

Online Worship Service from the Moderator and General Council Office
For Sunday, April 19, 2020

Welcome and Announcements:

A warm welcome to each and every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.

My name is Richard Bott – whether you are able to participate in the live version of this worship service, or are taking part at a later time – I am very glad that we've been able to join, in this space, to worship together.

I'd like to thank both Bruce Harding and Debbie Fingas for offering their gifts of music leadership, today. We are greatly blessed by your presence, and by your willingness to share your music with us.

This is being offered as a support to our communities of faith during the time it is difficult for people to meet together because of Covid-19. This worship time is being recorded, and will be shared through The United Church of Canada website, in high-resolution, low-resolution, audio, and text formats – because we realize that not everyone has access to high speed internet.

Acknowledgement of Territory:

As we gather today, I would like to ask us to take a moment to connect where we are to this virtual space that we're in. I ask you to take a moment to recognize the space you are in, and even more than that, to recognize the land upon which that space sits. For 10,000 years and more, there have been people living on this land, not just being responsible for this land, but being an integral part of it. This is the traditional territory – and, in many places in which we live, unceded territory – of the various Indigenous peoples of this land. Those of us who are settlers, descendants of settlers, and newcomers, need to acknowledge that reality; give thanks for the Indigenous peoples care for this land, past and present; for the fact that we are able to worship the Divine on it. We celebrate all of the Indigenous peoples of this land, and remember today the Elders and others who continue to be deeply devoted to their faith and relationship with the Creator, and those who are part of The United Church of Canada.

In this time, it is important for all of us to recognize that we continue to live in broken relationship. This is a moment to recommit ourselves to working for right-relations each and every day. That is what a territorial acknowledgement is about – more than just pretty words – commitment to working for right relations.

So, today, I join this virtual space, from Port Coquitlam, British Columbia – on the traditional, and unceded, territory of the Katzie, the Kwikwetlem, and the Sto:lo peoples. If you know the peoples of the land upon which you connect to this space, take a moment to reflect and give thanks, where you are. If you don't know, when worship is done, consider going to native-land.ca, typing in the name of your community, and learning a bit more.

Thank you. May God bless this reminder, and help us to be people of truth and right-relations.

Lighting the Christ Candle:

In the room where they were staying,
with the door locked,

knowing that the tomb was empty,
knowing what Mary had seen,
things were more than a little chaotic.

And then...

[Light your candle]

Christ appeared, saying,
“Peace! Peace be with you.”

And, in that moment, they knew:
CHRIST IS RISEN!
CHRIST IS RISEN, INDEED!
ALLELUIA!
ALLELUIA, AMEN!

Singing: “Where Two or Three are Gathered” - Can be found at More Voices #14

Opening Prayer:

In our doubts and in our fears,
in our loss and in our tears,
in our hope and in our living,
in our receiving and in our giving,
in our questions and in our query,
in our excitement and when we're weary,
we know that you are with all creation,
Rock of our lives!

As we open our hearts to your presence,
as we open our hearts to each other,
help us to open our hearts to your world,
that we might reach out,
touch, and know,
that your love lives,
now and always.
In your name we pray – amen.

Singing: The Spring Has Come - Can be found at Voices United #187)

Scripture Reading:

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 Authorities, 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.

Reflection on Scripture:

You know, I really feel for Thomas. The only one of the group of disciples that had been with Jesus on his ministry – out doing something when Jesus show up.

The disciples had sequestered themselves in the upper room, worried that the authorities were on the lookout for them, to arrest them for sedition against the Roman Empire, too. I sometimes wonder what Thomas was doing, out and about. Did he have people to see? Was he taking care of essential business? Was he checking to see if the authorities were really searching for followers of Jesus' Way?

Well, for whatever reason, he wasn't there when Jesus appeared before the disciples. He wasn't there to see what had happened – to experience the presence of the risen Christ.

I have to wonder how long he politely smiled as the other disciples, nodding his head, thinking, "Yeah. Right. Grief. Does strange things to a body, eh?" How long did he listen to the disciples tell the story of what they experienced, over and over – "What were you doing when he appeared?" "Oh, I was playing dice with Peter – had won him taking over dish washing duty for a week!" "Yeah, I was just staring out the window, bored silly, when I heard the commotion." "Didn't he look great?" "For having been crucified, he looked amazing!" and on and on... until he finally had to say, "Ok. Stop it! I don't know what you're up to, but until I can see him... no – until I can touch the wounds the spikes made in his wrists, and put my hand on the side where they speared him, I just can't believe you!"

I don't particularly like the fact that we've given Thomas (whose nickname was "The Twin") a different moniker – "Doubting Thomas." Of course he doubted! He hadn't had the same experience as the rest of the group!

I'm a lot like Thomas. As much as I love learning from other people's stories, other people's experiments, other people's experiences – I find that on the really big questions in my life, I *need* to experience them for myself, before I can believe in answer. I like to use my own senses to be able to test the truth in a claim. Even when I have the sense that it's probably true - "The water's cold." Dip my toe in. "Sure is!"

I'm not sure that's doubting, as much as it's holding up extraordinary claims to the light, to test them, and see where the issues are with them.

For me, questions and doubt are an integral part of my faith in Jesus Christ. They challenge me to continue to learn, to continue to seek out experiences, to continue to grow my relationships with others who have experienced God's presence, and to continue to grow my relationship with God, Godself.

There's nothing wrong with doubting, especially when the claims are really big.

But there's something that's important in Jesus' words – that people (like us) who can't touch him the same way that Thomas could, but could still believe, are blessed.

For many, belief is a starting point for their experience of God, rather than the other way around – and I celebrate people who are able to believe, without the experience first!

So... what's your experience of the Risen Christ?

What do *you* believe?

Singing: Don't Be Afraid - Can be found at More Voices #90

Sharing in our Gifts:

Take a moment to think about the gifts that God has placed in you.

What is one way that you could use those gifts to love God, to love your neighbour, to love yourself in the coming week?

If you would like to help your congregation during this rather tumultuous time, but you aren't sure how, be in contact with your minister or the treasurer of your community of faith. As well, every congregation of The United Church of Canada is registered at canadahelps.org. You can make an electronic donation, though them, if you would like.

I'd invite you to take a moment to offer to God the gifts in your heart – the actions of care, the resources that can help your neighbours and the world, as we sing together.

Singing: Praise God - Can be found at Voices United #549)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

Words: Thomas Ken. In the Public Domain - we give thanks for this gift of song.

For all the gifts that we have,
for all the gifts we are,
for hope and wonder,
life and love,
we give you thanks, God of all creation.
Bless the gifts that you have given,
that we might use them well,
in ways that bring healing
to all your world.
In Christ's name we ask it,
amen.

Singing: Thine is the Glory - Can be found at Voices United #173

Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son:
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where the body lay.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son:
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb!
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth: death hath lost its sting.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son:
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;
life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son:
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

Words: Edmund Louis Budry, 1884. Public domain.

Prayers of the People:

This is where you get to pray! What are the things that you would like to bring to God, today.

Commissioning and Benediction:

Let us go in peace and in all that we do,
let us do it for love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
And let us always remember – we never alone!
The peace of Christ holds us all creation.
The love of the Creator enfolds all that has been, all that is, and all that will be.
And the wings of the Holy Spirit carry it –
in the moments of grief, and in the celebration of life made new –
now, and always. Amen?
Amen!

Blessed Easter to you!

Let us go in peace, to love and to serve.
Thanks be to God!