

Third Sunday of Easter - April 26, 2020 - Saint David's, Halifax NS

Readings: Isaiah 65:17-23; Revelation 21:1-5a; Luke 24:13-35

Welcome

Introit - *Simon & Aaron*

Ein Feste Burg - Michael Praetorius

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,
Ein gute Wehr und Waffen.
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,
Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.
Der alt böse Feind,
Mit Ernst er's jetzt meint.
Groß Macht und viel List
Sein grausam Rüstung ist.
Auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.

A mighty fortress is our God,
a trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from every need
that hath us now overtaken.
The ancient evil foe
now means us deadly woe;
deep guile and his great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
on Earth is not his equal.

Call to Worship:

The Lord is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

**Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change,**

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult. [*Psalm 46:1-3*]

Let us pause for a moment of silent prayer, remembering those who have died in the shooting rampage, remembering also their families and friends and all who have been touched by this tragedy. . . .

Prayer:

**God of compassion, you watch our ways,
and weave out of terrible happenings
wonders of goodness and grace.**

**Surround all who have been shaken by the recent horror in Nova Scotia
with a sense of your present love, and hold us in faith.**

Though we are lost in grief, may we find you and be comforted;

**through Jesus Christ who was dead, but lives
and rules this world with you. Amen.**

Hymn: Come to us, beloved Stranger (*based on Lk. 24:13-35*) (262 in *Book of Praise*)

Come to us, beloved Stranger, as you came that Easter day.
Walk with us to our Emmaus, for we need you still today.
Come to us when we are broken, when our dearest hopes are lost,
speak to us the prophet's message you fulfilled upon the cross.

Stay with us and give us blessing, that our hopes again may rise.
Offer us your broken body; open our unseeing eyes.
Come to us, God's love embodied; touch our hearts with burning flame.
Risen Christ, once dead, now living, come to us through joy, through pain.

We would never fail to see you as you walk with us each day.
As a friend and not a stranger you would join us on our way.
Help us trust that through your mercy we can doubt and fear transcend,
and to others be a blessing. Keep us faithful till life's end.

Isaiah 65:17-23 (NRSV)

¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well.

Revelation 21:1-5a

Then 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;

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.”

Hymn: The love of God comes close (474 in *Book of Praise*)

The love of God comes close where stands an open door,
to let the stranger in, to mingle rich and poor.

The love of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk the Way;
the love of God is here to stay.

The peace of God comes close to those caught in the storm,
forgoing lives of ease to ease the lives forlorn.

The peace of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk the Way;
the peace of God is here to stay.

The joy of God comes close where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life are found through smiles and tears.

The joy of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk the Way;
the joy of God is here to stay.

The grace of God comes close to those whose grace is spent,
whose hearts are tired or sore and hope is bruised and bent.

The grace of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk the Way;
the grace of God is here to stay.

Reflection:

Driving home from an errand on Thursday, I passed the North Street Gospel Hall whose sign conveys the eloquent, heart-wrenching, heart-comforting message: "Jesus wept." That says it all.

"God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break!" Words quoted in the 1996 memorial service in Dunblane, Scotland, for 16 primary school children and their teacher who had been massacred by a gunman. So last weekend in Nova Scotia: God's heart broke. Jesus wept.

Some might ask, Where is God in this horror?

I believe God is in the wreckage with the victims.

God is with the first responders and the police doing their awful jobs.

God is weeping as a parent who knows the grief of losing a son.

God is holding the families and especially the children with everlasting arms.

God is with each one of us in our numbness, our bewilderment, our sorrow.

In the days following the Westray Mine Disaster in 1992, families gathered in the Plymouth community centre hoping against hope that their loved ones would be saved. School children sent them cards which were posted all over the walls. One of the cards showed a mine shaft and the figure of Christ with outstretched arms.

"See, the home of God is among mortals."

In such a time as this, heaven and earth seem eternally separated, God seems to have gone away some place. Celtic interlacing notwithstanding, the chain between heaven and earth seems broken.

But Christ who is that chain lives and is present with us, weeping with us, embracing us with love that has no end. And he brings glimmers of the future death-free creation into the present through life-giving, life-affirming acts among humans.

At a time when God seems most far away, the link between heaven and earth is made by the sacrificial caring humans can show in time of crisis. Even in this time of isolation, people are finding hundreds of ways to love one another--through virtual vigils, music offered from one's basement, candles lit in windows, Nova Scotia tartan and flags, social media exchanges and email messages, pipers from all over playing apart but together, conversations on radio and TV that both tell the stories of the people who were killed and offer support and love for the families and friends left behind, prayers offered individually and together via Zoom, endless hours of listening and consoling by counsellors and clergy and others.

This is what it means to love one another as Christ has loved us--the giving of everything one has in the service of another. We cannot see God or Jesus but when we see the love and support of humans for one another, we see the presence of God with us. We experience the reality that in Jesus Christ, God and humans are connected, heaven has come down to earth. We are not alone or bereft of God's love.

So, as we mourn the dead and comfort the sorrowing, God is with us and with them. In the words of the Psalmist, there is nowhere we can go beyond God's loving presence:

"If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol [*the world of the dead*], you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand hold me fast." [Ps. 139:8-9]

Especially for the children but for all of us, I want now to teach a chorus that might give us comfort and reassurance. It comes from the Iona Community in Scotland. I'll sing it once to show how it goes, and then I'll sing it again and you can join in if you like (mics muted, of course!) The words are written in your worship script and it's called "Don't be afraid." These are the words of Jesus to us.

**Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
my love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger
and I have promis'd, promis'd to be always near.**

Thanks be to God!

Offertory - (Brogan Cameron) - *Prelude No. 13 in F Sharp Major, Op. 28* - F. Chopin

Prayer:

Gracious God, in your Son Jesus Christ you have come to earth to be one of us. In Jesus, you shared our joys and sorrows, our sufferings and death. In the Cross and the Empty Tomb, you won victory over death and brought new life to the world. Thank you for every sign of your love and your presence among us. Thank you for holding on to us even when we cannot feel you are there. Thank you for the promise of the new creation which strengthens us during hard times and leads us forward to a new day.

Compassionate God, we pray for the church and for the world.

May the church be faithful to your ways, loving one another and the world as you in Christ have loved us.

May the world and all its peoples come to know your peace and your joy. Hasten the day when all tears will be dried and there will be no chaos, no mourning, no death and no pain.

Heal all who are hurting and comfort all who are sad. Continue your work of re-creation, making all things new, so that all your creatures can live in peace and without fear. We pray through Jesus Christ, the Living One, who taught us to pray in hope:

And now we offer the prayer that Jesus taught us saying;

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy km. come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the km., the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: O Master, let me walk with thee (642 in *Book of Praise*)

O Master, let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free;
tell me thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move by some clear winning word of love;
teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with thee in closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong, in trust that triumphs over wrong,

in hope that sends a shining ray far down the future's broadening way,
in peace that only thou canst give, with thee, O Master, let me live.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.
Amen.*

Postlude - (Brogan Cameron) *Invention No 13 In A minor* - J.S. Bach