

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

### **Links to Christ and Grace**

YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgveCGQgn0okeiNXLcmZI\\_w?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgveCGQgn0okeiNXLcmZI_w?view_as=subscriber)

Website: <https://www.christandgrace.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ChristandGracePetersburg/>

**OFFERINGS:** Thank you to all who sent in your contribution this past week. We know that this is an extraordinarily challenging time, with many facing serious financial hardship. So many of you who need the church right now feel terrible about not being able to support it financially. Please remove this from your list of worries. We are here to support each other, and we will get through this together. We know that those who are able to do more to support the church at this time will do so, recognizing that if the shoe were on the other foot, our fellow parishioners would gladly do the same for us. It's who we are and what we do.

For those who are able, please know that you can [make a contribution electronically](#) by going to "Give" at [www.christandgrace.org](http://www.christandgrace.org). Offerings can be set up for a one time or recurring gift. The church is charged a fee for this service. If you are able to include the fee with your offering, the total amount is tax deductible. Or you can set up a regular payment through your bank's bill pay, or mail checks to Christ and Grace 1545 S. Sycamore Street, Petersburg, VA 23805.

**PRAYER LIST:** We beg you to feed the hungry, protect the refugee, embrace the distressed, house the homeless, nurse the sick, and comfort the dying. Especially we pray for Robyn Arrington, Nancy Gates, Betty Goodman, Kayleigh Harris, Brian Hettinger, Nell Howard, Mark Jones, Pret Kaichen, Josh Lumley, Kent Mallory, Mike McKibbin, Joan Mitchell, Addison Owens, Sharon Plymire, Lilly Rudd, Mark Sheffield, Wendy Taft, the Trowbridge Family, Larry Tucker, and Paige Whitley

**Next week Robin+ will be taking some Sabbath time, but is available as needed.**

### **MESSAGE FROM ROBIN+**

We are in Holy Week and I pray that you will take some time each day to reflect on the cross and on the power of God's love. In case you missed it last week, we are again attaching the Holy Week Worship booklet for your use at home on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and either Easter Vigil or Easter Day. In addition to these services for the home, we will have brief services available on our Youtube channel for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day. You can access these videos from our website, Facebook, or the YouTube Channel.

As we enter the peak period for the coronavirus, my prayer is that we not relent, but remain safe at home as much as is possible. Please let me know if there is anything you need or if you become sick. We won't hear all the Easter readings this year since we aren't at church, but I want to share with you the reading from Jeremiah that reminds us of the promises of God's love. We will get through this time of exile together, and we will return to church to worship, because God is faithful and loves us with an everlasting love. And on the day of our return we will say, "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God."

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord:

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;  
when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!

Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria;  
the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.

For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim:

"Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God." Jeremiah 31:1-6

Easter Blessings,  
Robin+

## **Sermon for Maundy Thursday, John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

Jesus was often found teaching from the tables where he shared meals with people. Gathering for a meal has always been central to our faith community, with Eucharist being that meal which is most precious to us. This year when we cannot have Eucharist in the context of the night of Jesus' betrayal, we might have a deep sense of loss. We have grown accustomed to Eucharist at this service, and every Sunday. Since the publication of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer Eucharist is our principle act of worship on the Lord's day. Now though, there are many of us who cannot recall the time when we received Eucharist only monthly, or even quarterly. So being unable to have Eucharist and then to strip the altar as part of our liturgy this year is hard.

Some priests are celebrating and even consuming the Eucharist, on behalf of their congregations and many find receiving communion spiritually to be a comfort. I have not had communion since the last time we prayed the Eucharistic prayer together here, on the Second Sunday in Lent when our Youth so beautifully led our worship. I have made the choice to fast from the Eucharist with all of you, receiving it spiritually as I worship with the WNC on Sundays.

But sharing a meal is only part of the story Jesus tells in John's gospel. Jesus not only fed his disciples, he also poured water into a basin and washed their feet. And the disciples were not at all receptive to this idea at first, just as many of us are not at all thrilled with the idea of foot washing as part of a Maundy Thursday service. Maybe some of us would be willing to wash the feet of our neighbor, but we are less likely to allow our neighbor to wash our feet.

Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and then he asks, "Do you know what I have done to you?" Can we answer that question? For that is really our work as disciples, to come to the answer, to begin to comprehend what it is Christ does for us, otherwise, how will we imitate Christ? Until we are willing to receive the love of Christ, we will not fully understand what it is that we are doing, not only with bread and wine, but also with water and towel.

Which brings us to the last part of the story, after the meal and after the washing of feet to show us how to serve others. After all of that, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. It was not a suggestion, or a new item for their "to do" list, but a new commandment. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So on this night we remember that meal Jesus shared with his disciples, that precious meal that we are waiting to share again with one another. And in the meantime, we remember those other things Jesus taught us from the table – to serve one another and to love one another.

To know what Christ has done for us is to begin the work of loving others as Christ loves us. And it is also to receive the love of Christ from others in community. What Jesus has done and does for us always is not just about the cross. It is about the whole of the life of Christ, poured out for us. It is about the birth and the baptism, the teaching and the healing, the body and the blood, the water and the towel, the life and the death. And all of that is held in the feeding, serving, loving hand of God. Amen.

## **Sermon for Good Friday, John 18:1-19:42**

Will you pray with me the Collect for Good Friday –

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

After reading the passion narrative, we are left empty. What is there to say? Nothing happens the way we would prefer, the way we hope. Even though we have heard this story many times and we know how it ends on the cross, it is still painful and disturbing to us. To walk with Jesus through the final hours of his human life is agonizing every time. Maybe that is because we can all too easily identify with one of the people in the story, one of the ones who deserted Jesus, who caused Jesus to suffer, who chose to go along with the crowd rather than risk standing up for what is right. This story is so powerful precisely because it is a story about all of us. It's powerful because it holds up a mirror for us to see ourselves and our behavior, not in a glass dimly, but with fearful clarity.

