

Sunday, May 17, 2020
Sixth Sunday of Easter



Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Almighty and ever-living God, You hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In Your great mercy receive the prayers of all Your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of Your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(from the Sixth Sunday of Easter, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

- **Acts 17:22-31**
- **Psalm 66:8-20**

Paul's message to the Athenians

Bless our God, You peoples; let the sound of praise be heard. Ps. 66:8

- Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of His praise be heard,
 ⁹ who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.
¹⁰ For you, O God, have tested us; You have tried us as silver is tried.
 ¹¹ You brought us into the net; You laid burdens on our backs;
¹² You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet You have brought us out to a spacious place.
 ¹³ I will come into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows,
¹⁴ those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
 ¹⁵ I will offer to You burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. *Selah*
¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what He has done for me.
 ¹⁷ I cried aloud to Him, and He was extolled with my tongue.
¹⁸ If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
 ¹⁹ But truly God has listened; He has given heed to the words of my prayer.
²⁰ Blessed be God, because He has not rejected my prayer or removed His steadfast love from me.

- **1 Peter 3:13-22**
- **John 14:15-21**

The days of Noah, a sign of baptism

Christ our advocate

The Holy Gospel according to John 14:15-21, NRSV

(<https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#texts>)

In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, because He abides with you, and He will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹They who have My commandments and keep them are those who love Me; and those who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love them and reveal Myself to them.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Sixth Sunday of Easter. Amen.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.” These are Jesus’ words from our gospel for today. These are much-needed words for me today and so important to share with you.

Jesus is speaking to His disciples on the night of His arrest. Yet, how appropriate these words – this entire gospel reading – is for us today. We are never alone. Christ is always with us.

I can’t imagine what you are going through right now. You. The one listening to this sermon on the radio or on social media; even you who may be reading this in an email or mailing. I know how it is affecting me. The lack of social interaction seems to really be getting to me lately. Yes, I talk with people on the phone and on Zoom. I text. I’m on Facebook. But none of that is the same as being in person.

I had a memorial service this past Wednesday afternoon at a local cemetery for a beloved sister in Christ who walked on in February. It was very difficult to maintain social distancing. It was difficult to not be able to hug the family or shake their hand. I shared with them my sorrow. I can’t imagine what it has been like to grieve a loved one without being able to have friends and neighbors stop by, have a cup of coffee, and share stories. That is one way we process grief. By talking about our loved ones.

The neighborhood I grew up in downstate is dealing with this right now. A childhood friend who was three years younger than I am walked on this past Tuesday from the coronavirus. She had been hospitalized since the end of March. Isolated from her husband and two children. From her elderly father and her sister and brother. My heart aches for them and for what they are going through. But their faith is in the resurrected Jesus. They know they will see their beloved Nora someday.

This social isolation has been a form of grieving; leaving us feeling alone and empty, lost and afraid of the unknown. Depression and anxiety are elevated during this pandemic. I’ve been reading several articles about this and want to share some key points. According to the sources I’ve read, one should...

1. Limit the amount of information you consume. That’s not to say that you shouldn’t watch the news at all or be updated on what is going on in the world. There is such a thing as too much television. Turn it off. Disconnect from social media (that’s the hardest one for me!) even for a brief period. Take a breath and take a break.

2. Focus on the things you can control. Continue to practice social distancing, wash your hands, avoid touching your face, wear a mask, avoid non-essential travel as much as possible, avoid being around sick people, eat a healthy diet, manage stress, get enough sleep. These are things you have complete control of. Congratulate yourself for following healthy and safe guidelines!

3. Stay busy with other things. I’ve started to clean out “Joey’s room”, the spare bedroom where my grandson stays when he is up here with us. It’s become a catch-all room. My goal has been to set aside 30 minutes each evening to sort through the containers of stuff that have accumulated there. I know I will feel so much better when it is completed! When you’re done with your daily obligations and especially if you are still working during this time, find something fun to do. Put together a puzzle (though, for me, that’s a stress-maker!), do some painting or gardening, take a walk, write a friend (the old-fashion way), call a loved one and talk about anything but the coronavirus – or politics. Take. A. Nap.

4. Set aside time to worry. You can't just ignore what you are feeling and what is happening around you. Start a journal. Or just write your feelings down on a blank piece of paper. Limit this time to 3 minutes. Yes, 3 minutes. And then move on to something else – something fun or something that will divert your attention. If you do this periodically, it will hopefully reduce some anxiety.

5. Vent to a friend who won't judge you. If you're already seeing a therapist, please be sure you remain in contact with them in whatever way you have already set this up. Sometimes it's nice, though, to have a someone to talk with and share your thoughts and concerns. Try not to discuss politics unless you know this person shares the same view. Be sure who you choose isn't one who would say, "Everyone is dealing with this. Just suck it up." This is not helpful. At all.

6. Spend time reading scripture and in prayer. Your particular denomination has a library of ways to mentally and physically get through this time. If you need help finding resources, please call me and I will direct you to whatever you are looking for.

It is in this frame that I share with you again the words from John 14. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." He continues by saying, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

At our baptism, water is sprinkled on our heads with these words spoken, "Child of God, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit." Our forehead is marked with the sign of the cross with these words spoken, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." The Holy Spirit is the Advocate sent to be with us forever. This is a promise God made to God's Son, Jesus Christ. This is a promise Christ makes to each and every one of us.

Even in the midst of our isolation, of being separated from our loved ones, whether temporary or, as in death, for a longer time, the Holy Spirit is among us. We take comfort in knowing that we do not face this time alone. We do not face this virus alone.

So, when it seems like the walls are closing in or your anxiety is increasing, turn off the television. Think of all the good things you are doing for yourself right now – even if you don't think so. Find something enjoyable you've been wanting to do and haven't been able to do it. And be like Nike - just do it. Take 3 minutes to recognize the worries that you have and then put them aside. Share your fears with a trusted friend. And, most of all, spend time in scripture and prayer.

And remember we will find the answers to our questions and solutions to our problems in the Bible. We will find words to comfort our fears and words to give us hope. We will also find many joys and reasons to celebrate. And, most importantly, we will hear how much God loved us by sending God's Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. The Bible is the *best* resource book we will ever find! **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

P: Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, 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.*

P: Abiding God, You have revealed Yourself to us in the form of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Embolden Your church, as Your followers, to reveal Your love to everyone in our speaking and in our living. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You are the Creator of heaven and earth. Revitalize the health of oceans, rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers, and other bodies of water that give life to Your creatures. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You call all people of the world Your children. Judge the nations justly, show mercy to the oppressed, and speak truth to power through Your prophets. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You come near to us when we are lost, and You hear our distress. We pray for those who suffer in any way, in body, mind, and spirit, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices....(please name your prayer concerns). Bring healing to all affected by the coronavirus. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: Your commands are good and merciful. Give us courage to take hold of our baptismal promises to work for justice, advocate for the voiceless, and free the oppressed and imprisoned in body, mind, or spirit. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: You remain with us always, O God, and Your kingdom has no end. We remember the saints who have gone before us. Unite us forever in Your final victory over death. Lord, in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

P: With bold confidence in Your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into Your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (prayers from the Sixth Sunday of Easter, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray...

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

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what You have first given us-our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of Your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of Him, who offered Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace to serve our Risen Lord! **Thanks be to God!**