

South Elkhorn Christian Church

Digital Liturgy

EASTERTIDE
April 19, 2020

PREPARE

Locate a candle to light and communion elements to use (bread/juice or whatever is available to you).

Find a quiet place by yourself or with others.

Read through the instructions, prayers, scripture, and questions below. You can also find a guided, voice-led version of this digital liturgy at southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy

WELCOME THE LIGHT

Welcome to worship with South Elkhorn Christian Church. Light a candle if you are able and receive these words:

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!
Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

CENTERING & LORD'S PRAYER

Dear Gracious and Heavenly Father,

As we gather for worship whether here nor far, through all places, and all times, we give you thanks and we give you praise as we come together as one church and one body.

This morning Lord, we continue to remember the works of your great sacrifice given in the gift of your son upon the cross. As we celebrate and rejoice in the story of the resurrection, we are reminded that your gift is truly everlasting. In doing so, we also call to mind the great promise in which you fulfilled, the great joys in which we share in knowing that the story of the cross, the story of the empty tomb is not over, but continues day in and day out within our hearts. For we know Lord that the story of Easter is truly never over...

As we continue to walk in these moments and in the days and weeks ahead may we continue to turn to you for joy, for peace, for comfort in the unknown. At this time may we take a moment of silence to surrender all that which is upon our hearts to you O' Lord

And now, as the full body of Christ let us begin walking in the prayerful ways your son Jesus Christ taught us, praying together...

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 sins as we forgive those who sin 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. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

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.

SERMON

Perhaps at no time in my life have I felt as connected to those disciples as I do now--confined to their home, fear and uncertainty in their hearts, grief over what was lost: not only the death of Jesus, but also an entire way of life that he embodied and brought near. Confinement, fear and uncertainty, grief...

Yes, this story is primed for us to hear.

So let's make sure we are listening, and listening deeply. Because it's easy to get distracted... there's a lot of “noise” in this passage...

The first bit of noise is the disciples “fear of the Jews.”

I'm quite convinced the disciples were afraid. But the disciples' fear was not a Christian fear of Jews--that doesn't make much sense. The disciples were Jewish. Jesus was Jewish. This fear is not about Judaism.

Sadly, tragically, horrifically, later Christians would interpret this passage as referring to Judaism and to Jews, to an entire people group and religion, and that later interpretation fueled Christian anti-semitism and led to horrible persecution, violence, and the murder of Jewish people.

So let me be clear before I continue. This story does not sanction superiority, bitterness, or hate for our brothers and sisters of the Jewish faith.

What we learn earlier in the gospel of John, in 9:18-23, is that the term “the Jews” is a way of talking about certain religious authorities, authorities with significant power; and that in the time of John’s gospel, those who believed in Jesus as the Christ were kicked out of the synagogues by those with the power to do so.

“Fear of the Jews” is not fear of a religion, it is fear of exclusion, persecution, and the loss of community...

And those disciples likely experienced great fear, not just at religious authorities, but also Roman ones. Jesus was crucified as a state criminal, a rebel who made anyone associated with him liable to the same outcome.

Would they be hunted down and executed, too?

And betrayal... Judas, one of their own, had sold out Jesus... maybe he wasn’t the only betrayer; maybe others would turn on the rest. Maybe the crucifixion of Jesus was just the beginning... fear, distrust, suspicion. The doors were locked.

And then the uncertainty... even if we do make it, they might have wondered, so what? What comes next? Our leader is gone. Everything we thought was supposed to happen didn’t. Do we just go home and try to pick up the pieces we left behind before Jesus ever called us...? That’s likely impossible now, too...

We need to be able to hear and sense the fear, the real, anxious, uncertain fear, the fear that huddled the disciples in that room.

Jesus offers those disciples the opposite of fear.

Peace.

He spoke not just a word, saying “peace.” He offered them a tangible peace: himself.

His very side. His own hands. The scars of destruction, death, and hate.

He showed them the worst they could imagine. And he did so standing before them in the power and mystery of God’s everlasting love, God’s undying presence, God’s new life. He showed them that they were not alone, that they had more to live for, that what had begun in them was not over. He showed them that there was a future they hadn’t even yet begun to imagine.

Jesus met them in their fear and offered them himself.

Second, let's not get distracted by Thomas' doubt.

Poor Thomas. He gets a bad wrap. None of the other disciples get a nickname like Thomas. We don't talk about Selfish Simon or Batty Bartholomew, there's no Awkward Andrew or Jumpy James. Nope... just doubting Thomas.

But Thomas gets singled out and rebranded. He becomes the poster-child for doubt, and the one disciple we tell kids not to be like.

I've long wondered why Thomas wasn't in the room behind the locked door when Jesus showed up. Maybe he drew the short straw and had to make the lunch-run. He leaves for 15 minutes to go grab some fishsticks and look what he misses!

Regardless, he's not there when Jesus shows up, he's not there when Jesus shows the disciples his hands and feet, when Jesus offers them himself, the peace of God's very presence.

