



Guildwood Community Presbyterian Church

140 Guildwood Parkway, Scarborough, Ontario
M1E 1P4

Worship Service for Guildwood Community Presbyterian Church, April 19, 2020

Dear Friends;

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. We continue in our time of being physically apart, and while our leaders are beginning to talk of when these restrictions can be relaxed, it appears that it will be some time before we can gather for worship. So our connections as a community of faith have to happen in other ways, checking in with one another by phone or email, lifting them up in prayer. And while we are not physically together, through these printed resources, we can focus our attention on the good news of resurrection and the hope that is ours in Christ. Our service today continues the Easter story as Jesus meets with the disciples behind closed doors. His message to them is "Peace be with you", something that we need today as much as ever.

Rev. Bob Smith

Opening Hymn

Book of Praise – 260 "Now let the vault of heaven resound"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvrj1BislZw> ← click this link

- video with on-screen lyrics, which differ slightly from the hymnbook
- recorded on October 27, 2019 at [Immanuel Lutheran Church](#); Colorado Springs, Colorado

Prayers of Adoration, Confession, Lord's Prayer

God of resurrection, we were no people whom you made a people, empty people whom you have filled with your spirit, discouraged people whom you have given hope, Good Friday people of sorrow whom you have filled with Easter joy. We have been fearful, but we praise you that you bring life to us, and peace for our broken spirits. O God, we praise you for your blessing that overwhelms us, for the peace that dawn new each day, and for the work which you empower us to do.

God of light and love, you have called us to live by your light, in unity of heart and mission; yet we have continued in ways of darkness. We hide from you and from one another, rather than joining hands, hearts and resources to live and work for your peace and justice. Forgive us for denying the light of Easter's hope, and empower us by your Holy Spirit to walk in the light, freely laying down our lives for Christ's sake, even as he did for us. We pray this in his name, and continue to pray together in the words that he gave us:

(silence)

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon and the Peace

Friends in Christ, hear the good news. Paul writes to his friends in the church in Corinth, "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun." Receive the forgiveness that God offers you in Christ, and be thankful.

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

(And also with you.)

Scripture

[John 20:19-31](#) ← this links to on-line text of the NRSV bible

[Click here](#) for additional scripture readings from today's lectionary. Links courtesy of the [Revised Common Lectionary](#), a project of the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Children's Story

This week, Christian Education Coordinator Laura Alary reads stories from two picture books in this video posted on YouTube.

<https://bit.ly/2zcZc6p> ← click this link

Sermon

*"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..."*

The reason for the meeting behind locked doors
on Easter evening?

Well, it is probably to get their heads around the astounding news,
and to try to figure it out.

The verse before has Mary Magdalene announcing to the disciples,
"I have seen the Lord."

She met him in the garden,
and through her tears, I guess,
at first mistook him for the gardener.

But soon she recognized him
and is now passing on the news
as a faithful witness.

Maybe they have gathered here, now,
after dark, and behind locked doors,
to discuss her news, her testimony.

Let's take stock of where we are on this story at this point.

As John tells it,
only Mary has actually seen the risen Christ,
and it is likely her news that has drawn them together.

Peter and the beloved disciple, John,
both saw the empty tomb and folded grave clothes.

But of those two, only John has come to **believe**
and neither of them, says the writer,
really **understands** yet the scripture,
that Jesus must rise from the dead.

And presumably the others are not yet on board at all —
it's all so...**incredible**.

Little wonder then,
that this little group, traumatized and uncertain,
meets, as John puts it,
"With the doors of the house locked for fear of the Jewish rulers."

No kidding!

That's probably an understatement.
They are absolutely terrified,
 probably convinced that any minute
 the doors will be broken down by temple authorities.
Their nightmare is that they,
 as the circle of his closest friends,
will be rounded up and taken prisoner
 in a final, clean-up wave of suppression,
 of any support that remains for the rebel Jesus.

They have not been able yet
 to bring themselves to believe Mary's unbelievable news.
And if it's true, well,
 they may even be **more** afraid of Jesus himself,
 come back from the dead,
and how they will face him
 as those who denied or deserted him.

So the doors are locked,
 the lights are kept low.
Maybe they are sifting through the little evidence they have
 and trying to sort out what it all means.
*"So Mary, tell us again what you think you saw.
Are you sure you weren't dreaming all this? —
 we know it's all been very stressful.
Can we get you something for your nerves?"*

*So, Mary, what did he look like?
What exactly did he say?
What was his mood?
Why do you suppose he talked to you,
 and not Peter or John?"*

And they are very likely asking themselves
 whether they can trust the testimony of a woman —
 which in that day carries almost no authority at all.

And suddenly Jesus stands in their midst,
 neither locked doors nor doubting hearts
 being any barrier for him.

