

Season of EASTER



Prayers

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Scripture Readings

Psalm 148 (antiphon v. 13)

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 470/471

Other Hymns – 603 (FR), 467 (G),

472 (G), 487 (G), 720 (G)

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Risen Lord, breathe Your Holy Spirit upon us that with the eyes of faith we would see You present among us in Your Word and the blessed Sacrament of Your body and blood, and so receive the forgiveness of our sins and Your gift of peace; Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Holy Spirit, fill us with the zeal and desire to hear and learn more of the apostolic and prophetic Word of God so that by believing we may have life in the name of Jesus and with one heart and soul and mind confess with Thomas that He is our Lord and our God; Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Father of glory, remember Your Church throughout the world, and strengthen all Your baptised people to be bold witnesses of our Lord's resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Fount of wisdom everlasting, look in kindness upon our Synod that all we undertake together may be to Your praise and glory. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Ruler of all, to Your care and protection we commend all our elected officials and all who serve in our armed forces. Grant them wisdom and honour as they carry out their responsibilities. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly King, Your Son promised that He does not break the bruised reed or quench the dimly burning wick. Remember in mercy all who struggle with the darkness of doubt and despair, and bring to their hearts the peace of Your Son's resurrection victory. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Forgiver of all our sin, You have given Your Church the keys of the kingdom. Help all pastors to use them faithfully, that Your people's joy may overflow. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

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O Lord, our Healer, we commend to You all those who are in need of restoration, whether of body, soul or spirit [especially remembering before You _____]. Grant to them Your peace, that they may bear their sufferings with patience as they await Your gracious healing. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting One, receive our thanks this day for all who have fallen asleep in faith in Jesus Christ. Bring us to share with them the joys of the feast that never ends. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**



EASTER SERMON

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

(Series B)

APRIL 7, 2024

Sermon Text: John 20:19-31

“He Seeks The Lost”

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

The risen Christ lives to seek the lost . . . like a shepherd seeking His lost sheep. At Easter, God the heavenly Father has wakened from death the great Shepherd of the sheep. Jesus is alive to search for, bind up, and strengthen His sheep and lambs who are lost in unbelief, doubt and error . . . and wherever they have strayed in this vast world of His.

He begins by seeking His disciples on Easter evening. How are Jesus’ closest followers celebrating Easter? Why, in lockdown: behind locked doors, quivering in fear, not believing, afraid of suffering arrest, trial and death just like what happened to their Master. They were not blessed with believing hearts; for fear eclipsed faith. And so, the living Shepherd, Jesus, seeks out these lost sheep of His.

Like Thomas. His fear and unbelief ran so deep, he needed to see the evidence: marks of nails in the hands and feet of Jesus . . . the scar from the spear that had been thrust into His side — the marks from Jesus’ terrible suffering and death on the cross that would prove this really was Jesus. That’s what this lost sheep needed to take the doubts away from his heart and mind. And so, to doubting Thomas, Jesus came.

And to the world gone astray, the risen Lord Jesus also comes. To His dear sheep – lost in doubt, unbelief and error – the Lord Jesus comes . . . once wounded, dead, and buried, but now alive . . . and calls all people to repent of their sin, to turn from unbelief, and believe in the One who died for the world, and who now lives forever. Yes, the Shepherd seeks His lost sheep.

And that includes us, as well. When fears and worries rob us of faith in the living and resurrected Christ, Jesus seeks us. Where error leaves our hearts troubled and disturbed, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,

then the resurrected Lord Jesus comes to us. He binds our wounded consciences with the precious gift of His free forgiveness. On every hill and valley where our sins have scattered us, the Lord seeks us, calling His sheep to Himself.

Who is this Good Shepherd? You know Him by the scars that He bears on His body, even as the disciples rejoiced and were glad when He showed them His hands and His side, just as Thomas saw and believed in Him . . . “my Lord and my God.” By the nails that pierced His hands and His feet, the Lord Jesus has taken away the guilt of our sins. At the cost of His holy precious blood that poured from His spear-punctured side, Jesus has purchased our forgiveness. Even while fixed to the cross, the divine Son of God was seeking every lost sheep of this world. With His heart breaking as the world rejected Him in unbelief and rebellion . . . every one of us like sheep having turned to his own way; yet in love, Jesus died so that His sheep would live.

And now, He is risen — resurrected to seek and to save the lost. Sadly, however, those who cling stubbornly to unbelief and reject the Lord’s free forgiveness have their sin and guilt still bound to them . . . stuck in their souls, judgement truly locked down, forgiveness withheld. And yet, even by this binding discipline, the Shepherd seeks His lost, impenitent sheep; calling them to repent and come back.

The Shepherd’s true delight is to seek out His straying sheep, binding their wounds and strengthening them with His declaration of forgiveness, absolving and freeing them by the voice of His called servants. So we read in the Small Catechism: “[We] believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.” Yes, behind closed doors on Easter evening, risen from the dead, but still bearing on His body the marks from the cross, Jesus gave the command to His disciples, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.”

And what then happens? Nervous, jumpy, sin-troubled sheep calm right down when the Shepherd speaks His forgiving word: “Peace be with you.” And with that same Word, and by that gracious Word joined to His Sacraments, as His rod and staff, Jesus also takes care of us. The Shepherd seeks and saves His sheep. Believing in the risen Christ, who takes all our sins away, we now have life in His name. So, our risen Lord promises through the prophet Ezekiel: “I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.”

Now, today, Sunday, is not just the first day of the week; it is also the eighth day. To be sure, we, who gather together on the eighth day like the disciples did, are not privileged to see Jesus with our eyes or handle the wounds on His body like Thomas did. But through His Word and in and with the bread and the wine of His Supper, the Good Shepherd seeks us out, coming to us by means of His Word and the Sacrament, strengthening our weak faith, binding up our injured consciences, enlightening our minds. And do you know what? His Word is true; for He is risen!

“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed!” Amen.