

Smithfield Carman United Church
email Service April 19

Welcome

*O God, we share in the light of your glory...
This is the day you have made
– a day of wonder and celebration, joy and trust.
We join together to proclaim
Jesus Christ, light of the world,
Our hope is in God as we join our hearts and voices
to declare Christ is risen.*

Opening Prayer

Risen son of God,
you meet us in your rising with the promise of life.
You meet us in fellowship where we least expect you
and show us the way.
Be with us as we gather in spirit from our isolation,
that your presence might bring healing,
joy and peace to our world.
May your Spirit bless and renew us
through the promise of resurrection.

Hymn: In The Bulb There is a Flower

In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness,
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

Scripture:

John 20:19-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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.

Reflection:

"Apostles of Hope and Fellowship" - John 20:19-31

If you want to stay out of the rain, you need to invest in an umbrella.

So the saying might go.

Or in our world right now, if you want to stay clear of the virus, you need to wear your mask.

For what you can't see, CAN hurt you!

We can't see it.

We can't feel it.

We can't hear it.

We can't touch it.

And yet, we withdraw in our homes for fear of the invader we call COVID-19.

Even the talk shows are going virtual, filming from their homes where, hosts and guests play music, are interviewed, do skits, and banter with each other, even about COVID-19. Far from getting us down, COVID-19 seems to be bringing out our best creativity, our innovative edge. And despite fears and deaths and dangers, the grief and the sadness, those with a voice keep on singing, inspiring hope in others.

This invisible "force" is changing the world, changing the way we do life, changing people. But not necessarily all for the worse.

This is the human spirit at its best and greatest, perhaps we might call them "Apostles of Hope and Fellowship." They fill a mission to uplift, to entertain, to laugh in the face of danger, to encourage others in their homes that we can still giggle, that we can still love, we can still offer fellowship from a distance, that despite anything that happens to us, we cannot be defeated.

In that locked upper room after Jesus died those disciples were truly feeling defeated. They were afraid to go out in case someone recognized them and told the authorities, for to them Jesus was nothing more than a trouble maker. The events of Good Friday had been traumatic, and none of those disciples wanted it to happen to them.

Yet, suddenly as they sat with each other they felt a presence - "Peace be with you." Jesus said, and showed them the scars on his hands and feet. Then Jesus said three more things that changed those disciples forever.

First, he said, "**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**"

Well, really, there they were, all huddled together in that locked room like a bunch of cowards, yet Jesus was still interested in sending these same cowards to continue his mission!

Then, coming closer Jesus breathed on them saying "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**"

This comment must have reminded those disciples about the story in Genesis when God breathed life into Adam and Eve. Was he telling us that this too was a new beginning, perhaps a new Genesis, an example of a new kind of people in fellowship and community.

This third and final comment must have been rather the biggest shock of all.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Jesus was talking forgiveness, not revenge on those that had killed him! And sending out these disciples with the power to forgive. Yet the one missing was Thomas. Later, when Thomas was told what had happened he stated “I want to touch those scars with my own hands and see for myself, or I won’t believe. So a week later when those disciples were again together, this time with Thomas, and with the doors locked, Jesus again was with them. Walking directly to Thomas, invited him to see, touch, believe.

“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.”

But that is one thing that we have to say about Thomas: even though he didn’t believe at first he came back, open to the possibility that his doubt could be transformed into faith. He kept coming back and showing up, not believing, but wanting to believe.

Perhaps that is what that scripture means

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

And from that night these disciples learned that they were in the middle of what might be considered a sort of uprising - an uprising of hope, of peace, of love, of belief. An uprising not just for brave people, but also for those who may be scared, like all of us. It is not just for believers, but for doubting folks like Thomas, and like folks like us who want to believe in spite of skepticism. What those disciples felt that night was fellowship – a kind of belonging that is based on a deep belief that everyone matters, even the doubters, everyone is welcome and everyone is loved, no conditions, no exceptions. A rising up of fellowship, in a community where anyone who wanted to be part of this fellowship of disciples was welcome. Even those who want to believe but aren’t sure what or how to believe.

During this time when we are not able to meet or get together as a congregation, our fellowship takes on a new look, but we too have the opportunity to still be able to rise again, to believe again, to hope, to live again. For, if anything, these challenges of today can unite us, can energize us to fight back with the best within us, can encourage us to reach out to others in unprecedented ways. Many of the churches are offering on line or zooming Sunday services. A challenge in modern technology. Here in our Smithfield

Carman community we are offering phone calls to check on others, texting when we can, checking our church buildings, offering weekly email updates and Sunday services - and we even have Nicole blessing us with her music. Thanks Nicole!

This offers us the opportunity of a sense of fellowship, and what it means to be human, one community in spirit, what it means to be an “Apostle of Hope and Fellowship.” Those apostles in that locked room had that same feeling of new energy, creativity, empowerment, and challenge, when they realized Jesus had risen.

They too could now rise up and become “Apostles of Hope and Fellowship.”

“Christ is Risen

Christ is Risen indeed!

We too, are rising up!

We are rising up indeed!

Let us arise in fellowship

In fellowship indeed!” Amen

Prayers of Care for all

(inspired by John 20:19-31)

Today O God we are reminded what people of faith are like—we are reminded of their joy and trust in you—we are reminded of how they care for one another and reach out to help others - we are reminded of how your presence in their lives conquers their doubts and fears. Lord, work in us that we may follow the example of Jesus and of all those with a living faith—help us walk in your glorious light and rejoice in your truth....

Gracious God, we recall how the sadness of the disciples was turned to joy and of how their fear was turned to courage by your risen presence. Help us show your present reality to all those around us who dwell in fear and sadness. Help us, and the people of Christ everywhere, to bring comfort to those who grieve, strength to those who are ill, and blessings to all those in need in these uncertain times.

Lord, hear our prayers for those in special need of your presence this day—we ask that your Spirit may touch those we name before you in the silence of our hearts—that they might receive your comfort and your grace.

We thank you O God, for your power and presence in our lives. Make us known as a people who rise up to share that power and presence, so that the glory we intend to

give unto you may be given by all, and so that our joy may be complete in Christ Jesus
our Lord - who taught us to pray as one saying,

Our Father....

Hymn: Lord, You Give the Great Commission:

Lord, you give the great commission:
'Heal the sick and preach the word.'
Lest the church neglect its mission,
and the gospel go unheard,
help us witness to your purpose
with renewed integrity;
with the Spirit's gifts empow'r us
for the work of ministry.

Lord, you call us to your service:
In my name baptize and teach.'
That the world may trust your promise,
life abundant meant for each,
give us all new fervour, draw us
closer in community;
with the Spirit's gifts empow'r us
for the work of ministry.

Lord, you show us love's true measure:
'Father, what they do, forgive.'
Yet we hoard as private treasure
all that you so freely give.
May your care and mercy lead us
to a just society;
with the Spirit's gifts empow'r us
for the work of ministry.

Commissioning:

“Christ is Risen
Christ is Risen indeed!
We too, are rising up!
We are rising up indeed!
We are rising in hope
We are rising in hope indeed!
Let us rise in fellowship
In fellowship indeed!” Amen

