

Order of Worship for April 18, 2021 8:30 and 11 AM

Livestream link: <https://youtu.be/fGAqFzslJE>

Prelude

P: Jesus Christ is risen!

C: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Opening Hymn: *“Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds”* - Hymn #465

Confession and Forgiveness: p. 203

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: In Your presence there is fullness of joy;

C: at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

P: I will extol You, O LORD, for You have drawn me up

C: and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

P: O LORD my God, I cried to You for help,

C: and You have healed me.

P: O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol;

C: You restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

P: Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,

C: and give thanks to His holy name.

P: For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime.

C: Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: In Your presence there is fullness of joy;

C: at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Kyrie (Lord, have mercy): pg. 204

Gloria in Excelsis (Glory to God in the Highest): pg. 204

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day:

P: O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

First Lesson: Acts 3:11–21

R: While the man who was healed from being lame clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And His name—by faith in His name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: 1 John 3:1–7

R: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Jesus. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Alleluia and Verse: (p. 205)**Holy Gospel: Matthew 24:36-49**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 24th chapter

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: As the disciples were talking about these things, Jesus Himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, He said to them,

“Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them.

Then He said to them, “These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Lord.

Nicene Creed:

Sermon Hymn: *“This Joyful Eastertide”* - **Hymn #482**

Sermon: *“The Focus for God’s Word”* - **Luke 24:36-49**

Focusing light—it is what enables us to see electronically whether it be what is on our computer screens, our cell phones, or, (when we get to return to them) in movie theaters. If I put the slide on the screen out of focus, we cannot see it clearly. That doesn’t just involve the focusing of light on a camera to give us a picture of the image we are trying to capture, but it also involves the focusing of electrons that make the image on a screen. Even more we could not see at all without the lenses in our corneas focusing the light that goes to our retinas which produce the signals that go to our brains.

God’s Word is similar. It needs focus. There are all kinds of views about Scriptures. We need to focus light because the natural tendency of light is to scatter. It needs some kind of lens to make it focus. So does God’s Word. One of the reasons why the Roman Catholic Church has stated that their teachings are based both on Scriptures and tradition is that if you just simply say Scripture, then you get all kinds of different interpretations. Look at all the Protestant groups there are in the world! People can take God’s Word and use it for all kinds of things. Here are some examples:

Antisemitism—for centuries the Jews were called “the killers of Jesus.” This was used to justify keeping them in separate areas of town called “ghettos” and seizing their property when others got jealous of their wealth. The Klu Klux Klan was as much against Jews and Roman Catholics as they were African Americans, and they twisted the Bible to support this attitude. But this disregards that except for Luke, everyone who wrote a book in the Bible was a descendant of Abraham, the father of all Jews including Jesus Himself. John in His Gospel calls the enemies of Jesus “the Jews;” but in his writing we can tell he is talking about the religious leaders of the Jews, not all Jews. It is also clear to anyone knowing the Greek of the New Testament that the man who wrote the book of John was someone whose native language was Aramaic, the language of the Jews in Jesus’ time.

Racism—I stated before about the Klu Klux Klan. They used the account of Noah to explain that Noah’s son Ham was cursed because he made fun of his father. They stated that the descendants of Ham were Africans. Yes, Ham was cursed, but the Bible tells us his descendants were the Canaanites in Israel, not the Africans—and that they were the ones who so often led the Israelites into pagan worship.

Violence—People look in the Old Testament and read the stories about how God told the Israelites to kill all the people and animals in cities like Jericho. It was a principle called “cherem” in Hebrew, which means those were “dedicated” to God. In the Old Testament God used the nation of Israel to advance His Kingdom. Places like Jericho were pagan and practiced infant, child, and virgin sacrifice. But with the coming of Jesus God’s Kingdom works only through the Gospel, not politics or violence.

Moralism—The Bible can be used to make things legalistic. The religious leaders of the Jewish community in which Jesus lived used God’s commands in the Old Testament as a basis to come up with all kinds of rules that enabled them to be “better” than the common people and give them control over them.

Conversely people use the Bible to defend their desire to free themselves to do whatever they want. They speak about how Jesus calls us to love and say that if we speak against any kind of immorality in the lives of others, we are being “unloving.”

Anti-woman—the phrase “wives obey your husbands” in Ephesians 5 has been used to justify all kinds of abuse against women. The direction of St. Paul to women is seen as sexist. This ignores that Paul does not say “obey” for wives in the same way he says “obey” to children with their parents. Instead Paul speaks of “submitting,” which is what Jesus did to the will of His Father. In the Christian Church there is no higher calling than to serve as Jesus served us. The very fact that Jesus, Peter, and Paul even talked to and about women showed they were anything but sexist.

