

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

➤ *He is Lord*

252 (repeat)

Call to Worship

Unlock your hearts – **God wants to come in**

Open your lives – **God needs a home**

Swing wide the doors – **God's children need shelter**

Easter rolls the stone – **nothing can be shut anymore!**

Let us worship together with hope and joy as we pray together...

† Prayer

In the wake of the resurrection, we gather as a people of sanctuary, as a people of Sabbath – ever seeking God's presence – ever in awe of the new life around us. Accept our music as gift, our words as offering, our motions as service, our breath as worship for we are community in your name and by your power.

Loving God, we confess our own doubt this morning along with Thomas. Sometimes it is deep and wide, like a fresh wound whose sting cannot be softened by any salve. One moment we praise you with song and action, and the next we turn away. We mistakenly beg for certainty, proof and control over that which cannot be known or controlled. Open our hearts and minds to breathe in the reality of your presence in all that we do.

We contemplate our sin in silence this morning, O God and pray that in your mercy you will continue to forgive...

*We join in pray as Jesus taught... **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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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***

Words of Hope

Hear the words of the risen Christ: *Peace be with you.* Receive the peace and forgiveness of Christ – rejoice in his gift of new life this day and every day.

➤ *The day of resurrection*

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† Prayer for Understanding

God of all who doubt and believe, by the gift of your Spirit enable us to hear with our ears, to see with our eyes, and to touch with our hands your Word of life – Jesus, the Christ – our Lord and our God. Amen

Scripture

Acts 4: 32-35

Now 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. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There 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. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

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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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

In our reading from John's gospel, Thomas initially wants some evidence of this resurrection that his friends have been talking about. He not only wants visual evidence – he expects a physical experience – to see the mark of the nails and to touch them – to put his hand in the wound of Jesus' side – convincing evidence. Perhaps you and I are like them – perhaps we are hungry for a little evidence of the resurrection, or at least a little more than we usually have.

It has been said that "without faith, no evidence is sufficient; with faith, no evidence is necessary."

I think that Thomas demonstrates this principle. Although he is much maligned – dubbed "Doubting Thomas" – this is an unfair characterization. Thomas doesn't ask for any more evidence of resurrection than the other friends of Jesus had already been given. He was not with the others on that Easter morning when Jesus appeared to them. We don't know why he wasn't there; we just know that Easter did not happen to him when it happened to the others. They saw and heard Jesus before Thomas did; and try as they might to convince him that Jesus had been raised from the dead; Thomas wasn't buying it. He wanted to see, hear and touch Jesus for himself – he wasn't asking for anything the others hadn't already experienced, but that simple request has caused many to scold him as a doubter.

I don't know about you but can identify with Thomas and his critical mind – with his struggles to believe. Frederick Buechner said that "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith – they keep it awake and moving." Certainly, I am enthusiastic about the liveliness of faith. Wrestling, questioning and even a little doubting is healthy for us as believers in the way that walking and doing puzzles are healthy activities for our minds and bodies – keeping us awake and moving.

So, Thomas wants what the other disciples had – a little proof – to see – to touch – and a week later – today – he gets his wish. Jesus comes and stands among them offering peace and proof. Thomas is in no way criticized for his demand of evidence. Jesus presents himself – submits himself as evidence – encouraging Thomas to believe. Yet abruptly it seems that Thomas needs no such substantiation – he doesn't touch the wounds as he demanded but cries out "*My Lord and my God!*" He suddenly believes and no evidence is necessary.

That is all very well and good for Thomas of course but what about you and me? Like lawyers or juries in courtroom dramas, we wouldn't mind a little evidence – even just a peek at the risen Jesus would satisfy. The writer of John's gospel helps us out a bit here. He tells us that Jesus says something to Thomas that is meant for the rest of us – for those of us who stand where Thomas stood before Jesus appeared to him – *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*. Then the author speaks to his audience directly – speaks to **us** directly – saying that he has written many of the signs Jesus demonstrated in his lifetime. He is confident that

he has given us enough information – enough evidence if you will – for faith to be born. In essence he says, “Now listen, friends: I have left out a ton. Jesus said and did lots of other really amazing things that I just have not gotten around to even mentioning. But what I have given you is enough. Read it and believe!”

