

WESLEY UNITING CHURCH, FORREST

April 27th, 2025,

9am

SECOND SUNDAY IN EASTER



Blind or Embodied Belief?

The readings on this Second Sunday in the Easter season, address the ancient and modern question of belief in Christ. In the ancient world, intellectual doubt was not looked upon well. The charge of atheism, of disbelief in the gods, was a dangerous one. In the medieval period and still later, modern and contemporary periods, doubt was and is seen differently: as part of a legitimate intellectual process in Christian growth. But belief is never just an intellectual, mind-thing. In Hebrew thinking, belief must do most fundamentally with practical living: the way we live: 'embodied belief'. This is certainly the approach that Jesus takes, and one affirmed by the apostle Paul: belief is yes, an intellectual enterprise, but directed practically into the world: a doing thing.

THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

We Prepare Ourselves

Acknowledgement of First Nation's People

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the first inhabitants of this place.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today

Our Rich Diversity and Mutuality

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people are made in the image of God, and so we accept every individual regardless of race, age, creed, sexuality and gender.

Announcements

Lighting the Community Candle

The liturgist welcomes the people present in the church and others on-line, introduces today's theme and then greets the people in the name of the Holy Trinity

Greeting

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

The following Call to Worship and Opening Prayer we share together

Call to Worship

In the rising of the morning sun, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Shine!

In the greening of the Earth and blooming of creation, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Grow!

In the mountains reaching toward the sky, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Stand with strength!

In the darkness of the winter days, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Trust!

In the presence of the skies that float above us and the assurance of the Earth beneath us

And with the calm of the Spirit within us, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Live!

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

Creator God, you call us to take on the holiness you have planted within us.

In our worship this day, open our eyes and hearts to your movement that longs to make a home in us. So be it. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Welcoming Song Lord I Lift Your Name on High Rick Founds © 1989

Lord, I lift your name on high,

Lord, I love to sing your praises.

I'm so glad you're in my life,

I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from heaven to earth to show the way,

From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay.

From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky,

Lord, I lift your name on high.

An Implicit Prayer of Confession Concerning Our Failure to Embody Faith in the World

Maker, Healer, Gatherer God,

You formed our bodies from the dust and called them good.

You made all creation to be in community.

Just as the fungi and the trees have connections so deep that we cannot see them on the surface,

So, too, do we have connections to you and one another.

Remind us of our calling to maintain this world;

Guide us in our pursuit of justice for everybody that calls this place home;

Enliven us and energize us with the glow of your love.

May we show that love to every being that comes near to us.

Ever near God, draw us in to see the wounds of the world.

Give us the strength to bear witness.

Grant us the courage to proclaim what we have seen.

Open the ears of all to hear.

God, gather us together in your love;

Strengthen our resolve to collaborate;

Open our hearts to your possibilities.

May it be so.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Our self-sufficiency is no more than a psychological mask.

Insufficient to even ourselves, as difficult as it is to admit it, you restore us even as we refuse to restore others.

Thanks be to God!

The Peace

The peace is shared either through the taking of the other's hand, by placing our right hand over the heart, or clasping our hands together in a prayerful gesture with a slight bow.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Conversation with the Children

Children's Song

Singing Hallelujah!

Linnea Good © 2003

*Chorus Hey now! Singing Hallelujah!
Hey now! The morning has come!
Hey now! Singing Hallelujah!
The tomb was empty at the rising sun.*

1. Jesus loved people and he made them friends.
Hey now, the tomb was empty.
He called to the children and the women and men.
Hey now, the tomb was empty.

Chorus

2. Jesus loved people and they said he was a king.

Hey now, the tomb was empty.

He turned all the tables on everything.

Hey now, the tomb was empty.

Chorus

3. Jesus loves people and he lives again!

Hey now, the tomb was empty.

He calls us disciples and he calls us his friends.

Hey now, the tomb was empty.