Curiously, it's only after Jesus offers himself, his hands and his side to the disciples, it's only then that the disciples rejoice...

Yet when Thomas demands the same treatment suddenly he becomes the bad guy... unfair, indeed.

But not just unfair... I think it's wrong to call Thomas the doubter.

Why? Well, the word for doubt isn't actually in the text. We might read "doubt" in English but the greek word is better translated as unbelieving. Jesus says "do not be unbelieving, but believing." Or more literally, "don't be untrusting, but trusting."

This story is about trust of the heart, not inquiry of the mind. This is about an orientation of the heart toward God's everlasting love and undying presence. It is about a peace that pushes us from the paralysis of fear into life-giving action beyond our selves and our all-too-ordinary expectations.

Sadly, making this story about labeling and stigmatizing Doubting Thomas has led to all kinds of anti-scientific silliness in Christianity. Some of which is plaguing us now as some churches and religious leaders reject the sound advice of health experts and choose to meet in person, putting entire communities and the most vulnerable at risk.

So let me be clear. Doubt, curiosity, questioning, and examination is not what Jesus is

rejecting here. This is not a proof-text for why we should reject science and “just believe” in whatever dogma or doctrine is being paraded around. No, the life of the mind is a very real part of faith; and you can be Christian and doubt, wonder, question, and even be unsure.

Indeed, certainty is no badge of faith...

I might even wager that a mature faith, a growing faith, has learned to doubt well, question deeply, wonder widely, and examine rigorously.

Doubt is a form of faith--a willingness to be humbly human and not turn our ideas, assumptions, and experiences into gods. Doubt is one way we leave room for God to show up and teach us something new...

Yes, this story is full of distractions.

To really hear it, we need to see that this story is not about “the Jews” or Thomas’s “doubt.” It’s about Jesus. It’s about the Christ who offers himself for all humanity on the cross, and by the power of God’s undying love offers himself again... and again... and again... even here. Even now. Especially to individuals confined to homes in a time of uncertainty and fear.

Jesus says, “peace be with you.”

Because there is more to us than fear. There is more to us than this moment. We have with us the very peace of Christ, his courage, his strength, his creativity, and his resilience, that we are invited to reach out... and touch. And trust. And live.

COMMUNION

Place before you bread and a cup of juice (or whatever you have on hand to use). If you are with others, serve one another with the blessing, “The bread of life, the cup of hope.”

The Lord be with you,

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

The communion elements before you unite us in Christ's Spirit one to another. Christ's life, death, and resurrection unite us to God's infinite and all-inclusive Love. All are welcome to the Table, and all are invited to remember...

THE BREAD

"The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it..."

Hold the bread and, if possible, break it.

"...and said, 'This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.'"

THE CUP

Hold the cup. If you have not already, pour juice (or whatever you have on hand) into the cup.

"After supper, Jesus took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'"

PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, You have made us for connection. In this time of separation and isolation send to us your Spirit. That we might experience your sustaining presence and be encouraged with hope through the fellowship of your love. Amen.

Receive and prayerfully enjoy the bread and the cup.

GENEROSITY

Prayerfully consider someone to reach out to with a word of love, encouragement, or prayer. Write a card. Make a phone call. Or identify a time to do so today (or in the week ahead).

Tithes and offerings can be mailed to South Elkhorn or you can give online at

southelkhorncc.org/give

The parade was incredible.

Last week, for Easter Sunday, some 42 cars and over 100 South Elkhorners, wound through the streets of the Palomar neighborhood next to the church. There were signs of God's love, big smiles, crosses, streamers, even an Easter bunny hanging out a window!

Children shouted from doorsteps and sidewalks outside their homes. Adults waved and hollered "happy easter!"

It was a beautiful moment of life and joy and energy that brought people to tears.

When we are isolated and distanced, when life is radically changed... It's easy to forget that we still belong to each other, that we can still creatively connect and bring love, that we are still conduits of God's generous and joyous life.

And yet we do belong to each other, we can creatively connect, we are conduits of God's generous and joyous life.

Thank you. Thank you for supporting the mission and ministry of this incredible church--thank you for giving online, for mailing in your tithes and offerings, for dropping off checks and children's worship and wonder offering to the mailbox outside the church office. Thank you for your Easter donations of canned goods and much-needed soups, proteins, and fruit for God's pantry at a time when hunger has grown and the need is great.

Thank you for being conduits of God's generous and joyous life that flows through you. Keep being the church, no matter what building or vehicle we are in.

CHANGING THE LIGHT

Now it is time to change the light. The light that was in one place at one time, is now in all places at all times.

In this very room and everywhere we go. And all God's children said, Amen.

Extinguish the candle and watch the smoke rise.

UPDATES

Visit southelkhorncc.org/blog to learn the latest on worship, building usage, and more.

Digital Worship & Wonder videos available at southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder.

Subscribe to South Elkhorn's text messaging alerts by texting:

@southelk to the number 81010