Pilate goes in and out too many times to count, back and forth between the accusing crowd and Jesus, looking for the truth. Pilate's struggle is ours as he makes an effort to resolve the problem, but he cannot, in the end, leave the stone pavement of popular opinion to stand on the foundation of the truth he knows in his heart.

And what is that truth? I believe we can find it in the Collect we prayed a moment ago. It is the truth that our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross. Jesus was willing to do this for his family, for God's family.

And who is God's family?

Is it those who have been baptized in the faith? Yes, and it is bigger than that if we remember John 3:16 – for God so loved the world, the whole world, the entire human family, that he gave his only Son. Whether we were there at the crucifixion or not; whether we are always faithful or often unfaithful; whether we have faith or have not yet found it; God beholds us, God loves us.

We are not in the church on this Good Friday; we are in the world. Many of us are in our homes, trying to stay safe from the virus which could bring death, even as we sacrifice our freedom to keep our neighbor well. Some of us are out risking our own safety to care for those who need healthcare and the necessities of life.

On this Good Friday, perhaps we identify with the suffering of Jesus more acutely than ever before, and maybe we are better able to ponder just how connected we all are as the human family. We may finally be taking time to contemplate the reality of death. We long for God to behold us.

As you take some time to read the Passion Narrative and sit at the foot of the cross today, consider where the truth is in your life. Think about the ways you avoid it, ignore it, deny it. Consider the Body of Christ, broken for you, broken so that our human family might be made whole. And then offer all of your longings, hopes, and fears to God. Because God is there with you, beholding you with eyes of deep love. Amen.

## Sermon for Easter Day, Matthew 28:1-10

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Blessings to you on this Easter morning, a quieter Easter morning than most of us have ever experienced. It's quiet, much as it must have been in the garden outside of Jerusalem when, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. They went quietly, in deep grief for all that had been lost. Some of us know what it's like to be that deep in grief, fearful for what will come next, and anxious for how we will manage to get through not only life, but the next day, the next hour, the next minute. And if their grief and fear from such loss were not enough, suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Earthquakes happen. We can analyze them and measure them, but we cannot really predict them. Oh, we can have a good idea that one is imminent, but we never really know the strength of it until afterwards.

New viruses are a lot like earthquakes. We know they will happen, and when they do, we can research them and track the spread, and predict the number of people who are likely to become infected. But we never really know the strength of a virus until it's been contained and we have the final statistics and are able to develop a vaccine.

Like earthquakes and viruses, death happens. We know that we will eventually die and we like to think that we will live a long and healthy life. We make a lot of assumptions, don't we? This pandemic has surely shattered our assumptions, shaken our world, and infected our hope. Like the women, we are fearful of what will come next. Like the guards at the tomb we become like dead men, paralyzed in our fear and anxiety.

But the angel said to the women, "do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." Just as the fear and uncertainty filled the early morning air in the garden that day, it fills our world right now, and we might be wondering how we can have Easter this year.

Earthquakes happen. Viruses happen. Death happens. But thanks be to God, Easter happens! The Gospel tells us that Jesus is risen, and with that Resurrection news comes the promise of new life for us all, both now and in eternity. This year, more than ever, we need this good news. The angel told the women to come and see! And when they opened the eyes of their hearts, they saw Jesus.

In all of the anxiety and fear of our world right now, where are you seeing Jesus in those angels, those messengers from God, who come to assist you and calm your fears? Certainly, in the tireless efforts of doctors and nurses on the front lines, the first responders, and respiratory therapists. Those who work behind the scenes cleaning the hospitals and keeping equipment functioning, lab workers running tests, and chaplains praying with patients and staff. We see them in car companies who have transformed their assembly lines to make much needed ventilators. They are the farmers, field laborers, grocery distributors and cashiers who provide our most basic necessities. In their selfless actions they reveal the risen Lord to us.

Once Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were able to see Jesus, they were able to go quickly and tell the others, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” Who are we telling about the power of the Resurrection? Are we showing others the power of the Resurrection within us?

I have seen Jesus throughout this Lenten wilderness, throughout this time of isolation. So many acts of kindness as messengers from God sew face masks, deliver groceries, homemade cookies, and toilet paper. They have stripped palms, filled Easter baskets, and created worship packets for Holy Week. Volunteers have given rides to medical appointments, made calls to check on neighbors, and delivered Holy Week packets to our families and those who cannot get out. Even in this fearful quarantine, the power of the Resurrection is so visible.

Jesus said to the women, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Remember, that Galilee was home for the disciples. Jesus told them to go home and he would meet them there. Home where they would be safe from danger. Home where, in days to come, they would share with each other all the ways they had seen the risen Christ. Home where they would pray and recall the words Jesus spoke and his mighty healing acts.

This Easter we are experiencing exactly what those very first disciples did, as they witnessed and proclaimed the Resurrection from their homes. We cannot be together in an overflowing church for Easter, joyful as that is, but we can share our joy as we tell our personal stories of good news in this world. Tell one another the stories of the earthquakes in your lives. Write down for your grandchildren the stories of Christ at work during these pandemic days.

In this world there will be earthquakes, viruses, and loss of every kind. But our belief in the risen Christ will give us strength - strength to move beyond our grief and fear and into joy. No matter what happens in our lives, Jesus is going ahead of us. And as Resurrection people we are called to follow Jesus, and share our own Resurrection stories.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.