

Welcome

- P: Welcome to Trinity Lutheran Church of Pittsburg Ohio. I'm Pastor Mel Musser and I'm so happy you joined us to Worship today. We are gathered via video on this fifth Sunday of Easter and we worship in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.
- P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

- P: Today we include our thanksgiving for Baptism in our worship liturgy. Christ is risen... Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!
- P: Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him to new life. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism... We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you created us in your image and planted us in a well-watered garden. In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched, and you gave us water from the rock. When we did not know the way, you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters. At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side, and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life.
- P: We praise you for your salvation through water, for the water in this font, and for all water everywhere. Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love. Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
- C: Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

- P: Let's pray... Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow in the way of his commandments, and to share his risen life with all the world, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: Amen.**

And now we hear the Word of God for this day...

First Reading: Acts 7:55-60

The First reading is from the book of Acts, chapter 7, verses 55-60....

⁵⁵Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶“Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” ⁵⁷But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

Psalm: Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Our Psalm for this morning is taken from Psalm 31, verses 1-5 and 15 and 16...

¹In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

²**Incline your ear to me; make haste to deliver me.**

³Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold; for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.

⁴**Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, for you are my tower of strength.**

⁵Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth.

¹⁵**My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.**

¹⁶Let your face shine up on your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:2-10

The second reading for today comes from first Peter, chapter 2, verses 2-10...

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,

a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”
⁷To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,”
⁸and - “A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people,
in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of
darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the 14th Chapter, verses 1-14.

Gospel: John 14:1-14

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord! Amen.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

And now for our children's message for today... I'll pause for a moment to allow the children to come closer to the screen so they can have the best view in the house...

Hello boys and girls. I'm so happy you could join us today to show how much you love Jesus!

Today I brought with me four pictures with arrows pointing different directions. *(Show the pictures of the arrows.)* Let's see how good you are at following the arrows. As I hold up each arrow sign, look the way the arrow is pointing. Since I can't see you, I'll trust you are following the directions and looking the same way the arrow is pointing. *(Go through each of the four signs slow, then fast to try to catch them not looking the right way.)* I know you all did a great job! Now as I share about today's Bible lesson, see if you can follow instructions and look the right way when you see a sign.

Stop and imagine how Jesus' disciples felt in our Bible lesson today. Jesus knew that the day of his crucifixion was coming and that He would soon return to His Father in heaven. He was trying to prepare His disciples for the time when He would no longer be with them.

"Don't worry," Jesus said, "I am going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will be with Me. You know the way to where I am going."

(Show the up arrow sign and have kids look up.)

"No, we don't," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

(Show the right arrow sign and have kids look right.)

Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

(Show the up arrow sign and have kids look up.)

Philip, another of the disciples spoke up, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

(Show the right arrow sign and have kids look right.)

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Jesus wanted his disciples to

know He and the Father were one and the same, and if they put their trust in God and in Him, they would one day join Him in Heaven.

(Show the up arrow sign and have kids look up.)

Sometimes life can be very confusing and we don't know where to turn or what path to take. It seems that every path we take leads to a dead end.

(Show the down arrow sign and have kids look down.)

When that happens, we just need to remember that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." If we will keep our eyes on Jesus and follow his teaching, we will find the path to our goal -- eternal life in Heaven with him. We can only come to God through Jesus.

(Show the up arrow sign and have kids look up.)

Dear God, help us keep our eyes on Jesus because we know that He is the way -- the only way to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thank you, boys and girls. I hope you have a safe and fun week...

SERMON

As we move now to our Sermon message for today, I pray... Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.

I feel like I should be delivering a funeral homily. The words from this Gospel text are commonly used at funerals. I'm really happy today isn't the occasion for a funeral and that I get to preach on this lesson because it gives me the opportunity to really dig into the meat of this text instead of sentimentalizing it as normally happens during funerals. This text from John chapter 14 begins what Bible Scholars call Jesus' "Farewell Discourse." This is the narrative that makes up the last will and testament of Jesus. In Bible speak, a Farewell Discourse is a specific and distinct literary genre. Moses had a farewell discourse that took up an entire book of the Bible. The book of Deuteronomy was the last testament from Moses. A farewell discourse is made up of specific parts that can be identified and John chapters 14-16 contain all the necessary parts to make up the farewell discourse of Jesus Christ. The defining characteristics of a farewell discourse include; (1) the gathering of the family or followers; (2) the announcement of approaching death;

(3) prophecies and / or promises and blessings; (4) a review of the person's life; (5) naming of a successor; (6) final instructions; and (7) prayer.

