

Prayer of the Week:

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, Second Sunday of Easter)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

*And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages.
Amen.*



**The Uprising Of
Fellowship**
John 20:19-31 (NRSV)
April 19, 2020

Peace In The Midst Of Fear

In the scene described in John 20, the disciples have locked themselves in a room fearful of the authorities.

While they were hiding in fear, Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you." Later, he said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." Messages of peace and forgiveness are not exactly the message you would expect from an innocent man whose life had ended at the hands of the state.

But Jesus has a propensity for the unexpected.

These words energized the disciples and gave them new confidence that Jesus is the world's Messiah. He had risen from the dead and even shown them his scars! Except Thomas. Thomas wasn't there.

Thomas

Thomas has a bad reputation. “Doubting” Thomas we call him. He was a bit stern; even gloomy disciple. Some might call him a pessimist. Fellow pessimist would call him a realist.

After encountering the risen Christ, the other disciples were excited and filled with joy, Thomas was unconvinced.

Maybe we shouldn’t give Thomas such a hard time. After all, this isn’t a run of mill claim; we are talking about a man overcoming death! He says, “I’d have to see that for myself.”

One week later the disciples are gathered once again. This time Thomas is with them and he sees the risen Christ, scars included, and believes.

Scars

The resurrected Jesus bears scars.

Scars are wounds filled with living flesh. In this way, the scars we bear tell stories of deep hurt/pain and redemption.

I’m struck that the redeemed body of Jesus bears the scars of the cross. This points us to the reality that life cannot be contained! Even with pain, wounds, doubts, rejections, disappointments, let downs, and failures, the redemptive work of God turns those wounds into scars. He takes wounded parts and fills them with life! God is a God of life and redemption!

Since the risen Christ showed his scars, maybe that means we don’t have to hide ours.

Jesus does not criticize Thomas for his doubt, uncertainty, or questioning.

Jesus does not shame Thomas for needing to see it for himself, but gently shows him his scars and allows Thomas to touch them.

Thomas saw and recognized God in man who was scarred, but whose holy aliveness was more powerful and palpable than the cruelty he had endured. And his life was transformed.

Despite his doubting, Thomas was always counted among the disciples. He was part of them! He wasn’t always certain. He didn’t always believe. He often had questions, but he stayed with them and he was welcomed.

The Uprising of Fellowship

The uprising of Jesus is an uprising of fellowship! Sometimes we misunderstand fellowship as a sense of community among like-minded people. A sense of belonging among people who all paid their dues, believe the same thing, and have the same partisan persuasions. That isn’t fellowship. It might be camaraderie, but it isn’t fellowship.

"Fellowship is a kind of belonging that isn't based on status, achievement, or gender, but instead is based on a deep belief that everyone matters, everyone is welcome, and everyone is loved, no conditions, no exceptions." -Brian McLaren, We Make The Road By Walking, pg. 175

This Christ-centered uprising is for all people. Those who aren't certain all the time. Those who tend to fear. Those who know exactly what they believe, and those who aren't sure what or how to believe. Those who are brave and those who aren't. It is for men AND women. It is for the rich AND the poor. It is for those who show their scars and those who tend to hide them. And it must be this way, because only together we can figure things out. Only together can we learn to hope, believe, and love.