



## ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a small group of people stood on a Palestinian hillside and watched as their friend and rabbi faded from their sight. His body had already changed in ways that they could not understand or explain. A devout Jew, he had been a gifted teacher of Torah, and when he extended his loving-kindness and welcome to the Gentiles, he revealed the extent of God's gift of grace to all creation through the children of Israel.

Even his closest followers, some of whom had met Jesus on the shores of the Galilee, could not see the full scope of this gift. And so, they stood staring at a cloud until two beings in white robes told them that this Jesus would return to them in the same way they had just seen him go. And so, the little group went back to Jerusalem.

They stayed together and they prayed. These were real people with histories, families, hopes and concerns. These are among the people who made up the early church. Today, there are only a few of these original church families left. In what was once Judea and Samaria, Christians have gone from around 80 percent of the population just after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1950, to around 12 percent today. And it is increasingly difficult for Arab Christians to live in and around Jerusalem.

With the ironic funding and support of some American Evangelical churches (and despite international law), Jewish settlers continue taking over Arab land, including some that is owned by the descendants of the original Christians. In Israel proper, Christians have gone from some 21 percent of the Arab population to around 8 percent today. Overall, they now number just 2 percent of the entire Israeli population. The Gaza strip holds some 2,000 to 3,000 Arab Christians, or about 0.2 percent of the total population there.

Palestinian Christians are mostly Orthodox, Roman or Anglican with some Lutherans and a handful of other Protestant denominations. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, for example, is a well-known Palestinian politician, activist and scholar. She lives in Ramallah on the West Bank and worships at St. Andrew's Anglican Episcopal Church. She and other Christians still wait and watch for God's glory to be revealed in Israel.

The quandary before us is this: How can we watch and wait and act in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land without lapsing into disdain for our Jewish cousins who also have a right to be there?



## Preparation

Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics and others keep some version of the Great Fifty Days of Pascha, the season that next Sunday on the feast of Pentecost. If we were gathered at church, the altar and priests would be draped in our finest vestments. The altar would be surrounded by beautiful flowers and set with new beeswax candles. Now that we are past Ascension Day, the Paschal candle would be unlit and standing in its usual place by 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 that we no longer see or saints that you admire.

You might want to listen to some liturgically appropriate music before or between readings or prayer. You can find a gorgeous recording of “Alleluia! Sing to Jesus” here on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTrCIYH1Yw4> or you might like to end worship with this from New Zealand: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ometKgLTkrg> Or see if you can keep a dry eye watching this beautifully prayerful gift from Indonesia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akT32E83zjI>

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

## Seventh Sunday of Easter 24 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:* Almighty God,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven.  
Mercifully grant us faith to know  
that, as he promised,  
he abides with us on earth to the end of time;  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

### The Word of God for the Seventh Sunday in Easter

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

A reading from Acts: When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has

been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.



*Reader:* The Word of the Lord

*Response:* Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

Let God arise, let the foes be scattered.  
Let those who hate God take flight.  
As smoke is blown away so will they be blown away;  
like wax that melts before the fire,  
so the wicked shall perish at the presence of God.

But the just shall rejoice at the presence of God,  
they shall exult and dance for joy.  
O sing to the LORD, make music to God's name;  
make a highway for the One who rides on the clouds.  
Rejoice in the LORD, exult before God.

Father of the orphan, defender of the widow,  
such is God in the holy place.  
God gives the lonely a home to live in;  
and leads the prisoners forth into freedom;  
but rebels must dwell in a parched land.

When you went forth, O God, at the head of your people,  
when you marched across the desert, the earth trembled,  
the heavens melted at the presence of God,  
at the presence of God, Israel's God.

You poured down, O God, a generous rain;  
when your people were starved you gave them new life.  
It was there that your people found a home,  
prepared in your goodness, O God, for the poor.

Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, praise the LORD  
who rides on the heavens, the ancient heavens.  
God's mighty voice thunders and roars.  
Come, acknowledge the power of God

whose glory is on Israel; whose might is in the skies.  
God is to be feared in the holy place.  
This is the Lord, Israel's God,  
who gives strength and power to the people.

Blessed be God!

