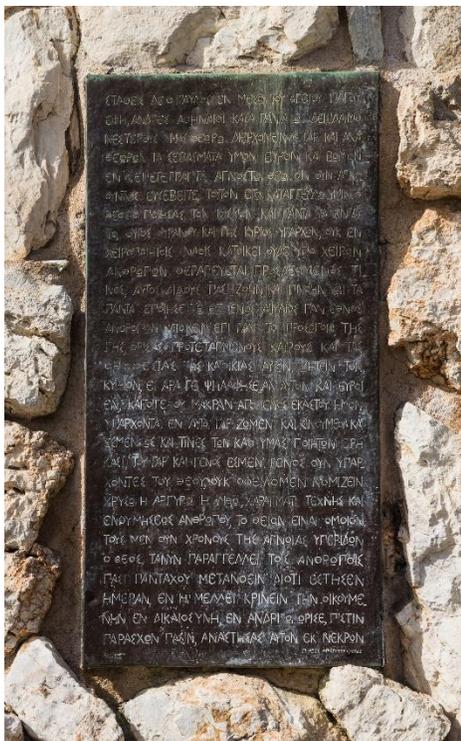




ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

In the first years of the Common Era, there were numerous ways of being Jewish. In addition to the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, revolutionary Jews and “everyday” Jews just trying to live the faith their mothers and fathers taught them. Most of them thought of themselves as a nation of people rather than a religion that could exist in many nations. In the midst of them came a man from Galilee named Joshua or Yeshua after a Judaeen folk hero. He so influenced Gentiles and Judaeans that after his death on a cross, his followers experienced him in a new way. They began to refer to him not in the Hebrew as Yeshua Messiah (meaning “Anointed”) but in the Greek as Jesus Christ.



The change emphasizes the enormous influence that Greek culture had on the ancient world, as the early followers of Jesus and rabbinic Jews started working out what made them distinct and how they should describe and spread that distinct gift to the world. Paul, who was a Judaeen Pharisee “educated at the feet” of the prominent rabbi Gamaliel, was sufficiently knowledgeable of Greek language and culture to deliver a dramatic speech in the heart of cosmopolitan Athens, at a notable rock outcropping called the Areopagus, or “Hill of Ares.” Paul’s impassioned lecture persuaded a number of people to become “Christ-followers.”

Paul’s speech was persuasive because, instead of scolding or humiliating people, he went through the door that was open. He defended his faith with what Peter describes in his letter as gentleness and reverence, with a humble heart that relied on hope rather than fear. John’s Jesus moves us to consider how we might practice respect and gentle humility with everyone we encounter, loving beyond all fears and suffering without exception. We are not only capable of this stance but encouraged by the presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

Swiss philosopher and poet Henri-Frederick Amiel wrote this about the attitude most suited to receive the God who can never be fully known: “Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.”

Preparation

Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics and others keep some version of the Great Fifty Days of Pascha, the season that lasts until Pentecost on May 31st this year. If we were gathered at church, we would have our finest vestments on the altar, which would be surrounded by beautiful flowers and bearing new beeswax candles. The new Paschal candle would be lit and standing in a place of prominence right between the lectern and the baptismal fount. We would light our best incense and sing some of our favorite hymns. We'd gather at the table to celebrate with our best port and some home-made bread.



While we are temporarily separated (and then, only physically so), consider taking this as an opportunity to bring some of that intention home. Home worship is the oldest form of Christian worship with more than a little Jewish influence. And so, if you can, invite the Risen Christ into your home with a white tablecloth and a new white candle on the table or desk where you are collected. You might set out a favorite cross or rosary and spend a moment summoning up a sense of gratitude and forgiveness with friends or family by phone or through social media. Offer it with loved ones no longer living or saints that you admire. You might want to listen to some liturgically appropriate music before or during prayer, like this alternate version of “Be Thou my vision” from the Anglican Trinity College at the University of Melbourne <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMEAlzuEXWI> or this beautiful rendition of the very difficult but gorgeously appropriate hymn, "I Will Not Leave You Comfortless" by Everett Titcomb, sung by Concordia Chamber Choir. You can find it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eV0g-gbF_s0&list=RDfCzs7_hUdow&index=2

And, as always, please notice that our worship is voiced in the plural – “we,” “us” and “our” – because we may be temporarily apart, but we are also always bound together in Christ.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
17 May 2020

Centering

Make the sign of the cross as the leader says: May the light of Christ in glory rising scatter the darkness of heart and mind. (+) Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All respond: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The leader prays: Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
riches beyond imagination.
Pour into our hearts such love toward you,
that we, loving you above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Word of God for the Sixth Sunday in Easter

The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read.

A reading from Acts: Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 66: 7-18

O peoples, bless our God;
let the voice of God's praise resound,
of the God who gave life to our souls
and kept our feet from stumbling.

For you, O God have tested us,
you have tried us as silver is tried;
you led us, God, into the snare;
you laid a heavy burden on our backs.

You let foes ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water
but then you brought us relief.

