

Fifth Sunday of Easter + May 18, 2025
Indiana-Kentucky Synod Sermon and Prayers
Pr. Dan Forehand, Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

O Lord God, you teach us that without love, our actions gain nothing. Pour into our hearts your most excellent gift of love, that, made alive by your Spirit, we may know goodness and peace, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6

¹ I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them and be their God;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

Gospel Reading: John 13:31-35

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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Sermon by Pastor Dan Forehand

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen indeed! Alleluia!

May 29th is Ascension Day, the day that marks 40 days since Easter, where we read the stories of Jesus again breathing the Spirit upon the disciples and then ascending presumably to heaven. While most of our congregations do not gather for worship on this random Thursday in late May, I think it's a great and important reminder that we are called to be witnesses of the work and love of Jesus.

And, it can be a day fraught with strange theology and can help us easily lead us to see Jesus in ways that are unhelpful. We can start to see God as distant. We can start to see God as up there away from the everyday journey that we take. We can start to hope that we too can evacuate this earthly mess as soon as possible, because that's what Jesus did.

Which is why, in my faithful imagination, the Spirit moved in the hearts and minds of the lectionary committee to pick these readings for today – to remind us of where God actually is and why that matters.

Have you ever had a bad day? Have you ever received a phone call that made your heart stop? Have you ever found yourself uncertain of how you will pay the next bill or take the next treatment or pass the next test? I know I have and I know in those moments it can feel like everything has changed and that the old way of experiencing life is going away and it will never be the same again.

Is that some part of what we hear in this Revelation reading as the first heaven and the first earth have passed away? What we had known has changed? But do you notice what happens? We do not go away with it. But it comes to us. God comes to us. God is not distant and up there, but God is right here with us. Because the book of Revelation is both prophetic and now. It's not just a book about what will happen, but it's a book about what is happening now.

The home of God is among mortals – that's you and me. God dwells with us. God is with us. These are the words of Christmas and Emmanuel meaning "God with us." And they are true for us in the midst of all we experience today. And what is God doing as God is with us?

The writer says that God is wiping away every tear from our eyes. It's easy to be with someone when things are going well and we are having fun and life is a party. But when life gets hard and the tears start flowing, many of us would rather go back to the

good times and avoid all of that. But God? God sits. God dwells. God wipes away every tear that comes. God is present in the midst of the suffering. In the midst of the pain. In the midst of the trauma. In the midst of all it – there is God.

I like to imagine that when a tear comes to my eye, although I cannot see God, God sits right here with me. And when the tears turn to a faucet and I'm gasping for air because of my pain, the pain of those I love, and the pain of the world – God does not leave to go to some higher heaven or tell me to figure it out or to be stronger. No. God is there. God is here. Wiping away my tears.

Perhaps as we let these words flow through us, we will begin to see that perhaps we sense God's presence most fully in those moments where the tears flow. Because we know that God is with us.

And, we trust, that there will be a day where the mourning and weeping and pain will be no more. But until we reach that moment, God dwells with us. God is with us. God is wiping away every tear from our eyes.

It's the absolute greatest news that we do not seek God nor do we seek heaven, but rather God seeks us and heaven seeks us. Heaven is not some distant place that we ascend to, but rather, heaven is coming to us. That is incredible and beautiful and so vital to us as we walk this road together as the children of God who are seeing, in part now, but one day fully, that God is making everything new.

And this makes the commandment that Jesus gives in the Gospel reading today all the more impactful to us. Jesus says, "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." And how are we loved? God comes to us and dwells with us and wipes away our tears.

How ought we to love? We are called to go to others, to be with them, and to wipe away their tears. Wiping away tears is quite different than solving their problems. It's a way of accompaniment, a way of being with those who struggle, a way of relationship and curiosity. Wiping away tears is a way of love. And it's not a judgement about tears, either. We're not saying that your tears are bad and they need to go away. But rather, we are saying that we see the hurt and the pain and the struggle and the sorrow and the anguish that is being experienced.

We are called to love as God loves us. And God loves us in a powerful way. By being with us. By being for us. By bringing heaven to us. That, my friends, is incredibly Good News. We need not escape our struggles in order to find God. Because God is coming to us in the midst of our struggles, our fears, and our failures and is in the process of making everything new.

May we have eyes to see. May we have ears to hear. May we have minds to imagine the grace and beauty and joy of this new resurrection. And may we go out and share that same love that we have received from Jesus with the rest of the world – wiping away tears and being with.

Alleluia! Jesus is risen. Jesus is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Prayers of Intercession

God of resurrection and new life, we come before you in prayer for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Fill the church with the spirit of your redeeming love. Make us steadfast in our proclamation of your grace for all people without exceptions, especially those often overlooked in our communities. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Awaken joy in the beauty and abundance of your creation. Show us the wonder of your presence from the smallest flower to the tallest tree. Recommit us to preservation of wild places here in the Indiana-Kentucky mission territory and throughout the world. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Instruct all world leaders to protect the most vulnerable among us. Guide those in power toward equitable and just economic policies, so that all might have sufficient resources to live safely and with dignity. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Pour out your love on all in need of care: those mourning losses, enduring trauma, experiencing broken relationships, yearning for companionship, or facing illness especially those we name before you now both silently and aloud. Wipe away every tear. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Abide with all who are victims of racism, especially people who are doubly marginalized because of gender, sexuality, or ability. Destroy all forms of systemic oppression, and renew our commitment to healing the wounds of our collective body in this community and beyond. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We give thanks for all the saints whose lives bear witness to your redeeming love.
Guide us by their example, until we join them in your eternal home. Hear us, O God.
Your mercy is great.

We commend these and all our prayers to you, O God, trusting that you are always
with us; in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Savior.

Hear us now, gracious God, as we pray the words that Jesus has taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

The triune God,
who was, who is, and who is to come,
Sovereign, ☩ Savior, and Spirit,
light your way with resurrection dawn,
now and always.
Amen.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!
Go in peace. In Christ you are made new. Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Liturgy from sundaysandseasons.com.
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