Here at the beginning of chapter 14, John has Jesus gathered with his followers for their last meal together before his passion and death. Jesus begins by commanding his disciples to not allow their hearts to be troubled. The Greek word translated as troubled is *tarasso*. This verb is only used 3 other places in the Gospel and all 3 times it's used to describe Jesus' condition of distress, his agitation, or his great inner disturbance at the power of death and evil, not simply his emotional state of sadness. As I studied this Greek word it became clear to me, Jesus wasn't telling the disciples not to be sad. He wasn't addressing their emotional state on the eve of his betrayal, arrest and crucifixion. Instead, he was commanding them to stand firm in the face of his departure.

When the events of the world appear as if evil and death are having their way, that's the time when Jesus says, "Stand firm! Trust in God and trust also in me!" What more powerful word can be uttered for us today! In the face of a divided nation, countries who put their own interests ahead of doing the right thing, and where death is more prevalent than I've ever seen it in my lifetime. When the threat of an unseen, super contagious, and highly deadly virus is all around us, Jesus comes to us, right where we are, and says this is not the time to begin to doubt. Only believe. Only trust. Only have faith.

I know many of you are afraid. I'm afraid too. We stay at home and when we do venture out, we cover our faces. The guys are going without haircuts and the ladies without beauty salon treatments. People are still hoarding items and the economy seems to be in free fall. The United States blames China and China blames the United States. Democrats blame Republicans and Republicans blame Democrats. There's so many conflicting reports you can't hardly figure out what's true and what's false anymore. It's easy to succumb to the evil and divisiveness all around us. How can a person, one who really, really wants to follow Christ navigate life in these days of chaos? The answer Jesus gives is simple. He says believe in God and believe in me.

The nuance in Jesus' words here again gets lost in translation to English. Jesus is talking to his followers. These are the ones who have been following him for 3 years and have been taught by him. These are the ones his close circle of disciples and friends. He's not giving them the pitch of an evangelist, rather he's telling them that in the face of all that is to come, the way to get through everything that's about to happen, is to continue to believe, to continue to trust, and to continue to have faith in God and in Jesus. Now is not the time to waver, question, or doubt. Now's the time to double down, to dig in, and to buck up.

I believe the same can be said of these times we're living in today. We're still facing the same forces of sin, death, and the devil today that God's people have battled since the Garden of Eden. The names have changed, but the underlining forces of evil are still the same. We might have a Corona virus today, but God's people in the Middle-Ages had the Black Plague. We might have a political system that is on the verge of dismantling our Constitutional freedoms, but God's people 2000 years ago faced the oppression of the Roman Government strangling their freedom. The exact circumstances may be different, but the answer is still the same. We get through this by continuing to believe in and by continuing to trust God and Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we're all like Thomas when he says Jesus, I know I'm lost, and I don't know the how to follow you. Other times we're so beaten down by the evil trinity of sin, death, and the devil that we, like Phillip, shout out in desperation, "Jesus, just show me the Father. Give me something to cling to so I can continue trusting, believing and having faith..."

I know it's been quite some time since we've been able to gather together for Worship. I don't know about you, but that's where I get the encouragement to continue believing and trusting in God and in Jesus. When we gather together as God's people, that's when our faith is formed and reformed and we are strengthened to face whatever life throws at us every day. It's in our times together when we are the Body of Christ and there literally is no power on earth or under the earth that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Watching a video screen of worship helps, but I'm hungering for the true spiritual milk to fortify my soul. I hear Jesus imperative to stand firm in faith and I'm giving it my best college try, but I need to be with all of you again. I need to taste and see that God is good once again. As a good Lutheran I believe Jesus is really present where two or more are gathered in His Name. I believe He is present in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. I am longing for that real encounter with Jesus so I can be comforted, encouraged, and sent back out with renewed strength to tackle whatever that unholy trinity throws my way.

