

Sermon & Prayers for April 17, 2022
Resurrection of our Lord, Year C
Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Prayer of the Day

O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Luke 24:1-12

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, beloved children of God, from God our Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ is risen!

Unbelievable.

That’s what the claim that Jesus has risen was for those first century disciples: unbelievable, an idle tale that did not square with the ways they understood the world to work.

And this, despite Jesus telling them beforehand that it would happen.

Then again, this sort of unbelievable, assumption-shattering, new-world-making action is God’s specialty, isn’t it?

This could be why the dazzling messengers of the unbelievable news told the wondering women to remember what Jesus had said. And not just the parts that fit their worldview or matched what they had seen transpire – like Jesus being handed over and crucified – but also and especially the part that challenged their worldview – like Jesus rising from the dead on the third day.

The messengers of this unbelievably good news invite the followers of Jesus to remember that God keeps God's promises, and that God saves God's people in ever new, even unbelievable ways. In this remembering of the Word that is Jesus, those who were looking for Jesus would realize that they were looking in the wrong place.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Preaching professor Lucy Lind Hogan tells of a similar encounter with her son:

“Years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to the Holy Land with a church group. My husband was telling our eldest son that I would be going. ‘Why?’ he asked. I think my husband was a bit confused. His response was, ‘Well, you know, Jesus.’ I have long recalled my son's response because I think he understood the angel's admonition. He told his father, ‘Tell her he's not there.’

“He isn't there; he is risen. He has burst the bonds of time and space, yet we continue to focus on the unexplainable empty tomb, looking for him among the dead.”ⁱ

Right after this story from Luke that we read today is the story about the road to Emmaus. There, the risen Jesus joins a couple of human beings on the road of their grief and confusion to give them a new future as they recognize him in giving thanks and breaking bread together.

And after that story, Luke tells us that again, while the disciples were together sharing and discussing the unbelievable good news, Jesus appeared among them offering peace and hope.

The risen Jesus is found among the living!

It may be unbelievable, but it's true: Jesus left the tomb to join us in the living of our days.

The crucified and risen one enters with us into that challenging relationship that vexes or grieves us, to work the wonder of resolution or reconciliation.

The risen Jesus bursts the bonds of time and space to join us in the unjust situation to offer the new life of equity and purpose.

Jesus risen walks with us in our illness or loss, faces uncertain futures right alongside us, appears again and again with the persistent, forgiving, healing, hopeful love of God and the unbelievable gift of new, abundant, and lasting life...not among the dead, but the living.

And he does so in unexpected ways, through imperfect people, at the least expected times.

Remember this, child of God, and look for Jesus where you or others least expect him.

Remind others of what Jesus said, what God does, how God specializes in making a way out by going through, by drawing us up by going down with us, by springing resurrection from the tombs of our days.

Look for the offer of new, abundant, and lasting life drawing near in the people and circumstances of the living of your days...

resurrection – unbelievable, unexpected, undeserved – in the form of forgiveness, hope, reconciliation, peace, and persistent self-giving love, appearing among us in the living of our days.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Alleluia!

Prayers of Intercessionⁱⁱ

On this day of resurrection joy, let us offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and our world.

A brief silence.

Renewing God, the good news of your resurrection changed the world. Give church leaders and all the baptized the same excitement as the women at the tomb, and inspire us to share your abundant life.

Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Sustaining God, your creation abounds with signs of new life in budding trees and newborn creatures.

Provide fertile soil, ample sunlight, and nourishing rain for the growth of plants, and provide farmers with a plentiful harvest. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Sheltering God, strengthen and sustain all who support vulnerable people across the world, especially in those places we name now... Empower government agencies and international organizations that provide for refugees and migrants forced to leave their homelands. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Encouraging God, you do a new thing among us. We pray for those gripped by fear and anxiety or who suffer in any way... Send us as your healing presence to places of hunger, pain, illness, or overwhelming sorrow. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Surprising God, you offer endless ways for us to delight in your grace. Give the community of faith of faith of which we are a part and those across the Indiana-Kentucky Synod a sense of joy and wonder in exploring new avenues of faith formation, worship, and discipleship. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Resurrecting God, you make us alive in Christ. Thank you for blessing us with faithful witnesses who now rest in you... Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

We offer to you these petitions and those we carry in our hearts, trusting in your abundant and ever-present mercy.

Amen.

ⁱ Lucy Lind Hogan, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-3/commentary-on-luke-241-12-9>

ⁱⁱ Prayers, including the Prayer of the Day, adapted from SundaysandSeasons.com.