

The Sixth Sunday in Easter – May 9, 2021

Hymn 210 – The Day of Resurrection

The day of resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad;
The Passover of gladness, the Passover of God.
From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over, with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil, that we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal of resurrection light;
And, listening to his accents, may hear so calm and plain
His own "All hail!" and, hearing, may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heavens be joyful, let earth her song begin,
The round world keep high triumph, and all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen their notes in gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord hath risen, our joy that hath no end.

Collect for Purity

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your holy spirit, that we may more perfectly love you and more worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Collect of the Day

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 10

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days. The Word of the Lord.

Psalm 98

O sing to the Lord a new song, who has done marvellous things*
Whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

The Lord has made known this victory* Has revealed vindication
in the sight of the nations.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth* Break forth into
joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre* With the lyre and the sound
of melody.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn* Make a joyful noise
before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it* The world and those who live
in it.

Let the floods clap their hands* Let the hills sing together for joy

At the presence of the Lord who is coming to judge the earth* The
Lord will judge the world with righteousness, and all the peoples
with equity.

A Reading from the First Letter of John, Chapter 5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey God's commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey these commandments. And God's commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? And the Spirit is the one who testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. The Word of the Lord.

Hymn 448 – O love, how deep, how broad, how high

O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
How passing thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take
Our mortal form for mortals' sake!

For us baptized, for us he bore
His holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptations sharp he knew;
For us the tempter overthrew.

For us he rose from death again;
For us he went on high to reign;
For us he sent his Spirit here
To guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.

All glory to our Lord and God
For love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore
Forever and forevermore.

The Holy Gospel According to John – Chapter 15

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Sing to the Lord a new song! Over and over in the Book of Psalms we hear and repeat this phrase: Sing to the Lord a new song. What on earth is there to make of such an admonition? What in the World are we to do with such an arresting and electrifying refrain?

When Peter and his friends are met by the company of all those unfamiliar, foreign folks, the day becomes one of surprise, amazement and wholesale rethinking. We must hold in our minds the paradox that the stories we read today are very specifically for us, even though they are peopled by other folks, long, long ago. We might get hung up on the rightness or wrongness of Peter and his friends' hesitation in accepting the spiritual companionship of the gentiles they encounter, inclusiveness is very much the way we want to operate our house today. But for Peter and his friends, there was no long history of established institutional Christianity that they were protecting from outsiders. The whole idea of following Jesus as central to a godly life was new. What they were

trying to do was discover and understand what God's criteria were for joining or belonging to the kingdom of believers. They were learning a new song.

Last week we heard the Ethiopian say to Philip, "Is there any reason I should not be baptized?" And Philip was immediately awakened to the realization that the answer to that question was and will always be 'No.' Today it's Peter, who almost sounds like he heard the Philip story when he asks, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people?" And of course the answer is 'No.' For it is clear that the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost power has descended on everybody in the vicinity, everybody, including, well, everybody. There is no more legitimate rationale for discriminating. Everybody means everybody. All means all.

So this story is for us, but not because we are consciously attempting to exclude anybody from our midst. Goodness knows, we are delighted when a prospective new worshipper shows up at church. And perhaps we sometimes seem to bend over theologically backwards to fold them into our midst. No, the story is for us because of our ancient, persistent and completely natural human tendency to include by enlisting instead of by loving.

Sing a new song unto The Lord – with pipes and timbrel and harp – let the very hills ring out their song of joy. Many of us enjoy the camaraderie and satisfaction of service organizations, Lions, Kiwanis, the Rotary. Why does the work we do together with our club friends not fulfill this desire for love and joy? The short answer is, it does. To some extent. It's a great feeling to work together on a project for some good cause, and relax together at the end of a long day. So why do we need this religion thing anyway?

God has made us capable of love, hungry for loving action, but also more than a tiny bit careful, reticent, reserved. The truth is that whatever work we do to further God's Kingdom counts and satisfies. Our service work can fulfill us to a significant degree.

And yes, the instinct we have to do this work is plenty holy. But there is more to life even than this healthy appetite for goodness.

The new song we sing is a song of joy that comes from each of our hearts individually, when we interact for no other reason than togetherness. We sing it if we will, all the day long, and especially on Sunday. This is the true Glee Club – no audition necessary. Peter and his friends were amazed that the Holy Spirit fell on everybody in the vicinity, without exception. It was only when they realized that this was the unimaginable power prophesied by John the Baptist and promised by Jesus, descending on whomever was there to be affected – without criteria – that they began to abandon status, heritage and purity in favor of universality, openmindedness and blind love. John said, “There cometh one after me more powerful than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire!”