He enters the shut-up room
of their fear, their grief,
their shame, their doubt,
and in the face of it all
he offers his peace.

"Peace be with you."

It may even have been an early Christian greeting,
but here... here, it is so much more than just a flippant,
"Hey, how're ya' doing?"

Here in the locked room of their fear,
and to the cowering eyes of their shame,
there is much more to his "peace" than that.

Here, when his offering of peace
is met first with a speechless silence,
then a tentative examining of his wounds,
and finally an outpouring of joy
when they realize it really is him,
he says it again,
maybe to make sure that they understand what he is offering,
"Peace be with you."

Here, with his repeated offer of peace,
he gives them as well the gift of the Holy Spirit
which will fill and empower them
for the work of ministry that lies ahead.

It's with just a breath here,
but it's a foretaste of the Spirit given in the rush of wind
that will blow them off their feet in a few weeks at Pentecost.

Here, a week later when Thomas is present —
Thomas who couldn't bring himself to believe
with just the second-hand proof the others gave him —
with Thomas now present as well, he says,
"Peace be with you."
and offers the disciple now for his doubt,
the proof of his wounds.

It's as if, with Jesus,
this offer of peace is not just a **description**
of some fuzzy notion of a far-off good feeling,
or a **wish** of something
that they might find someday.

Wounded and broken as he is,

he gives peace to them,
as a concrete, life-changing, and empowering gift.
He **declares** it to them,
He **bestows** it on them.
"Peace be with you."
His words have the authority
actually to **accomplish** what they say.

Maybe by now this offer of peace is sinking in
for the disciples.
maybe they think back
to when Jesus was speaking about his death,
and how he would send them his Spirit.
And they recall his promise to them,
*"Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
neither let them be afraid."* ([John 14:27](#))

And maybe they remember
that later he had been speaking
of the trouble and suffering they would face,
and he said,
*"I have said this to you
so that in me you may have peace.
In the world you face persecution.
But take courage,
I have conquered the world."* ([John 16:33](#))

"Peace be with you."
Just try to imagine the disciples that night
behind their locked doors,
as what Jesus is saying slowly begins to sink in,
"Peace be with you."

They have betrayed him,
they have denied him
they made themselves scarce,
when things started to close in on him.
When he first appeared in that room,
they couldn't even look him in the eye.

Just think of how he **could** have come back at them
with anger or ridicule
or some kind of punishment or judgement.

But that would not be his way.

Instead, what he says is an offer of life, of love,
of a way forward

"Peace be with you."

Imagine — even with all he has been through,
he continues to love and minister to them,
in spite of how they all let him down.

Peace in the face of their denial and desertion;
peace to lift them from their grief and loss;
and peace to guide them in the road of discipleship
that lies before them in the service of a living Saviour.

There's no time to ease into this new calling.
They're still shaking their heads at all that has happened,
all that they have to sort out,
and already he is pointing them forward
to the ministry that lies ahead of them.

In the space of a few minutes
he moves them from their emptiness, their grief,
their hiding behind locked doors,
to handing them their marching orders,
*"As the Father has sent me,
so I send you."*

The world is waiting to hear this news,
and, wounded and broken as the disciples are,
they are the ones who will tell them.
So, Jesus declaration of peace comes
with his risen presence,
with a commission to go out into the world in his name.
with the equipping of the gift of the Holy Spirit,
all to be realized by the community
that he will soon leave behind.

His peace is offered to Mary who first met him in the garden,
to the disciples behind locked doors,
to Thomas who wanted more proof,
and to us,
who are not so different from any of them.

We all know what it is to be stuck in our loss:
in our failure, our doubt
in our fear, our grief.

Shame for our failures and how we have let others down
makes us wonder if we could even be forgiven
or have anything useful to offer.

Uncertainty plagues us
as we doubt whether the risen Christ is in fact risen
whether he is with us today,
or has any power to lift us and give us the grace
to try again and keep going.

We are stuck by our fears
from how we have stumbled in the past
or what others are saying about us,
or how we aren't good enough.
Grief floods through our minds and hearts,
almost consuming us
with emptiness from lost loves
and disappointment from lost hopes.

And goodness knows, in the face of a global pandemic,
we feel locked in our homes,
cut off from our friends and loved ones,
worried for our jobs,
anxious for our health,
grieving for all the deaths.

And the resentment, the burden, we carry for all of it,
for how things were supposed to be different,
for how it is all so much more than we can cope with at times,
creates in us a stubborn bitterness
that won't let us see even a glimmer of hope.

We've been in that room with the disciples.
And we may shut ourselves off from the world,
away from the things that may threaten us,
but often away as well
from the community that could minister to us,
and even from the risen Saviour
who would grant us his peace

But he comes to us anyway,
our locked doors and fear and doubt
being no obstacle for him.

