

Prayer of the Day

God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life. Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Peter began to speak to [the people]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

¹Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

Mark 16:1-8

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus’ body]. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

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

They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid...

...except, they must have said something to someone eventually or we wouldn't be celebrating Easter today!

If the early morning trip to the tomb left the women fearful and speechless, when did their fear abate enough for them to share with others the messenger's good news that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified has been raised?

Note that in Mark's telling of the Easter story there is no appearance of the risen Christ. In fact, the white-robed messenger who is there makes it quite clear: "You are looking for Jesus...He is not here."

This Easter Day is our second in the coronavirus wilderness.

While some congregations may be gathering in-person in some way this day, many will not. And, the gatherings that do occur will be nothing like what they were in pre-COVID days of yore:

...no packed sanctuaries...little or quiet singing or humming at best...not everyone who would like to gather is able to gather...no Easter egg casserole brunch before or between services...

Gatherings with family and friends will be unlike pre-COVID days, too, if they happen:

Smaller, distanced, festive but subdued, perhaps by Zoom...

With those early forebears in faith, we make our way to the empty tomb this day, looking for Jesus only to feel in too many ways like he is not here.

And yet (there is always "and yet" with God), the Word, the music, the liturgies, the time with family and friends all echo the angel's confident cry: He is not in the tomb because he has been raised from the dead and he is walking the world. The crucified and risen one has gone to Galilee. He has taken up residence in your everyday ordinary lives. You will see him there as he promised.

Surely, it was the promised appearance of the risen Christ in their Galilean lives that eventually assuaged the fear and loosened the tongues of the two Marys and Salome to proclaim loudly enough that it resounds through the centuries to reach us today: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Of course, as Lutheran pastor Richard Lischer and retired Methodist bishop Will Willimon remind us in a recently published conversation, "The risen Christ comes to us incognito."

"It's a peculiar thing," Lischer says, "but after his resurrection Christ was hard to recognize, even to those who had loved him."

"Yes," Willimon agrees, "it's risen Christ *appearances*, not risen Christ sightings. Christ's resurrected presence is pure gift. We can't come to the risen Christ; he comes to us."

Willimon goes on to remind us that in another gospel writer's telling, "Mary Magdalene thought he was a gardener. His disciples, cowering in isolation between locked doors...thought he was a ghost."

Incognito.

"Today," Lischer concludes, "Christ may appear as the doctor or nurse bending over a stricken patient; a first responder; a dedicated teacher with 20 masked third-graders; a chaplain with her prayerbook alone at a crematorium. Incognito. It would be just like [Jesus]."ⁱ

And I would add, the risen Christ may appear as a pastor or deacon or church musician preaching and leading worship via Facebook or praying for folks at a distance; the neighbor who drops off food for someone who is ill; folks who get vaccinated or wear masks as much for the health of others as for themselves; the family member who walks with us in our anxiety and uncertainty; the one who offers forgiveness; the one who seeks justice, crosses bridges and boundaries to offer the love of God in a drink, some food, radical welcome or life-changing mercy; the friend who reminds us that there is life after whatever struggle we are having and then takes our hand to walk with us toward it...

"...for Christ plays in ten thousand places," proclaimed the poet.

"Lovely in limbs,
and lovely in eyes not his,
To the Father through the features of [human] faces."ⁱⁱ

Are you looking for Jesus? The crucified and risen one has gone ahead of you to your Galilee. You will see him there, as he has promised.

Incognito, perhaps. Unrecognizable at first. But there, as promised in our everyday lives, in every Galilee we walk, Jesus crucified and risen becoming known in self-giving acts that offer new, abundant, and lasting life and the persistent and glorious grace of God to others...as promised.

Dear people of God, today and every day, look for the crucified and risen Jesus where he promises to meet you, in Galilee, in everyday life, where he has gone ahead of you to take up residence.

And, like all those who have gone before us for whom the appearance of the risen Christ in their Galilee assuaged fear and loosened tongues, proclaim boldly enough that it will resound through the centuries:

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ⁱ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/preaching-holy-week-middle-pandemic-again>

ⁱⁱ *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W.H. Gardner & N.H. Mackenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 90.

Prayers of Intercession for Easter Day 2021

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Praise to you for your power revealed in the resurrection! Fill your people with the power of your love that is stronger than death. Send us to tell the good news wherever death holds sway. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for your life at work in the resurrection! Fill all of creation with your life. Bring it to blossom and flourish; use it to remind us of your persistent grace. Cultivate our care for what you have made. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the peace made possible in the resurrection! Fill the nations with your peace. Draw together people of all nations and languages; reveal new possibilities and inspire new beginnings. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the hope of the resurrection! Fill all in need with hope: those who are afraid or confused, those who are sick or suffering, those who are dying, and those who grieve, especially those we name silently or aloud...Assure them of your promises. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Praise to you for the joy of your resurrection! Fill your people with joy as we are called your beloved in baptism. Multiply that joy so that we share it at home, at work, and in our community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Praise to you for your faithfulness revealed in the resurrection! Fill us with trust, that we join with all who have gone before us in proclaiming: "your mercy endures forever!" Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.