My dear congregation, even in the midst of our social distance, Jesus still comes to us and says to us today, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." I believe we will have our heart's desire to once again gather as the Body of Christ together again and very soon. Our time of being apart will not last forever. In fact, we're tentatively scheduling June 7th as the day we'll gather again to be Church together. It won't be the same as it was before. We will have to make some changes and accommodations. Many of us are praying to be able to go back to the way it was before. I have prayed that prayer many times. In our most recent Zoom

Meeting with our Southern Ohio Synod Bishop, Suzanne Delahunt, in her wisdom, she said if we're so preoccupied with going back to the way it was, we are in danger of missing the new thing God is about to unveil in our midst. That's a good word for us to help us overcome our fear of change as we begin to plan for re-opening Trinity Lutheran Church of Pitsburg Ohio. My new prayer for us is for God to open our eyes to whatever new thing He is doing so we can be included and help to bring God's plan and God's will to realization here on Earth as it is already in heaven.

By taking the advice or I should say command of Jesus to not be troubled or afraid, even in the face of a pandemic virus, but rather to stand firm in our faith, trust, and belief that God is and has total control of the situation we will get through this. It's not about clinging to our past rituals, but responding to God's new revelation and living into the future God has planned and that God wants for all His children.

May you stand firm in your faith and never waiver or be afraid. May God's hand continue to lead and guide you into that future God had planned for you from the foundations of time. May that future bring such a blessing that we'll be able to let go of the past and look to God's rich blessings to come. Amen.

NICENE CREED

P: We respond to God's Word by confessing our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed. Please pray these words along with me:

C: **We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe

in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We are uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection and so, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Build us up, mothering God, even as we must stay apart, help us to see the new opportunities you are preparing for us to be your hands in the world. We pray especially for congregations who are struggling to define who they are and what they should be doing in this age of separation and pandemic. We ask you blessing on this congregation that our ministries might prosper and glorify your name as we are your living stones building up your spiritual house here on earth. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Humble us, creator God, as part of your creation. Fill us with respect and awe for the world you have made, including volcanoes, ocean currents, tropical rainforests, and glaciers. Grant fair weather for farmers as they begin the planting season. Keep our farmers safe and provide the energy for crops to grow and flourish.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Align our ways to your love, O God. We pray for countries, leaders, and other organizations as they decide the best ways to combat the Corona virus. Help decision makers as they manufacture and distribute the necessary medical devices and personal protection equipment. Help the leaders of this congregation to use good judgment in determining the best policies and procedures for us to reopen Trinity Lutheran Church for Worship and mission. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of healing and rest, help those whose hearts are heavy and weighed down by many troubles. Comfort all those who are suffering, ease their distress, and lighten their burdens. We ask your blessing on all who care for and those afflicted with the corona virus. We ask your special blessing for all those who are hospitalized or in the care of an assisted living facility or nursing home. Be with families who are unable to share time together. Help us all to find innovative ways to stay connected during the time of our separation. Almighty God, we lift up to your throne of mercy all those we name aloud or keep in the silence of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Nurturing God, we pray for those who tend and teach our children. Give understanding and compassion to all teachers and administrators. Provide strength and encouragement to parents who are now struggling to ensure their children are completing their studies. We pray for graduates and those preparing to start a new chapter in their lives. Help them see the new things you are opening up for them and to see whatever occupations of continued studies they begin as a vocation and a gift coming through the best gift of all time, the gift of your Holy Spirit. We give thanks for all mothers and those who have shown mothering care. We remember and ask you to draw even closer to all for whom this day is difficult. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Generous God, you call into your eternal presence all who have died. Give us faith to take hold of the promise of your eternal life and to trust you when you promise that we will be with you in your Father's house forever. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SHARING OF THE PEACE

P: During our time of social distancing, we share the peace with one another in a slightly different way. As I share the peace of Christ with you, I once again ask you to pick at least one person each day this week to personally share the peace of the Lord. Please remember to keep your socially acceptable distance... One person each day isn't a lot to ask, but it will keep us united while were apart. So, I'll start us off...

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

P: The living Lord Jesus Christ is our tie that binds us together, let us pray as He taught his disciples.....

C: 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

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead raise you to new life, fill you with hope, and turn your mourning into dancing. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

P: In everything you do, go in Christ's Love.

C: **Seeking, welcoming, and serving all. Amen!**