

*Order of Worship  
Second Sunday of Easter  
April 19, 2020*

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship:

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim  
Till all the world adore his sacred name.

Opening Prayer:

Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Through these fifty days of Easter we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and throughout eternity. Amen

Affirmation of Faith   Apostle's Creed

Prayer:

God of signs and wonders, breathe new life into us this day that our spirits may awaken to the joy and hope of our glorious inheritance through the living Christ.  
Clear our vision, Holy One, that we may see the promise of Easter in the stirring of this precious earth and in the life energy flowing through our bodies.  
Help us find the faith to believe where we have not seen, that others may see, in our living and our loving, the glory of the risen Christ who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word  
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today)

New Testament Reading      Acts 2: 14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

Epistle Reading                1 Peter 1:3-9

Special Music                  *Bradley Fuller*

Gospel Reading                John 20: 19-31

Sermon                          The Church's Commission

Song                              *God Be With You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

Benediction:

Let us go forth to be the continuing revelation of God's love through Jesus Christ to all the world. Amen

## ***The Church's Commission***

April 19, 2020

John 20: 19-31

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”

Does this seem a little mystifying? Particularly in this context of Jesus appearing to the disciples on that first Easter Evening and breathing upon them the Holy Spirit? Does it seem a little out of context? And what does this verse mean? OK, If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, that's pretty straightforward. If you forgive sins their sins are forgiven, or does it mean your sins are forgiven? What is this about retaining sins? If I retain the sins of any they are retained. Is it that their sins are retained or does it mean my sins are retained because I did not forgive others? This is a real head scratcher.

And what about the context? Jesus is appearing to the disciples on Easter evening after the resurrection. He is giving them peace and fulfilling the promises made in the final discourse. Now giving them the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit and now he tells them to forgive sins or they will be retained. Does not make a whole lot of sense on the surface.

But it would have made perfect sense to those disciples of the Johanne community and reading in the context of the whole Gospel of John. So let's see if we can get a better understanding of this verse.

First, we need to define sin. We often think of sin in behavioral terms. Sins are those things that we do or fail to do that displeases God. Sin is a moral state, good and bad, with of course sin being bad. We think of sin as things we do like cheating, drinking, smoking, sex outside marriage, killing, not going to church, not saying our prayers, being prejudiced, and I can go on and on and on to infinity and beyond to quote Buzz Lightyear. We can think of an infinite number of things that we do, such as stealing, or not do, such as not going to church, that displeases God, but still not define sin as sin is defined by the writer of John.

For in John, sin is not about ethical or moral behavior, sin is a theological term. Sin is the failure to see and respond to God as revealed by Jesus. In 3: 19-21 we see Jesus talk about the light coming into the world (Jesus) but the people loving the

darkness more than light. Then in Chapter 8: 23- 26 Jesus reveals that he is from above, not of this world but sent from the Father and that we die to sin unless we believe in him. In 9: 39- 41 Jesus talks about blindness being those who do not see God revealed in him. And finally, chapter 15: 8- 9 as he explains the working of the Holy Spirit, he says that the Spirit is to prove the world wrong about sin, because they do not believe in me. So, as you see, sin in John's Gospel is not about behavior but about seeing and responding to the revelation of God through Jesus.

This revelation of God through Jesus is that God so loved the world that the son was sent into the world to save the world, not condemn it. Jesus is the revelation of God's love for all of creation. And Jesus gives the command in 13: 34, to love one another just as I have loved you. In other words, we love each other, all people, just as God loves us and them. So, to put it simply, sin is the failure to respond to God's love by loving others.

So, when you retain sin, that is you hold onto sin, you simply either fail to see God's love in the world and or you fail to respond to God's love by loving others. As we retain sin, we continue to live according to the rule of the world rather than the rule of God. It is more than just being free of the guilt of our behaviors but living our lives in such a way that reveals God's love to the world. We are the continuing revelation of God's love in the world today.

We retain sins, even as we may receive forgiveness and God's love, if we do not respond by living our lives totally and completely to reflect and reveal God's love to the world with all our thoughts and actions. Sin is retained and we do not reflect God's love to all people.

Forgiveness is to let go. We often think of this in terms of letting go of the guilt, anger, shame and resentment of our sins. Again, looking at forgiveness as letting go of the emotional responses to our sinful behavior. But if sin is the failure to see God's love in the world and respond to God's love, then forgiveness is to see and respond to God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ. We let ourselves go in order that we may experience and respond to God's love as revealed in Christ. As we experience God's love we respond by loving others.

This is what John (the Gospel writer that is, not the preacher) means as Jesus tells the disciples to forgive the sins of any. The forgiveness of sins is the continued

revealing of God's love through our love for others. The disciples of Jesus, both those locked in that room on Easter Evening and us today, are to be the continuing revelation of God's love in the world.

This is the commission of the church. John places Easter and Pentecost, Pentecost being the giving of the Holy Spirit and founding of the Church, on the same day. Thus, John closely connects the mission of the Church with the glorification of Christ. As God's love was revealed through the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, that is his glorification, so the disciples' mission is to immediately become the continuing revelation of God's love through Christ to the world.

This is the commission of the Johanne Community to reveal God's love to the world through Christ. This commission did not end with those first disciples huddled in that room but continues on through the ages. As Jesus says to Thomas, blessed are those that have not seen but yet believe.

We have not seen Jesus, but we have experienced Jesus. We have experienced God's love in so many ways. Kay and I have experienced it through our younger neighbors who have been willing to go to the store for us during this time. We have experienced it through musicians who have given "concerts" on You Tube. We experience it through the innumerable health care workers- doctors, nurses, CNAs, EMT's, and housekeepers- who work in hospitals during this time risking exposure. We experience it in all the little acts of kindness and levity that we have seen these past few weeks.

As we have experienced God's love through Jesus, so we forgive sins. We let go and be the continuing revelation of God's love in the world. We may reveal God's love by a simple phone call or note to someone who may be lonely or isolated. We may reveal God's love by following the guidelines to slow and hopefully stop the spread of this virus. We reveal God's love by listening and responding to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who reveals God's love over the rule of the world.

As the Church, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we forgive sin, letting go and embracing the revelation of God's love through Jesus and continuing the work of Jesus by revealing and reflecting God's love in our world today.