This story is often called “The Gentile Pentecost.” It makes abundantly clear the reality of universally available inspiration. Not just a desire to do good works – vital and therefore welcome as such a desire most certainly is – but the kind of inspiration, inspiration, as in getting filled with spirit that can most certainly blast our lives with a stunning awareness of God’s boundless love, set our souls on fire with eagerness to reciprocate that love by our treatment of others, and fill our hearts to overflowing with the unique music that God is longing to hear.

I’m told that Aristotle wrote about there being three kinds of friends: Ones who are useful, who help you get ahead in the World; ones who are amusing, who help you pass the time of day in pleasure; and ones whom you love and who love you, who function as models, teachers and living proof of God’s love at work in our lives. This last group is necessarily small. While there is a wideness in God’s mercy that knows no bounds, and a charitable impulse towards humankind in general that we would never want

to restrict, close beloved friends will always be a select group. It's not whether you choose them or vice-versa, you choose each other.

Today we can reflect on one of the most fundamental and (for most of us) complicated areas of friendship there is: Mom. I know it's politically incorrect to be friends with your kids. It's also a terrible way to be a parent if that's all you do, especially when they're young. But there are attitudes and strategies that we use with our beloved friends that can transform families fundamentally and for the better. What Jesus says to his disciples is this: 'You are no longer my slaves, you are my friends. I have told you everything I know about me and about God – you have the whole scoop – because this is the best I can do. Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends.' Well there is a literal meaning to that, but most of us won't ever have to make any heroic gestures. So how can we love our kids like Jesus loved us? By laying down our lives in the sense of our hopes, fears, dreams, wisdom, and the things we just don't understand. Like we do with our best friends. By singing out our new and unique songs, no matter how goofy or histrionic or unpolished, like we do with our friends. By saying in as many ways as we can how glad we are to be their parents, even if we didn't choose them!

Thus we gather together in families, in these our peaceful communities of worship, in twos and threes, brothers and sisters, good friends, mothers and their children, fathers too, in special loving friendship, to go beyond the law, beyond tradition and even beyond what's known as fine upbringing, and with Jesus as our inspiration and power, to break forth into a mysterious, new song-filled and unending life of love, that spills over and inundates our interactions with just about anybody.

The Prayers of the People

O God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving, and so we

pray for one another, for our families and friends, especially our mothering nurturers, through whom we learn to love and to be loved. Thank you for all who care for us. Give us grace to serve Christ by serving our neighbours and our community, loving others as he loves us.

Silence

We thank you for the unfailing love you hold out to everyone in Jesus Christ. Comfort and heal those in sorrow, need, sickness or any other trouble, especially Sue, Bill, Katharine, are there others? Give them courage and hope in their distress, and bless those who minister to them.

Silence

We remember with gratitude your many gifts to us in creation and the rich heritage of this land. Help us and people everywhere to share with justice and peace the resources of the earth. Give wisdom to those in authority among us and to all leaders of the nations.

Silence

We pray for your Church throughout the world, thanking you for all who serve Christ and his kingdom. By your Spirit strengthen your people for their work and witness in the world. Unite us in your truth and love, that we who confess your name may also reflect your glory.

Silence

We remember with thanksgiving all who have died in Christ, especially Elizabeth, all victims of the Covid pandemic, and all victims of gunfire in our land. And we rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age, praying that we may enter with them into the unending joy of your heavenly kingdom.

Silence

Accept, O Lord, the fervent prayers of your people. In the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon those who turn to you; for you are gracious, O lover of souls, and to you we give thanks, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. ***Amen.***

Hymn 208 – The strife is o'er, the battle done Vss 1, 2, 4 & 5

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

The strife is o'er, the battle done,
The victory of life is won;
The song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!

The powers of death have done their worst,
But Christ their legions hath dispersed:
Let shout of holy joy outburst. Alleluia!

He closed the yawning gates of hell,
The bars from heaven's high portals fell;
Let hymns of praise his triumphs tell! Alleluia!

Lord! by the stripes which wounded thee,
From death's dread sting thy servants free,
That we may live and sing to thee. Alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Now, may the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son our Savior, Jesus Christ. And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be with you and those whom you love this day and remain with you forever.