Burnt offerings I bring to your house;
to you I will pay my vows,
the vows which my mouth spoke in distress.

I will offer burnt offerings of fatlings
with the smoke of burning rams.
I will offer bullocks and goats.

Come and hear, all who fear God,
I will tell what God did for my soul;
to God I cried aloud,
with high praise ready on my tongue.

If there had been evil in my heart,
the LORD would not have listened.
but truly God has listened;
has heeded the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God who has not rejected my prayer
nor withheld his love from me.

A reading from the first letter of Peter: Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And

baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you-- not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God



Read the gospel aloud without rushing. Allow the images to enter your awareness and find a home within.

A reading from John: [Jesus said] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I shall entreat the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, that he may be with you throughout the age. The Spirit of Truth, which the Kosmos cannot receive because it neither sees nor knows it; you know it because it abides with you and shall be within you. I shall not leave you orphans; I am coming to you. Just a little while and the Kosmos no longer sees me, but you see me; because I live, you too will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, that one is the one who loves me, and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and will manifest myself to them.”

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

Sermon:

There’s a restlessness in the air, isn’t there? It shows up in different people in various ways and in shifting intensities: some are working too much, some are angry that they can’t work; some are mildly anxious, others are clinging desperately to denial. We’re impatient or watchful, we’re stressed, bored or overwhelmed.

We’re in an “in-between” place. We’re crossing a threshold of sorts; a hazy boundary between what used to be and what is yet to come. It’s an unsettling place. Can it really be a

co-incident that, here on the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, we are moving into one of the most “in-between” places in the entire liturgical year?

This is the Sunday when we hear John’s Jesus telling his followers that he has to go away. Now, they have a hard-enough time contemplating the impending physical death of their friend and teacher. They can’t possibly plan for what they will experience after that. He will return to his followers. Except he will not be what they expect.

Next Thursday is the feast of the Ascension, when we celebrate the day that the Resurrected Christ takes his friends to the Mount of Olives one last time before disappearing from sight, at least in the form that his friends had become used to seeing. And then for ten days, we contemplate the mystery of this separation secured with a new and deeper connection.

In our collect for the feast of Ascension, we pray for God to mercifully give us faith to perceive, to become aware that Christ abides with us, even to the end of the ages. We are learning to navigate the exquisite ambiguity of the coming reality as carriers of the gifts and responsibilities of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. And we practice as we wait in this borderland, this moment in history, while it continues to fill with the love of the Holy One. John's Gospel is less concerned with historical truth – what Jesus actually said, where he went, who he met on what dates and so forth. The Gospel writer wants us to see Jesus the Anointed for who he most fully and truly is. To do that requires disorienting us from our habitual ways of looking.

Jennifer and I had a horse who would suddenly panic at the sight of an empty can on a trail and the only way you could get him past it would be to spin him in a couple of circles until he forgot about the can and could keep walking.

John’s Gospel does something similar.

In preparing his followers, Jesus promises that God will send them a helper, the Spirit of truth. The Kosmos can’t see this spirit because it has not seen Christ. Jesus is skillfully forcing us to adapt a sideways glance by repeating and circling around, confounding our linear “seeing” so that we might come to see more deeply and keep walking. “...you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

If you try to follow that sequence looking for facts, it may end up feeling only like the opening line to the Beatle’s “I am the Walrus” (“I am he as you are he as you are me, and we are all together...”).

There is another purpose here.

You know the Spirit of Truth because it abides with you and shall be within you. Maybe it would help if you knew that the root underlying Greek word which is translated into English as “truth” is “alethea.” In Greek, an initial letter “a” is like our English “un.” And “Lethe” is the river in Greek mythology that the dead drank from in Hades in order to forget their past.

And so “a-lethea” - truth – carries a sense of “not the river of forgetfulness.” Or to put it more positively, it refers to waking up, overcoming oblivion and stupor. It implies a state of being fully alive and vital; undeceived by false ideas or desires or scams; seeing what is as it actually is.

Once you wake up to see this way, you will naturally love. Whoever has and keeps the command that Jesus left – to love one another as he has loved us – will begin to love with

the love with which God loves. And Christ will be manifested to and through the awakening Spirit of that Truth.

That Spirit is not a “comforter” as some translations suggest. The Greek word that John used – *paracletos* or the anglicized “paraclete” – means “one called to come alongside.” And without the legalistic baggage of the word “advocate,” we have a word that points to the revealer and energizer of the living flow itself; the life-giving energy of God’s love that flows through Christ, our brother and our redeemer.

John’s Jesus revealed himself as the Anointed; the way, the truth and the life. The spirit that animated him and filled him perfectly was and is the breath of the way, the truth and the life. This spirit has already come alongside; already abides within, among and around Jesus and his followers.

Jesus, speaking as the Second Person of the Trinity is not excluding or shaming anyone. He is not talking about rewards for good behavior and punishment for misconduct. “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me” means “They who love one another as I love them are those who love me (the One who abides in everyone.)” And “those who love me will be loved by my Father” means “those (in whom I abide) who love me will be loved by my Father (who loves me and therefore also loves those in whom I abide).”

