

**Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St. (PO Box 222)
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
April 11, 2021
Second Sunday of Easter**

Prelude

Announcements

***Call to Worship**

1 Peter 1:3

By God's great mercy,
**we have been born anew to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

Hymn

Thine Is the Glory

Edmund Louis Budry, 1884
George Fredrick Handel, 1748

Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son;
endless is the victory, thou over death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded graveclothes where thy body lay.
Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son;
endless is the victory, thou over death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life!
Life is naught without thee. Aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.
Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son;
endless is the victory, thou over death hast won.

Prayer

**Living God, for whom no door is closed,
no heart is locked,
draw us beyond our doubts,
til we see your Christ
and touch his wounds
where they appear in others.
This we ask through Christ our Savior,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen.**

Time for Young Disciples

Installation of Trustee Steve Gold

Scripture Reading John 20:19-31
The Morning Message

Let's set the scene: the disciples had gathered in a familiar meeting place, very likely the upper room where they had observed the Passover meal and the room in which Jesus instituted the Last Supper. The room was locked up tight for fear of the Jewish authorities. Any footfall upon the stair, a knock, or command to open the door, could signal certain death for them.

Then suddenly, Jesus is there with them. He gave them the customary eastern greeting, "Peace be to you." A more accurate translation would be, "May God give you every good thing."

We can imagine both the shock and the profound peace that would wash over the disciples in that moment. Jesus must have anticipated their need to see for themselves that this man was truly their friend, the crucified one, Jesus.

He shows them his wounds, his hands and his side. He lets them touch his body. Note, this is the same gesture Jesus will make for Thomas, but we never call these disciples doubters. Just an observation.

And then Jesus commissions them for their life's work, their magnum opus.
"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Let's place ourselves in that room: dark and stuffy, with the curtain covering the only window, everyone still as a stone, the snapping electricity of fear running through all of them.

Rev. Marci Auld Glass writes that , "Jesus could have gone and sent other people, presumably people with more courage, people who weren't hiding, or whomever. But, he's sending his people. His friends. His disciples. The one who denied him three times in eight hours. His disciples. The ones who loved him til the end. Even Thomas, who isn't there at the moment, but who will get his chance in a bit."

This is great good news for us. We are called and sent, even with our human inadequacies and our brokenness.

On the other hand, I'm not sure I want to sign up for the insults and abuse Jesus suffered. But don't we already know that the gospel doesn't always take us down easy paths?

But, hang on. Here comes the help: After Jesus gives them their instructions, he breathes on them. Now, If someone breathes on me intentionally, I would probably hold my breath and run to the great outdoors.

The Greek word for breath is “pneuma.” When someone has pneumonia, he or she has a problem with the organs involved in breathing. In Latin, it comes to us as “Spiritus.” You can see the relatedness of breath and spirit-without breath, we have no life, no spirit. The risen Jesus is imparting his Spirit.

And it’s a good thing because the first task Jesus assigns us is this: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, then they are retained.”

I confess, it’s much easier to preach on the six verses at the end of this text- the ones about Doubting Thomas-than it is these curious words about forgiveness. I have some great illustrations.

But, that’s not where we are today.

If you were to come talk to me about a situation that is troubling you, one that has hurt you, maybe something that has fractured a close relationship, I would probably say something like, the only person’s behavior you can control is your own. You can’t control anyone else’s behavior. We can only change ourselves.

When we forgive people, we don’t do it in the hope that they will change. Well, maybe sometimes we do. But, realistically, We forgive so that we are no longer holding onto the pain, the anger, the fear that can damage our lives.

Hear me clearly: there are some actions that wound in ways we identify as criminal in nature. That leads the conversation in a different direction altogether. The journey to forgiveness in that case will need a lot of work and support.

Last week I mentioned Rachel Held Evans. Rachel was raised in an evangelical Christian family. Her father was a pastor and professor at a Christian college in Tennessee. Her whole life and education was bathed in the climate of evangelical Christianity. She was grateful for that foundation, but, as she moved into adulthood, experiencing life outside that sheltered environment, getting married, having children, she began to ask questions of her faith, she began raising questions about and to God. She wrote a blog. She wrote NYT best sellers. She was a much-sought-after preacher.

Rachel's books and blogs are rich and humorous and insightful. She can make you laugh til you cry. She can be blunt. She can make the pages just sing with warmth and beauty.

But, as she pushed the margins of her traditional faith, particularly the beliefs about women's roles in the church, she suffered terrible, hate-filled insults. Her church condemned her work. Friends fell away.

She was on that not-so-easy path many of us fear when saying yes to Jesus.

A few years ago, during an especially difficult time, Rachel took up a new practice for Lent. She turned her hate mail into Origami. This is what she said about it: "As much as I try to ignore the most vile of these messages, they can still be quite painful, and I think that's okay. It's important to grow thick skin, but I also want to keep a tender, open heart...which means unclenching my fists and letting some of these words hurt every now and again."

At the end of her Lenten journey, Rachel wrote: "What I learned, turning my hate mail into origami, is that we're meant to remake this world together. We're meant to hurt together, heal together, forgive together, and create together. And, in a sense, even the people who continue to hate me and call me names are a part of this beautiful process. Their words, carelessly spoken, spent the last 40 days in my home- getting creased and folded, worked over...stepped on by a toddler, read by my sister, stained with coffee...blacked out, thrown away, turned into poems, and folded into sailboats and cranes and pigeons that now sit smiling at me from my office window."

Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

I kinda doubt you and I have ever received the volume of hate mail Rachel Evans did.

But, I'd bet we could all name someone or something, that hurt us or made us miserable. I sure have. And, this is saying the quiet part out loud... I hang onto nasty emails and memos and evaluations for a long time, I pull them out and stew over them, maybe shed a few tears and vow ...you get the drift.

Then the risen Christ shows up, throws open the locked door, throws up the shade, and says, "It's time to get out there and be a sign of God's amazing love. You're familiar with the stories. And I know you have a full tank!"

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Blessing

The risen Christ says: Peace be with you.

We have seen the Lord! Alleluia!

May you be filled with all joy and hope in believing. Amen.

***Postlude**

Announcements

Tithes and Offerings, including contributions for One *Great Hour of Sharing*, may be deposited in the offering plates at the conclusion of worship.

The Session meets following worship.

Leading worship today

Elder of the Month	Jon-Tyler Roach
Organist and Choir Director	Mark Baker
Pastor	Cinda Harkless

Worship resources: Glory to God, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013; The Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993; Daily Prayer, Westminster Press, 1987.