we move into each tomorrow as Easter people proclaiming that the Risen One has indeed been let loose in the world in ways that forever changed the world as it was known?

It’s akin to the question so many folks ask each Christmas season – How do we keep Christmas alive and meaningful all year long? The attitude of hope we share at Christmas, the possibilities that arise because the Messiah has been born are what we

want to keep projecting throughout the year. And as we all know, that is difficult, if not impossible.

But how about the challenge of Easter to shout – He is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. And then to shout it with meaning and a sense of expectation day after day? In the end we are as likely to maintain that as we are to keeping Christmas alive throughout the year.

Yet, today we are given a hint as Mary Magdalene shows us the way. Our shout “Christ is Risen” doesn’t cross her mind or lips. No, for Mary Magdalene it is much more personal. Mary says, “I have seen the Lord.” I have seen. So with that in mind I’m going to suggest this morning that you and I must say “I have seen” if we want Easter to be an ever-present reality and not just a commemoration of a past event.

You might think that I am a bit daft suggesting that we say “I have seen” when surely we have not seen Jesus as Mary did on that day of Resurrection. And my response would be that we certainly cannot see Jesus as Mary did – in person, up close and personal but we can see Jesus work in our lives and in the world – not only today but each tomorrow.

To proclaim – I have seen Jesus – is to acknowledge that Jesus is alive and well and that we are followers of Jesus who see and affirm and proclaim the reality of his living presence in our lives and in the world.

Reality for us is that the all-embracing love of Christ that lives and is at work in every moment, place, and circumstance – in every act of love, every beauty, every act of mercy and justice, every kindness, struggle, and hope, raising all of us into the fulness of life. The Risen One is indeed loose in the world, active even in people and places where his name is not known, believed, loved, or honored. Just as Mary could not hold him, neither can our sanctuaries, creeds, and confessions.

And just so, all who follow Christ today have an opportunity to show Christ’s love, mercy, peace, and justice in real and meaningful ways. This crazy year-old pandemic has cause innumerable heartaches.

I don’t need to and will not attempt to list them. All of us are aware of what they are and how they have touched our lives and the lives of our families and loved ones.

We see individuals, groups of neighbors, school children, seniors, and other impromptu associations coming together, overcoming obstacles and digging in with tenacity and helping those in need simply because they are in need. No questions asked. And many of these efforts will be ongoing until the need subsides.

I have seen Jesus. I have seen the Risen One. And he is busy helping those who are in need: physical, mental, spiritual. And I know you have seen Jesus too.

You have heard me say before that you and I as today’s disciples and followers of Jesus are his: hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouth in our world today. If we want people to see Jesus, we have to live so that others see Jesus through us. There are endless

possibilities for that to occur daily if we just but look and are attentive. In what we say and do we can pray that others will at the end of the day say that they, too, have seen Jesus.

I have been convinced for many years that we do not come to worship on Easter to hear proofs or explanations. Rather, we gather to hear Christ call us by name, fill our hearts, heal our grief and guilt, and remove our regrets and anxieties in the warmth of his eternal embrace.

We come today, in part, because we want to hope again. And as we daily proclaim, “He is Risen” and “I have seen Jesus,” our hope is renewed. Christ is alive and let loose in our world to work through us as we in many and varied ways allow him to be known through what we say and do in his holy name.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Praise to you for your power revealed in the resurrection! Fill your church with the power of your love that is stronger than death. Send us to tell the good news wherever death holds sway. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for your life at work in the resurrection! Fill all of creation with your life. Bring it to blossom and flourish; use it to remind us of your persistent grace. Cultivate our care for what you have made. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the peace made possible in the resurrection! Fill the nations with your peace. Draw together people of all nations and languages; reveal new possibilities and inspire new beginnings. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the hope of the resurrection! Fill all in need with hope: those who are afraid or confused, those who are sick or suffering, those who are dying, and those who grieve (*especially*). Assure them of your promises. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the joy of your resurrection! Fill this assembly with joy as we are called your beloved in baptism. Multiply that joy so that we share it at home, at work, and in our community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Praise to you for your faithfulness revealed in the resurrection! Fill us with trust, that we join with (*Benedict the African and*) all who have gone before us in proclaiming: “your mercy endures forever!” Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.