A reading from the first letter of Peter: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

*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...lifting up his eyes to the sky, said, "Father the hour has come; glorify your Son, so that the Son might glorify you. Just as you gave him power over all flesh, so that you have given everything to him, that he might give them life in the Age. And this is life in the Age: that they might know you, the sole true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus the Anointed. On earth I glorified you by completing the work you have given me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me by your side with that glory I had before the cosmos was. I disclosed your name to [those] whom you gave to me out of the cosmos. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that all the things you have given me, however many, are from you, and they had faith that you sent me forth. I make supplication on their behalf; I do not make supplication on behalf of the cosmos, but rather on behalf of those you have given to me, because they are yours. And all that is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And I am no longer in the cosmos, and they are in cosmos, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one just as we are.”

*Reader:* The Word of the Lord

*Response:* Thanks be to God

### **Sermon:**

“Do not leave us comfortless,” the collect for this last Sunday of Pascha says, “but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us.” And then every reading is a vignette about the suffering and discomfort that is so often a part of any life of faith.

Luke’s scene from Acts gave us a glimpse into one of the first communities of the followers of Christ long before they were called “Christians.” They have come together only to be told that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit and then scattered to the limits of the earth to empty that Spirit out for others.

Being with Jesus has never been the purpose, although that sounds quite comfortable. Instead, following Jesus the Anointed has always involved carrying the loving-kindness of God out into the world. Instead of fixing our eyes on the sky as though heaven was somewhere up there, Christ-followers are sent to *be* the light of Christ that opens the eyes of others to the Divine realm of the loving God flowing into this relative plane.

The psalmist urges us to sing part of an ancient war song to an awesome warrior God. It’s an image that makes me uncomfortable as do so many of our hymns: “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” “Stand Up for Jesus, (ye soldiers of the cross)” or “Soldiers of Christ, Arise.” Too many wars between nations have been fought in the name of Christ.

Even so, I’m also aware that there is an impulse toward a vengeful God in my own heart. I know that I need to keep an eye on that so I don’t allow that impulse to move me toward self-righteousness. Coming from a military family, I also recognize the unfortunate need for military strength. In a verse that the lectionary left out, the psalmist is clear that it is God fighting to save God’s children from death by “scattering the peoples who delight in war.” Those perspectives distress some of my friends, people of faith who want to reject all images of a God of vengeance.

That tension can become an instructive workshop for dialogue if we allow ourselves to stay in the discomfort of it.

Peter’s letter speaks to the reality that a life of faith inevitably involves suffering and discomfort. Life in the Spirit is never a “get-out-of-pain-free” card as some prosperity preachers promote. And yet, there’s also danger in misunderstanding what it means to rejoice in suffering. Not all suffering is glorious or somehow redemptive. Spousal abuse, for

example, or targeting civilians in war are never acceptable. Violence *must* be a *last* resort and even then, we must leave the possibility of forgiveness open.

And that leads us to John's Jesus offering his final prayer to God before his crucifixion. In the tradition of Moses and the prophet Ezra, this is Jesus' last will and testament that some scholars like to call his "high priestly prayer," offered for himself, his household and for all the people of who would follow him. And despite the horrific violence he is about to face, Jesus seems resolute and calm. He is finishing his life having accomplished his purpose.

That can be a little hard for us to square with our expectations for the end of our lives because so few of us get to die with that sense of completion. My Great-uncle Laurence is the only one I ever knew who did. I got a call one evening from his daughter to tell me that he was in the hospital refusing to eat. She said that he wouldn't listen to her. Laurence was in his late '90s and had grown a little, shall we say, "impatient" with some of his family.

But he and I had a deep and mutual admiration club and so I dutifully went to see him. When I got to his bedside, I told him that we were all worried about him and offered to bring him some applesauce or something light to eat.

He got up on one elbow and looked me in the eye. "Listen," he said, "I've been everywhere I want to go, I've seen everything I want to see and I've done everything I want to do. I want to see what's next." I sat there waiting for some profound response to come to me. All I could muster was "Huh!" He laid back down with a smile. I kissed his forehead and went home. He died that night. Not a bad way to go.

Most of us don't get to control how or when we die. And as much as we may want to pray "leave us comfortable," our trust in God inspires us to say instead, "Do not leave us comfortless" and then go on to pray "send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us."

That's right in line with what Jesus prays on our behalf. Some translations miss the point of John's Greek; Jesus didn't pray for God to *protect* us from suffering. He prays "Holy Father, *keep them in your name.*" In short, he prays for the preservation of the seeds of God's heaven planted in those followers still in the realm of the cosmos; still in this dimension of time and space and matter.

