**NVMA Mediated Worship- Easter 2, April 11, 2021**

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Tim Graves-**[**https://liturgybits.wordpress.com**](https://liturgybits.wordpress.com/)**)**

We gather as people on a journey.

**We believe and we have doubts, we do good, and we sin.
We are imperfect humans, and still beloved by God.**

Love and grace. Hope and faith.
These are the essence of the one we call God.
**We seek forgiveness and grace from the One and from those we’ve harmed.**

Assured of that grace, we are ready to grow again.
**We yearn for a new way, a new perspective, and a clear path.**

Though we are full of trust and full of doubt, we are here.

Speak to us, God! Continue creating us!
**Inspire our hearts. Enlighten our minds. Guide our actions. Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright* (ELW 384)**

1 That Easter day with joy was bright;
the sun shone out with fairer light
when, to their longing eyes restored,
th'apostles saw their risen Lord!

2 O Jesus, king of gentleness,
with constant love our hearts possess;
to you our lips will ever raise
the tribute of our grateful praise.

3 O Christ, you are the Lord of all
in this our Easter festival,
for you will be our strength and shield
from ev'ry weapon death can wield.

4 All praise, O risen Lord, we give
to you, once dead, but now alive!
To God the Father equal praise,
and God the Spirit, now we raise!

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the day of our Lord’s resurrection. By the grace of Christ among us, enable us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Acts 4:32-35**

A reading from Acts.

32Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Psalm 133**

1How good and how pleasant it is, when kindred live together in unity!
2It is like fine oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, flowing down upon the collar of his robe.
3It is like the dew of Hermon flowing down upon the hills of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing: life forevermore.

**SECOND READING: 1 John 1:1--2:2**

A reading from 1 John.

1We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—2this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—3we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
 5This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
2:1My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL: John 20:19-31**

The holy gospel according to John.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

19When 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.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”
 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So 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.”
  26A 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.” 27Then 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.” 28Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”
30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**SERMON- Bishop Michal Pryse**

Dear friend in Christ. It’s a privilege to be with you as a part of this morning’s worship and to be able to give your dear pastor some much welcome relief. Our rostered ministers have been doing such a wonderful job over the course of the past year. But its hard work and we need to do everything we can to give them our encouragement and support!

Today’s Gospel lesson raises questions that cut to the very heart of what it means to experience Christ’s presence; questions that cut to the very heart of what it means to say the words, “I believe.” We witness the gathering of the disciples on Easter night, and we can’t help but asking some very basic questions about the nature of belief. How is it that you believe -or disbelieve-for that matter? Who can you believe? How much proof do you need before you can say that you believe something? How certain does your belief have to be before you really believe?

 I need to tell you that I think poor old Thomas has received a bit of a bum rap by many Christians over time. Yes, he had doubts and questions, but we don’t know that he had any more doubts than the other disciples would have had, given the same circumstances. He certainly had no more doubt than I would have had!

 Remember, the others had already seen Jesus; he hadn’t! All he had to go on was the strength of the disciple’s witness, and obviously, it wasn’t all that convincing! If Christ were indeed raised, why were they being so fearful? Thomas didn’t doubt the Lord! He did, however, fail to be inspired or convinced by the witness of his colleagues who claimed that the Lord was risen but were still hiding behind closed doors.

 I find it very interesting that, while the Western Christian world typically speaks of Thomas as “doubting Thomas,” the orthodox church of the east calls him “believing Thomas” in reference to his exclamation “my Lord and my God” after having seen Christ and touched his wounds! Isn’t that something?! They choose to honour his exclamation of faith rather than his quite understandable –and temporary –expression of doubt. Furthermore, Jesus honoured Thomas’s questioning in a very special way! Think about it for a moment. He came back, just for Thomas! He’d already visited the others. He returned just for Thomas and said, “Peace be with you. Touch my hands touch my side. See and believe.”

