

**TO KNOX CHURCH FAMILY
APRIL 19, 2020**

PRAYER OF APPROACH

We have come together, O God, to be clothed with power from on high. Meet us here with truth we can wear with confidence and with joy we can share with sincerity. Awaken us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to life in all its fullness here and now and grant us courage and strength and love as we praise you for all your goodness. Be with us as we lift up our hands, our hearts, and our voices, and prepare us for everlasting life with Christ Jesus, in whose name we worship.
Amen.

A READING FROM I PETER 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, {4} and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, {5} who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. {6} In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, {7} so that the genuineness of your faith--being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. {8} Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, {9} for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A READING FROM 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." {20} After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. {21} Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." {22} When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. {23} If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven then; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." {24} But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. {25} 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." {26} 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." {27} 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." {28} Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" {29} 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." {30} Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. {31} 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: "Hope And Peace Be With You"

For a moment imagine a scene of peace. Close your eyes and imagine it. Describe it to yourself as fully as you can. Enter into it deeply enough to feel its glow.

Some of you may have pictured yourself dozing in the bottom of a rowboat on a calm and tranquil lake. Others may have seen yourselves looking at a little baby sleeping in her crib, or a dog napping on a sun-soaked window ledge. Still others may have seen themselves in a landscape empty of people but full of grain, gently waving in a breeze or beside a stream in the woods with the water making music as it runs over and around stones lying in its course.

Whatever the picture you painted and entered into; chances are it was not like the kind of scenes we have today or the one drawn by today's gospel text.

That text speaks of locked doors, of secret meetings by night and of fear. None of these things make a person normally think about peace nor does the presence of one whose body is marked by the signs of torture and death.

We are living today with closures of churches and schools, stores and restaurants. Who would have thought six months ago that our world would look like this. We were not able to celebrate Easter together as a church family. We are not able to go about our regular business as usual. I'm not sure about you but I will be soooooooo glad when we will get back to normal! But what is normal? I do not believe that things will ever be the same as before. The way we operate as a church will probably take on a different look. That may not be all bad!

However, the writers of the scripture passages today want us to see the two visits of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room as occasions of peace and hope. We should take comfort in that.

And perhaps they can speak to us about some dimensions of peace that we do not normally think of. Perhaps they can speak to us of peace in the midst of turmoil; of peace in the midst of fear; of peace in the midst of doubt which many of us are experiencing now.

False ideas about peace and joy abound in our society. These false ideas can distort our entire picture of what life is supposed to be about, and of who Christ is and of who we are.

A woman by the name of Lucy Bregman relates the story of how she once went to a worship service where the entire congregation was told: "If you don't have a smile on your face, you've got the wrong religion and shouldn't be here.

Christianity is a religion of joy."

She fled that service in tears because she did not feel at that time like she could smile. She was having difficulties and was looking for comfort. Instead she was told that she was not good enough for God because she was not smiling.

God never asks us to falsify our experience. Our risen Lord never waits until we are already happy in order to come to us and He never wears a pasted-on smile.

Think of this for a moment. Christ could have miraculously obliterated his wounds after He was raised from the tomb, but He chose not to do so. He bore the marks of his wounds into the presence of His disciples. In the same way Christ does not

ask us to banish our wounds when we come into His presence; not even at Easter when we are supposed to be full of joy.

The risen Christ came to his disciples in the midst of their turmoil and fear. He came in the midst of their doubt and their sense of having failed both Him and their own selves and said to them: "*Peace be with you.*"

And when He said this, He showed them His wounds; the holes in His hands and in His side as if to say:

"See these wounds. Feel them and know that it is all right to hurt. Pain comes to us all. I was hurt as all people are hurt, but that pain and that hurt no longer has dominion over me. I live as I said I would. I told you that I would suffer and that you, if you followed me, would also suffer. But I told you too, that after passing through various trials and tests, that pain and even death itself would lose its power. It would lose its power over me and its power over those who believe in me."

The three times that Jesus offers peace to His disciples in today's reading, is done in close connection with the wounds of crucifixion. The enemies of peace had already done their worst to Him. They had made cowards and liars of His followers and had mocked His own words and actions. They had humiliated Him in the city streets. They had violated His flesh and robbed Him of his life. But their war against Him failed. On the evening of the first day of the week, He came to His disciples and showed them that He lived despite the worst that could happen.