Jesus the Anointed never said: “Worship me.” He frequently said: “Follow me.” This is the Christ that Paul observed. And the story from Acts is a brilliant example of a follower of Christ living out that vision.

Paul was a Pharisee who, he claimed, had been “educated at the feet” of the prominent rabbi Gamaliel. On a missionary journey, Paul went to Athens, a multicultural city known for openness to philosophy and religion. Paul talked with some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who invited him to explain the resurrection of Christ at the Areopagus on the edge of the marketplace.

The people of Athens were interested in everything new. Their curiosity made them eager to hear from Paul. Paul, for his part, was surprised by the number of temples and altars for idols. And yet, in paying attention to their culture, he found an altar with no idol dedicated “to an unknown God.” And there, at an open altar of unknowing, Paul discovers an unexpected presence of God in an unfamiliar land.

Paul’s speech was persuasive because, instead of scolding or humiliating people, he went through the door that was open. He defended his faith with what Peter describes in his letter as gentleness and reverence, with a heart made humble because Paul was experiencing something new that the people of Athens were also discovering.

The Spirit of Truth was already present and available to them both because they were awake to new possibilities. Instead of insisting on the worship of the historical Jesus, Paul was able to see the movement of the Holy Spirit in a new place. And because of their willingness to set their idolatry aside and listen, the people of Athens met not some foreign God, but rather a familiar, if not well-understood “unknown God.”

John’s Jesus moves us to consider how we might practice respect and gentle humility with everyone we encounter, loving without exception because we are loved without exception. Setting aside our own idols in anticipation of getting to know more about the



God of resurrected life who has promised to be present even in the new and unfamiliar territory just across the border we are now crossing.

We can cherish what is still true and continue practices of love and service to ourselves and to others. And we can stay awake to the movement of the Spirit of the God who is larger than all our temples and altars; the God who has promised to abide with us along the way.

There's a restlessness in the air. And yet, the Spirit is our stabilizer. We're in an "in-between" place. And yet, the Spirit is alongside us as our guide. We are unsettled. And yet, because the Risen Christ lives, we will be drawn nearer to the God who abides with us closer than our own breath.

Christ will manifest to us and through us to bring us all into the kingdom of God and give us life in all its fullness.

Silence and stillness

The Nicene Creed

Leader: Let us reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he (or “she” or no pronoun) is worshiped and glorified.

He (she/who) has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:

Leader: God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Son, you came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: God the Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: Holy Trinity, one God, in you we live and move and have our being.

All: We praise and bless you, LORD.

Leader: In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Anglican Church of Korea, the Most Reverend Moses Nagjun Yoo, Primate of Korea and Bishop of Daejeon.

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for St. Andrew, Tacoma; Holy Family of Jesus, Tacoma.

We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, and for the safety of those in military service. We pray for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, especially for Rebecca and for Betsy, for first responders and for their families.

We pray for those on our long-term list. Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, offered silently or aloud.

Leader: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured or disabled, that they may be made whole.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who are lonely, anxious or depressed, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Grant to all who minister to those who are suffering wisdom and skill, sympathy and patience.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Mend broken relationships, and restore to those in distress soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Sustain and support those who seek your guidance and lift up all who are brought low by the trials of this life.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: We pray for the repose of the souls of Richard, Don, Mike and for their families in mourning. Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, especially Deacon Richard and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin, in our lives, in our nation, and in the world.

All: Hear us, LORD of life.

Leader: You are the LORD who does mighty wonders.

All: You have declared your power among the peoples.

Leader: With you, LORD, is the well of life

All: and in your light do we see light.

Leader: Hear us, LORD of life:

All: heal us, and make us whole.

Let us pray.

A period of silence follows, and then, Leader: Hear the prayer we offer for all your people.

Remember in your mercy those for whom we pray: heal the sick, raise the fallen, strengthen the fainthearted, protect those who serve, and enfold in your love the fearful and those who have no hope.

In the fullness of time complete your gracious work. Reconcile all things in Christ and make them new, that we may be restored in your image, renewed in your love, and serve you as sons and daughters in your kingdom.

Through your anointed Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit we lift our voices of thanks and praise:

All: Blessed be God, our strength and our salvation, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of spiritual communion

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to be separated from you. *Amen.*

Concluding Prayer

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son;
grant that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Blessing

Make the sign of the cross as you say: May Christ, (+) who by death has destroyed death, give us all courage and joy in believing. Amen.

Giving Thanks at Table

Giving God,
bless all who have gathered round this table.
May we know the fullness of your presence
at every meal and in all our sharing.
Amen.



“I wonder if the only way to spiritually hold suffering – and not let it destroy us – is to recognize that we cannot do it alone. When I try to do it heroically alone, I slip into distractions, denials and pretending – and I do not learn suffering’s softening lessons. But when I can find a shared meaning for something, especially if it allows me to love God and others in the same action, God can get me through it. I begin to trust the ambiguous process of life.”

~ Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

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