 Friends, never, ever be ashamed of your doubts and questions. And let’s be honest; if you don’t have any doubts or questions, you are either fooling yourself or spiritually asleep! Frederich Buechner tells us that “doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving!” Remember, there is often much more faith expressed in an honest doubt or question than in many of the pious platitudes that all to easily cross our lips. In fact, I would maintain that doubt, in many ways, is a precondition of faith!

 The disciples of old could not reveal Christ while they remained safe and comfortable behind closed doors. Their witness couldn’t even convince Thomas, one of their own number! And neither will the church’s witness convince modern day Thomas’s so long as we remain in a similar posture; hidden away, seemingly safe and secure behind closed doors.

 Those who are seeking a new experience of the Christian life will not be easily drawn to churches that blithely assume the fact of their own relevance or give all too-easy answers. People seeking a deeper experience of theological inquiry will struggle to maintain connections with faith communities that are intolerant of their questioning.

 We need to follow Jesus’ example and open ourselves to the honest questioning –to the touch -of those who come seeking a new truth. We need to equip ourselves with the tools needed to engage in mature but robust theological reflection, confident in the knowledge that our faith tradition is robust and strong enough to bear the weight of our critical self-reflection. Indeed, if that faith tradition is to carry any real authority, beyond that of mere lip-service, such reflection is of absolute necessity. The story is told of a student who asked his teacher about the nature of faith. The teacher told her about a dog who scared up a rabbit and began to chase it. Soon other dogs heard the barking and joined in the chase but slowly they began to drop out, one by one until only the first dog was left. “What does this tell me about true faith,” the student asked? The teacher explained that, “The first dog stayed in the chase because it had seen the rabbit. And for us to maintain a deep and abiding faith, it is necessary for us to have seen and experienced the risen Lord.

 Most churches today claim to be very concerned, and rightly so, about questions of evangelism and outreach. And my guess is that the church can do all sorts of things to try and bring people into our buildings. It can put on a kinder, friendlier face; it can use gimmicks, frills, and tricks. (Most of us have learned that threats no longer work, if they ever did!) But unless the church provides people with a living experience of the Risen Christ all of its efforts will be for naught. The hounds might follow for a while to see what all the barking’s about, but they won’t stay in the chase because they will not have seen the rabbit. And why should they? An old saying tells us that ships that remain in the harbour are safe ships. But we need to remember, that isn’t what ships are made for. The same is true for the ship that is the church. It can remain safe and comfortable in the harbour; its disciples can remain safe, locked away behind closed doors. But that’s not what this ship has been made for and that is not what disciples are made for.

 A spiritually hungry world is pleading “Show us your wounds.” They are looking to see where God is to be found today. Those who are searching are looking for a body of believers that resembles Christ’s Body, a church that is visibly following Him in the way of the cross. And unless we are serious about providing that kind of a witness, then all our busy chit-chat about evangelism and outreach is really just a lot of empty talk.

We are currently celebrating the season Easter, the holy season of resurrection and new life. It’s an opportune time for us to take a good hard look at the witness we are providing; for us reclaim our place in the pack and dedicate ourselves anew to running the chase of our lives; following Jesus the Christ, our resurrected Lord. It’s an opportune time for us to join with Thomas in His great confession “My Lord and my God;” an opportune time for us to invite others to join us in that confession by revealing the crucified and risen Christ to them, in our words, but especially in our actions and our choices.

 May God help us to be faithful in that task. May God bless the work that you do –as a people of God called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in your home communities –and may God bless the work that we do together as a wider church community called to show, in thought word and deed, that the Lord is risen! That he is risen indeed, Alleluia!

**HYMN OF THE DAY*We Walk by Faith* (ELW 635)**

1 We walk by faith and not by sight;
with gracious words draw near,
O Christ, who spoke as none e'er spoke:
"My peace be with you here."

