

John 20:19-31

Jesus appears to the disciples in the closed upper room, giving them a gift of the Spirit, and sending them just as he was sent. Then, Thomas who wasn't at this appearance, is encountered by Jesus, and his doubts are removed.

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.

COCU 32B.Easter2B Readings

Christ is Risen! The Easter celebration continues with the upper room appearances from John's Gospel. The supporting texts highlight a feature of the resurrection that can easily be missed – the way Christ's resurrection brings us into a unified, loving community in which we share joy and abundant life together. Acts describes the early church as a caring, loving and serving community in which all things were held in common and no one had need. Psalm 133 celebrates the joy and life that is found in a united community. John's letter calls us to live "in the light", with honesty and integrity; living like this brings us into fellowship with God and one another. In the Gospel, the first appearance of Jesus includes both the sending of the disciples as Jesus was sent to welcome, forgive and heal - proclaiming God's Reign - and the call to be people of forgiveness, which of course, is a key facet to reconciliation. The resurrection is not a personal, individual gift, but is also about reconciliation and community. Because of Christ's life we find connection with one another and with God, and can live out of this sense of belonging, welcoming others, into the joy we have found.

In the realm of religion, we have built an exclusivist culture 'us and them' culture that welcomes and accepts only those who think and act and believe as we do. This has led to religious violence, social fragmentation, political partisanship, and carelessness of creation. In the realm of economics we have underestimated both the impact that risky behaviour in one sector can have on the whole system, and how interconnected the global economy is. In terms of power, resources, and technology, we have failed to grasp how significant our connections are as they bypass the false categorisations and lines of division that we have set up. One result of our failure to apprehend our connectedness is that we lose the joy and life that true community brings. The gap between rich and poor grows, the conflicts between nations, religions, and ideologies continue, and the destruction of our planet and its species is unchecked. If we could begin to believe in resurrection as a lived reality, though, we could turn so much of this around. Once we recognise that God's life flows through everything and everyone, we can open ourselves to see the connections that God's life creates, and then we can begin to experience and enjoy our connectedness, ultimately working toward unity and interdependence. The starting point is to receive God's Spirit, to practice forgiveness and to go into the world as those who are sent, like Christ, to bring the grace, compassion, and justice of God into the world. Then, as we "walk in the light" with one another, we will begin to know the fellowship that John wrote about, and we find abundant, limitless life in our connectedness with God and one another. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 133

A song of celebration for the blessing of living in unity.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is
like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For
there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Praying the Psalms Nan C. Merrill - for personal reflection

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell
in unity! It is like vistas seen from atop a mountain one has climbed...
Or like the stillness of a sunset after a long day's work. It is like a
shimmering rainbow, breaking through a summer rain. When men and
women dwell in harmony, the star of Truth appears.

1 John 1:1-2:2

*John writes to testify to Jesus and to open the door to fellowship for the
believers with one another and with God. If we claim to be in fellowship but
live in "darkness", we lie. But, if we confess our sin, and live in the light we
have fellowship with God and others.*

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and
touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - this life was
revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the
eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us, we
declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may
have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and
with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy
may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and
proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at
all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in
darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light
as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and
the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we
have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we
confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and
cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not
sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children,
I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone

does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the
righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours
only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Acts 4:32-35

*The early disciples bear witness to the resurrection through their generosity
and care for one another, ensuring that no one among them had any need.*
Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and
soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but
everything they owned was held in common. With great power the
apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person
among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and
brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles'
feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

A place for us - a reflection by John van de Laar

We long to find a place to relax, O God,
to lean into the welcome and the love of real friends
who stay true no matter who we are or what we've done.
We want to be known - not just our names, but our selves,
our dreams and longings, our fears and failings
and be warmly, unrestrainedly welcomed.
We yearn to know the joy of opening our arms to others
and seeing them melt and grow soft in the safety of our acceptance.
And you have created a place like this for us
a place of people, with failings and disagreements
who still look out for one another;
a place of difference and struggle where we can all belong;
a place of faith and deep doubt,
a place of awkward stumbling toward Christlikeness;
a place of worship, of mystery and of rest.
And though we can't always see it,
although sometimes it doesn't feel like it;
this is the place - here.
Not the buildings and the furniture - no, these people
who gather each week in your name
and try so hard to remember each other's
And for this place, and your being with us
we give our heartfelt gratitude and devotion. Amen.