Even as they experience suffering, that is, keep them as your own children so that they can recognize their unity with each other, with all creation; so that they can stay awake to their unity with God, sharing a solidarity of purpose through the changes and challenges that they will certainly face.

This, just for the record, is a very Jewish way to pray.

Suffering is not required. Suffering does, however, seem to come along with many life changes as we mature emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Even what we experience as suffering can shift as we mature.

We are born completely unaware of our own distinctiveness. We have no clue that we are one separate being among other beings. We cry when we are hungry and something resolves the hunger. In time, that suffering transforms into a simple discomfort that we can tend to for ourselves.

Later, we discover that there are people who aren't part of our family, our clan, our way of being in the world. If we cling to our clans or our upbringing as the only right way to

be in the world, we suffer by isolating ourselves from differences. We can become stuck with suspicion, dread or, worse yet, with disdain for other people that begins to infect our lives.

In time, we may come to treat these differences as simply uncomfortable, not life-threatening. With enough exposure to challenging ideas, we may begin to suffer in a different way as we notice and treasure our individual uniqueness, while also noticing and cherishing our connection to all life.

With the Holy Spirit strengthening us as children of God, our innate drive toward unity compels us to change our behaviors, to be transformed so that we can enter into newly revealed aspects of reality with more expansive principles, more inclusive values and new ways of talking about how to be in this world.

Our spirit begins to suffer when we see people we may not even know suffering. And it relaxes when we participate in or witness acts of mercy and loving-kindness. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel liked to point out that experiences of justice and compassion often unlock the door to faith far more effectively than doctrinal argument.

The death of people we love, disruptions of family or work life and, yes, global pandemics, all have the potential to disorient us enough to pressure us toward restructuring our understanding of who we are and the cosmos we live in.

We may not get to sign up for a death like my Uncle Laurence's, where we can truly say, "It is finished." But my uncle did know something crucial that I will share with you with the warning that it might cause you to rethink a few things. There are some hints in the prayer that Jesus prayed for us – for you and for me and for all of us.

Life, do you see, is not about how many years you live or a balance sheet of your successes and failures. Every one of us is a child of God, not kept from suffering, but always kept in God's name. And life is filled with adventures that invite us to live into our unity with God and with God's creation by releasing divine love into the cosmos while we are here.

Every human is one of God's great ideas for stirring love in others. And each time that happens, God is glorified because the cosmos can see a little more of the light of heaven and all life is a little more complete.

Can you believe it!

### *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 all members of the Anglican Communion around the world. For the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, and all primates and bishops. For members of the Anglican Consultative Council, for the Secretary General, The Most Reverend Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon, for staff at the Anglican Communion Office in London and the UN offices in Geneva and New York. In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for St. Luke Memorial, Tacoma; St. Matthew, 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, and for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, 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:* For the repose of the soul of Helen Melina and for her family in mourning. Grant to the dying peace and a holy death, especially Deacon Richard Buhrer 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.

*Leader:* Let us pray.

*A period of silence follows, and then:* 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**

Eternal God, giver of love and power,  
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world  
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:  
confirm us in this mission,  
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*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.*



“This will be my solitude, to be separated from myself so that I am able to love You alone, to love You so much that I no longer realize I am loving anything. For such a realization implies a consciousness of a self that is separated from You. I no longer desire to be myself, but to find myself transformed in You, so that there is no ‘myself’ but only Yourself. That is when I will be what you have willed to make me from all eternity: not myself, but Love. Thus will be fulfilled in me, as You will it to be fulfilled, Your reason for the creation of the world and me in it.”

~ **Fr. Thomas Merton, OSCO**

*Sources and references:*

Essay image: Ceiling of the Cenacle (questionable, but traditional, site of the Last Supper, resurrection appearances and Pentecost), photo taken by Fr. John Forman.

“Preparation” image: Photo of St. Elizabeth nave by Fr. John Forman

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Epistle image: photo of carving at the top of a Cenacle column taken by Fr. John. The two pelicans feeding on blood that their mother has drawn from her breast symbolizes Christ giving his blood for the salvation of humankind.

Opening Gospel image: Fresco by Giotto di Bondone of Ascension in Cappella Scrovegni, Padua, Italy.

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