The peace that Jesus offers can be described as the confidence His followers are able to take from His resurrected appearance. His return on that first day of the week signalled the fact that His life and promises will endure. His "peace be with you" was more than a greeting to be followed by another good-bye. It was the declaration of a persistent fact. Because Jesus lives, nothing can separate His followers from Him and from life in Him.

The disciples realized this fact and in realizing it, they received the peace that Jesus offered; the peace that only Jesus could offer. For without Him they would have been left to continue alone in the darkness and fear of their locked room.

The confidence that the disciples received when Jesus came and said to them "peace be with you" is demonstrated in the response of the disciples to his appearance. Peace showed itself in their rejoicing and in Thomas' confession of faith: "My Lord, and my God."

And peace showed itself, confidence showed itself, inner security showed itself later when the disciples left that room and went into the world to proclaim the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.

Notice though, that none of the external circumstances of the disciples changed when they received and accepted the peace that Christ offered them.

They believed in Him. They had confidence in Him. They knew that nothing could separate them from God's love after He appeared to them, but they still had to face the same situation they faced before He broke into the room they had locked, because of their fear. They still had to face authorities. They still had to risk going out on the streets. They still had to deal with the crowds who had mocked and crucified Jesus. They still had to face trials and tribulations as do we.

We still have to face the world as we see it today. But we have hope. We know that as children of God, He will keep us safe and He will protect us.

We have a Saviour, who loves and died on the cross for us so that we might be redeemed.

“Peace be with you” are the words of Jesus to us.

Peace be with you and blessed are you when you have not seen, as the disciples saw, and yet have come to believe.

Blessed are you, not because life will be plain sailing for you.

Blessed are you, not because you will always want to smile and will never have to suffer.

But, blessed are you because you have linked yourself to a power greater than yours; to a power that wants to sustain you and will sustain you; to the power that raised Jesus from the dead; to the power that will bring you to the inheritance that Jesus has won for us.

We have that inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and which is kept in heaven for you and me. We are protected by the power of God through faith.

Finally - I leave you with these words of Jesus.

They are the words Jesus spoke to his disciples just before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane and onward from there to his cross and his death.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives, do I give to you.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Believe in God, believe also in me.

Amen.

LET US PRAY

God, how shall we praise you for the love you show us? What gifts can we offer that truly show our gratitude for how you have come to us in Christ Jesus to set us free? Because of your mercy, we live, in your presence and we are made whole. Grant, O Lord, that we might always remember that in You and Your living word is not only our hope, but the hope of our homes, our communities, and our world. Open our eyes, and quicken our hearts, that we may be about Your mission of sharing the good news of Your love with both our fellow disciples and with strangers, with both our neighbours and those who live far off. May our witness lead others to faith and a living belief in Your eternal power.

We thank you, O God, that You can break down all barriers and enter into every heart; that You speak peace into our fear, faith into our doubt and hope into our despair. We pray, O God for those who are living in fear this day, for those who have friends or relatives, or family members, who are desperately ill; for those who are uncertain about the direction that they should take or what they should do about a difficult situation, and for those who have lost their hope and their confidence as they go about their daily living in a world different from what we are used to.

We pray especially today, O Lord, for those who are working in hospitals and nursing homes; for those who are our first responders. They are putting their lives in jeopardy for us. Keep them safe and protect them from this terrible sickness. We pray also for those in our community and beyond who don't have food or proper housing; for families who are providing for the children. We thank You for those in this community who are providing food for people where we are not able to as a church these days.

We also pray for the leaders of this country. Give them the wisdom they need to continue to make wise decisions as they guide us through this crisis.

We ask all these things and we give You our praise and our thanksgiving, our prayers and our petitions, through Jesus Christ, our Risen Saviour who taught us to call upon you saying.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in 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, for ever.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and may Christ breath a blessing on you.

May the Holy Spirit fill you with hope and joy.

May God's living truth guide you in the path of freedom and of righteousness,
today, tomorrow, and indeed forevermore.

Amen