2 We may not touch your hands and side,
nor follow where you trod;
but in your promise we rejoice,
and cry, "My Lord and God!"
3 Help then, O Lord, our unbelief;
and may our faith abound
to call on you when you are near
and seek where you are found:

4 For you, O resurrected Lord,
are found in means divine:
beneath the water and the word,
beneath the bread and wine.

5 And when our life of faith is done,
in realms of clearer light
we may behold you as you are,
with full and endless sight.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

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.

You shower your church with grace, O God. Unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You proclaim the blessing of life forevermore. Like dew upon the mountains, refresh your creation. Restore waters, cleanse the air, and provide revitalizing moisture to parched land. Give your whole creation the promise of new life. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You direct the nations, O God. Guide all in authority, that they shepherd their peoples in the ways of your love. Defeat in us our impulse to war. Bestow the peace of Christ upon those in authority and breathe upon them the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You place within the heart of the church a spirit of sharing. Give us the power of your generous Spirit, that we provide for the needs of others. Announce your peace to those who are lonely, hurting, suffering with illness or injury, grieving, or afraid. We remember those we name before you in the stillness of our hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You give us fellowship with one another in our faith communities. Bless the NVMA. Shine the light of the risen Christ in our life together, so that we live in love for one another, and our joy may be complete. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You share the gift of eternal life. In thanksgiving and remembrance, we recall the lives and gifts of those who now live in endless joy. Unite us with them in resurrection hope. 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.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**MEAL**

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

**DIALOGUE**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

 Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

**Proper preface (Rev Dr. Mark Harris)**

It is our calling and our joy, to give thanks and praise to you, O Holy One.

You summon forth new life, from the silence of the grave, and abundant hope, where none was to be found.

And so with all living things and the earth itself, with the women at the tomb, the first witnesses of the resurrection, and with all your people of every time and place, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

**EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (Harris)**

Blessed are you, O Holy One, for the universe beyond our knowing, for creatures, great and small, and for the wondrous web of life into which we have been woven.

We give thanks that, in your wisdom, you create all people in your image, yellow and brown, black and white, calling us to be caretakers of one another and of your world. In each generation, you deliver us through the flood, bring us forth from bondage, guide us through the wilderness, sustain us in exile and call us toward your land of promise.

You sent us Jesus, our brother and Lord, who embodied your will, who reveals your heart, and who teaches us what it means to be fully human and fully alive.

On the night in which he allowed himself to be handed over,

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and gave it to his followers saying: “Take and eat. This is my body given for you.

Do this to remember me.

”After supper he took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and offered it to his followers saying, “Take and drink. This is the New Covenant, in my blood, offered for you and for all people.

Do this to remember me.”

So, in these weeks of Easter and Newness of Life, we remember...

we remember all whose blood is poured out in violence, in its countless forms...we remember all who offer up their lives in service to others...

and to you, and most of all, Blessed are you, O God, creator of all things.

By your power and love you continue to deliver your people from bondage,

thwart the designs of evil, show the way through the wilderness,

turn hardship into righteousness, and reveal your hand upholding the just. Amen

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

**INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

The risen Christ invites us to this table. Come, eat and be satisfied.

**COMMUNION**

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Let us pray.

Life-giving God, in the mystery of Christ’s resurrection you send light to conquer darkness, water to give new life, and the bread of life to nourish your people. Send us forth as witnesses to your Son’s resurrection, that we may show your glory to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. **Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**

**SENDING SONG*Thine Is the Glory* (ELW 376)**

1 Thine is the glory,
risen, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry
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, conqu'ring Son;
endless is the vict'ry
thou o'er death hast won!

2 Lo, Jesus meets thee,
risen from the tomb!
Lovingly he greets thee,
scatters fear and gloom;
let his church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth;
death hath lost its sting! Refrain

3 No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of life;
life is naught without thee;
aid us in our strife;
make us more than conqu'rors,
through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above. Refrain

**DISMISSAL**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia!**

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