And he comes to **us**, saying **still**,
"Peace be with you."

Peace in the face of all that holds us back.
Peace unlike anything the world can offer.

Peace that can get us unstuck,
that can fill us with hope and power,
that can send us out with a story to tell
even in spite of the failures we have known,
and the scars that we bear.

The world is still waiting — needing — to hear that good news,
and wounded and broken as we are,
we are the ones who are now being sent out
to declare it to them.

We have met the risen Christ
we have received the Holy Spirit
we have been offered his peace
and now we have his story to tell.

Earlier Jesus said,
*"I have to go soon,
but I'm leaving you well and whole.
Peace is my parting gift to you.
I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—
feeling abandoned, bereft, lost.
So don't be upset.
Don't be afraid."* ([John 14:27](#) – *The Message*, adapted)

Now, having walked himself
through the valley of the shadow of death,
he offers us his peace:

Peace in the face of our fear.
Peace in spite of our failure.
Peace for our doubts.
Peace to get us through the anxiety and isolation of a pandemic.
Peace to equip us for the commission
on which he now sends us.

"Peace be with you."

And now to the one by whose wounds we are healed,
we give all glory and praise,
now and forever. Amen.

Offertory

We remind everyone that we must continue to pay our bills; in the absence of Sunday worship, you may [sign up for pre-authorized remittance](#) (PAR), [donate online via our CanadaHelps page](#), or drop off your offering envelope in the mailbox at the church. The building will be checked daily for mail and phone messages. If you are not comfortable leaving an envelope, you are welcome to leave a phone message at the office (416.261.4037) and someone will pick up your offering.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Hope

We thank you, great God, for the hope we have in Jesus, who died but is risen, and who rules over all. We praise you for his presence with us, his power to lift us up, his peace to help us overcome our fear. Because he lives, we live too, abundantly here and now, and eternally with you. We praise you that nothing past, present, or yet to come can separate us from your great love made known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Loving God, in the unfamiliar territory of a pandemic, as we pray for those who are struggling, we remember that there is much for which we can give offer a prayer of thanksgiving;

- all those in the medical community for their courage and selflessness in working so hard to care for the sick;
- those who labour in very difficult circumstances in long-term care facilities;
- our political and public health leaders in all levels of government who provide information and make the hard decisions that will help lead us through these days; and
- those who supply our basic needs – cashiers, truck drivers, cleaners, transit workers.

We are grateful for their devotion to serve us, often are great personal risk.

And in this time of sickness and isolation there are so many in need, whom we lift up in prayer. We think of:

- those who are lonely in their isolation, cut off from the connection to family and friends;
- those who have lost their work;
- those who can't pay their rent;
- those who have the added burden of extra child-care while schools are closed;
- those who are sick;
- those who care for the sick; and
- those who are anxious.

Befriend and bring your presence, we pray, to all who are struggling. Help us who are able to reach out and help to meet their needs, and bring friendship and support. Give us all strengthen for the journey, and encourage us through the presence of the risen Christ with us, to move with hope and confidence into the days that lie ahead.

Often in our prayers we remember those who are vulnerable, and we think of them during this global pandemic, for how they are particularly at risk. So we remember:

- refugees who have lost homes and loved ones, in danger because of their race, clan or belief, who now have even less support for their struggles;
- victims of abuse in the home, who have been betrayed by those they should have been able to trust, and who have no safe place to go for cover;
- those who are poor and homeless, who at the best of times see all the blessings of the good life, but for lack of money cannot enjoy them, and are dependent on the kindness and generosity of others, now stretched even more thinly; and
- those who feel that all that is familiar and dependable and safe is being eroded, and that life has come off its bearings.

Fill them all with the perfect love that casts out fear, with the confidence and assurance that the risen Christ brings, and with the peace that conquers and empowers.

For ourselves, O God, we thank you for the presence of the risen Christ in our lives. That no barrier that we erect can obstruct his power to find and heal us; that no doubt we harbour can change his willingness to bless and give us his peace. We praise you that we have been touched by his spirit, given joy and empowered, and brought together into a loving community of faith. We are heirs of their witness, belief, and joy, as we are heirs of your grace, and we pray that in our turn, you will use us as your ambassadors in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Book of Praise – 249 “The day of resurrection”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pSODR_y1_U ← click this link

- video with on-screen lyrics, which differ very slightly from the hymnbook
- performed by organist Kartika Putri, musical director at [Good Shepherd Lutheran Church](#); Wasau, Wisconsin

Commissioning and Benediction

Go in the peace which is the gift of the risen Christ to you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and forever. Amen.