Yet, as these attacks go on and on we can feel overwhelmed especially when people express their opinions so smoothly. And many of the responses to these are filled with holes because they make assumptions that are not true, like being able to prove scientifically what the Bible says. With all the information out there and since we are reading something written centuries ago in different languages and in a different cultural setting than ours, how can we ever get real focus on God’s Word?

But it isn’t just our world today. Think of the disciples whom Jesus appeared to Easter evening in our Gospel lesson. They knew the Old Testament. But they still had it wrong. They saw God’s promises being fulfilled by a new King David who would overthrow the hated Romans and make Israel rule on earth. That is why they were so shocked to see Jesus risen from the dead. They didn’t believe the women who had gone to the tomb that morning. What the two disciples from Emmaus said about eating with the risen Jesus they doubted. And when

Jesus appeared alive to them, they still needed Him to eat food to prove He was real and alive. God's Word is God's Word, but it needs a focus, something to bring it all together.

That is what the disciples received as Jesus "opened to them the Scripture." Jesus did not use some magic like a crystal ball to open their minds. He didn't come up with the right algorithm to crack the code; He didn't zap their minds. He shared with them the Old Testament, God's Word, in light of Him standing there—the risen Lord Jesus. The two disciples from Emmaus who had just walked home with Jesus without knowing that it was Jesus stated afterwards, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" But they didn't fully understand until their eyes were opened up to recognize that they had been talking to Jesus risen from the dead. John, in his Gospel, tells us that the disciples heard things from Jesus that they did not understand until, "After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." There is something that can give focus and clarity to all of Scripture—Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead!

Martin Luther gave a simple direction to how to read and hear the Scriptures. He said we should be constantly asking the question, "How does this "push" Christ?" The Bible is God's wonderful gift to us. But it is useless unless we see that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the Word of God, the key to it all. Luther saw the Scriptures as the manger that holds the baby Jesus for us.

Christians will talk about being "Bible-believing." They are trying to emphasize the truth of God's Word. But we do not believe in the Bible, we believe in Jesus Christ. It is not that we are convinced that the Bible is true, so then we put our faith in Jesus, but the other way around. The Bible conveys Jesus to us. We put our faith in Him, so then we trust the word that brings Him to us. The Holy Spirit does not lead us to the Bible, but He uses the Bible to bring us to Christ.

As we get older, a lot of us need glasses to read. The glasses refocus the light so we can read what would be out of focus. Jesus is the "glasses" we can all put on to open our minds, to put into focus the Scriptures.

As we look at the Bible we find that stories and passages that lead us to Christ become the basis for understanding those that are less clear. We use Scripture to interpret Scripture and the risen Jesus to interpret Scripture. For instance all those laws in the Old Testament are not important for us to follow, but they show us what Jesus has fulfilled for us. God's use of a political nation—Israel-- in the Old Testament has been replaced by a spiritual nation, the body of Christ, the "New Israel," the Church. Condemnations in the Bible are most important to us as they lead us to forgiveness in Jesus. Jesus Christ—risen from the dead! That was the heart of the message that those disciples would proclaim to the world. And it is the heart and center of how we look at and proclaim Scriptures today.

God could just “zap” us and program our minds to understand it all. We would be like the perfect computer exactly having all the right information in the right order. But God has chosen to open our minds by His Word, the Word the Holy Spirit uses to bring Christ to us.

The pandemic caused a lot of people to do home activities like putting together puzzles. I find that when I do it I struggle to find the right pieces, then have periods when several fit very quickly one after the other. It is hard to be consistent.

This past year one of the greats in baseball passed away—Hank Aaron. He is the one who broke Babe Ruth’s record for most career home runs and still has the most RBI’s. The amazing thing about Aaron is that he never hit 50 home runs during any season. Instead he consistently hit over 35 for over 20 seasons. That is amazing when streaks are usually so important to hitters.

God gives us something consistent in Christ Jesus. We will always have our questions about what is said in the Bible. But the important thing is what is so clear to us through faith in Jesus. Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord, in Your mercy;

C: hear our prayer.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface and Sanctus (*Holy, Holy Holy*) p. 208

Prayer of Thanksgiving, Lord’s Prayer, The Words of our Lord, and Pax Domini (*The Peace of the Lord*): p. 209

Agnus Dei (*Lamb of God*): p.211

Distribution of Holy Communion:

“*Who Are You Who Walk in Sorrow*”- **Hymn #476**

“*Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia*”- **Hymn #466**

Dismissal

Nunc Dimittis:(*Song of Simeon*) p. 211

Prayer after Communion, Benedicamus, and Benediction: p. 166

Closing Hymn: “*Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*”- **Hymn #469**

Postlude