Chorus

Readings

Old Testament: Song of Solomon 1:15-17, 2:3-7

Epistle: Acts 5:27-41

Brief Commentary: Whether the apostles were really hauled before the Sanhedrin or not, we can imagine that there were tensions with the Jerusalem authorities as the movement they had hope would go away remerged and began to win a greater following. The grand acclamation that they must obey God rather than the will of human beings would have a familiar ring for Luke's audiences, because it was a known contrast asserted by heroes of conscience. For all that, it remains an important principle, which deserves scrutiny. Positively understood, it encourages people to critically think through what is said around them by particular interests, assessing whether it chimes with what they know to be right. Negatively, it can become a claim for not having to listen to reason or appreciate the negative implications for others. The brief summary of the gospel in 5:30-32 (a mere 50 words in Greek! - a very short sermon indeed) which serves in the narrative as a speech, encapsulates what Luke apparently sees as the key features of the gospel. They are very like what we find in the other brief speeches he creates, and, as one might expect. The leaders were responsible with Pilate for crucifying Jesus. As elsewhere, Luke does not highlight Jesus' death as a vicarious sacrifice: the way it is understood today. He simply relates it as a killing and Jesus as enduring the suffering it entailed with bravery. The resurrection also has its distinctive profile. It is set in contrast to the killing. It is saying: you killed him, but God made him alive. Luke understands Easter as God's "yes" where they had said "no". Luke takes it further. The issue is not just Jesus' being made alive again and vindicated. Rather, in Luke's faith, the resurrection meant that God had made Jesus the leader and liberator. This was a way of taking hold of Jewish hope for a messiah-liberator in a new kind of way.

²⁷When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the

men to be put outside for a short time. ³⁵Then he said to them, “Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. ³⁶For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. ³⁷After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” They were convinced by him, ⁴⁰and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. ⁴¹As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name.

John 20:19-31 (Good News Translation)

Brief Commentary: This is the famous story of “doubting Thomas”. Reading early church history, the Church Fathers had little tolerance for Thomas: he was seen as the incorrigible doubter. In John’s Gospel, Thomas is seen with more nuance. He is a doubter, he is a dubious figure, but he also finally confesses Jesus as Lord and God. In John’s Gospel, then, Thomas is seen as ambiguous: he gets it right but he is not exemplary. In John’s Gospel, there is an investment in higher faith that believes without proof (20:29). Thomas is one who requires proof. In the western medieval and modern worlds, proof for the existence of God is what has preoccupied the world of theology. In these changed circumstances, Thomas receives gentler treatment, Thomas is read more sympathetically.

¹⁹ It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger

here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting and believe!"

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

³⁰ In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ But these have been written in order that you may believe^[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

The Gospel of the Lord - **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Some Thoughts

Offering Song Spirit of Dreaming Alison Campbell Rate © 2013

1. Spirit of truth, come to us now,
breathe your word into us.
Plant in our hearts your wisdom and love,
speak your kindness through us.
*Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one,
Spirit of truth, enter our dreaming now.*

2. Spirit of grace, come to us now,
break into our silence.
Nourish our hearts with healing and joy,
sing your lovesong through us.
*Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one,
Spirit of grace, enter our dreaming now.*

Spirit of hope restore us, go before us,
lead us through famine and feast.
Spirit of faith uplift us, take and gift us
for loving the last and the least.

3. Spirit of light, come to us now,
shine into our darkness.
Bring to our hearts your longing for life,
kindle peace between us.
*Spirit of dreaming come, make of your people one,
Spirit of light, enter our dreaming now.*

Prayers of the People

We pray for the people of the We continue our prayers for the peoples of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. We continue to doggedly pray for the many innocent victims of Gaza, Israel, Ukraine and Sudan, amid the unpredictable 'shifting sands' of nation states.

Liturgist: Lord, by your Spirit

Response: **hear our prayers.**

SENDING OUT THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Sending Song Set Us Free for Freedom

Colin Gibson, words by Shirley Murray © 2014

1. Set us free for freedom, God of empty tombs!

Bring your life and sunlight into darkened rooms,
and let the life of Jesus, the breaking out of Jesus,
the rising up of Spirit, rising up of Spirit,
rising up of Spirit set our spirits free.

2. Set us free for changing by your freedom's grace,

dance to no convention formed by fashion's face,
and let the life of Jesus, the non-conforming Jesus,
the rising up of Spirit, rising up of Spirit,
rising up of Spirit set our spirits free.

3. Set us free from cages holding captive minds,

free us into vision, where no dogma binds,
and let the life of Jesus, the wisdom lived in Jesus,
the rising up of Spirit, rising up of Spirit,
rising up of Spirit set our spirits free.

Blessing

May we go from this place to embody God's love of all creation.

May we rise like those with wings.

May we know the lightness of those that swim.

And may the Holy be embodied in all our comings and goings
this day and every day.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ, Amen

Liturgist/Preacher: Rev'd Geoff/ Rev'd Bruce
Music Coordinator: Jade McFaul
Wesley Music Scholars Jojo Yuen (piano)
Musicians: Zoey Haar (guitar)
Bible Readers: Nancy and Brad Opdyke
Duty Elder: Nancy Opdyke
Stewards: Keith Billingham and Paul Chen
Video and Sound: Philip Bruen and John Alcock
Flowers:

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