Jesus is not likely to appear among us bodily and tangibly. If you and I are going to believe, we will have to do so without seeing.

How will we do that? Is it possible? If we are not going to see Jesus with our own eyes and hear Jesus with our own ears, is there any evidence at all on which we can base our faith? What are the signs of the resurrection?

I know that some of you may raise your eyebrows at this, but I think that the answer is, in large part, the church. The life of the church is to be a witness to the resurrection – evidence to the world that Jesus Christ is alive in the here and now. The church is meant to be God’s sign to the world that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The early church leapt into existence when those first disciples realized they had an unbroken and unbreakable connection to Jesus. Enlivened and emboldened by the connection, they lived in their world with such passion and compassion – such love and grace – such generosity and power, that the only plausible explanation for their life together was the presence and the power of the risen Christ.

Think of the passage from the book of Acts that we read today:

Now 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. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There 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. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Such joy, celebration, and exuberance – such compassion, generosity and love – had only one believable explanation: Jesus was with them. And because Jesus was with them, they gave themselves on behalf of the broken, bruised, and battered – they shared their lives with the least and the last. They had deep love for one another, tender compassion for their neighbours, and passionate devotion to God. There were signs of the resurrection all around – a vivid demonstration of the living Christ.

Certainly not perfect – as our churches today are not perfect. Just as human and flawed as our own communities of faith yet they are described as a bold and shining witness to the resurrection. If that oh-so-human and imperfect bunch of long ago could rise with Jesus above its own pettiness to be an Easter church, maybe we too – in spite of ourselves – can manage to be transparent to the presence of the living Christ. As we gather for worship (virtually for now), as we break the bread – tell our stories – sing our songs – pray our prayers – bear witness to the good news – care for those in need – work for peace – struggle for justice – as we live this resurrected life, we discover anew that Jesus is truly alive among us. **Thanks be to God!**

➤ *A Stranger, knocking on a door*

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† Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

Thank you, loving God, for your renewing presence in our lives, and for the many ways you make yourself known to us – in words spoken in peace – in actions that embody love – in creation that awakens wonder within us – in worship that inspires faith and understanding. With memories of the grace you have shown us, and with confidence you will yet show us more, we pray that all people will come to know the life-giving joy we find in Christ.

We pray for those who are feeling fearful, worried, or overwhelmed – especially as the months of pandemic restrictions stretch on...

We pray for those who face violence and unrest each day, in countries around the world and at home in our own community...

We pray for our national, provincial, and municipal leaders as they lead planning for our communities to recover from the pandemic. Give them wisdom and compassion – and give us patience...

We pray for our congregation, for churches in our community, and for people of faith around the world, especially those who face persecution...

We pray for our neighbours, especially for those who live in poverty and those who know rejection and discrimination...

We pray for those who are ill, in pain or grieving. We remember before you those on our hearts today...

Bring them comfort and strength.

Hear our prayers O God. Reveal your risen presence to us and to all for whom we pray. Use us in ways we may not yet even imagine to respond to those around us with the love we see in Jesus Christ and the confidence we draw from his resurrection. **Amen**

➤ *When we are living*

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† Offering and Prayer

In this season of Easter, we celebrate God's most precious gift to us in Christ's dying and rising. As we present our gifts to God, may our generosity reflect God's goodness to us and the hope we have found in Christ Jesus.

Generous God, we thank you for the hope and joy we find in your resurrecting power. Bless the gifts we bring so they may spread that hope and joy in the world you love. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

Blessing

Deep peace of the running wave to you – deep peace of the flowing air to you – deep peace of the quiet earth to you – deep peace of the shining stars to you – deep peace of the Son of Peace to you – and may the truth of the empty tomb – the hope of resurrection – keep you fearless and sure each day as the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*