

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**

**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 28, 2019**

**EASTERTIDE**

**Litany**

Based on Psalm 150

Praise the Lord! Where shall we praise our God?

**In the sanctuary, on earth and in the skies!**

Why shall we praise our God?

**For mighty deeds and surpassing greatness!**

How shall we praise our God?

**With trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, dance, strings, and cymbals!**

Who shall praise our God?

**Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!**

**The Scripture**

John 20:19-31

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

*A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

***The Message***  
***Come and See! ...the evangelism of ballooning***  
**Nick Larson**

When we began talking about what our stewardship theme this year would be, Terry and I sat down with our stewardship chair, David Holmes. Really David is a bit of triple threat when it comes to being stewardship chair. First, he's a retired Disciples of Christ pastor, so he knows biblical stewardship (I hope you are reading his reflections in "Broadway Weekly"). Second, he's retired from non-profit fundraising, so we know he's not afraid to ask for money. And third, he's a balloonist. So, it naturally lends itself to our *Soaring!* campaign.

Being a balloonist is an expensive, interesting, and entertaining hobby/retired career choice. Just ask Lysa; she'll tell you. So, when Terry and I first sat with David, Terry did her thing and started asking questions, and she asked David about using ballooning as the theme of our stewardship season. I, of course, thought Terry had a brilliant idea. Also, when David told us his story of ballooning, maybe it was just a room full of preachers, but, man, did it scream stewardship!

David told of another family hobby, Soap Box Derby racing, where Drew and Callie (two of his children) both became champions. One year they were racing in Kansas City, and at the top of the hill, Drew was climbing into his race car, and the family next to them seemed nervous and new at this. When they went to test the brakes, the boy engaged his brakes, but then as they dropped the gate, he realized that he never disengaged the brakes after testing. So back up the hill Drew went, resetting the gate and running the race again. And the results were just the same; Drew beating him down the hill, but a friendship had begun. David was chatting with the dad, and he discovered he was a balloonist that would be traveling to Columbia for a Hot Air Balloon festival. And he invited David to come and see him when fly. He'd get him up close and personal with it.

David got into ballooning because he was *invited*. Someone we meet invites us to "Come and See." That's how we get into a lot of things, really. Someone we meet invites us to join them in something that they are passionate about that we show sometimes just the faintest of interest in. Honestly, that's how I got into church. My girlfriend invited me to go with her, and I thought, "What the heck?"

Hopefully, you hear an invitation to join us in stewardship by pledging anything from "as can" to several hundred dollars a week or more. The personal stories you hear in our stewardship moment are supposed to show you exactly how and why people pledge at Broadway. I hope that you feel invited (and maybe a little challenged) in your giving through these moments. God wants to invite you into the life of stewardship, and

throughout this season, I want you to hear how we at Broadway want to invite you to do that here with us.

I want to pause for just a moment and make a specific invitation. My invitation to us, this morning, is to consider that last fiscal year we had 112 giving units (that could be individuals, families, etc.) that didn't give financially in a way that we can register that it was them. Perhaps you are one of those folks, perhaps you are not, but consider for this moment that if each one of those 112 giving units were to pledge and then contribute just \$1 a week to Broadway, that would total \$5,824 in resources for God to use through our ministries. If each one of those 112 giving units were to pledge and then contribute \$10 a week, then our budget would see a \$58,240 increase. Nearly \$60,000 from \$10 a week! Think of how many socks that could support those in our neighborhood who are experiencing homelessness. Think how many youth group activities or Junior Youth Fellowship outings that could invite students and kids on. Those contributions could pay for something as concrete as health insurance for staff members, or keeping lights on in the nursery, or heating the sanctuary so the organ pipes don't warp, or the \$8,000 this church contributes to disaster relief every year, or paying for youth sponsors on trips, so that those giving of their vacation time don't also have to pay to volunteer.

Stewardship is about the leadership of this place that carefully and respectfully crafts a budget. It's about the fact that individuals can tell you exactly where the budget goes, not in terms of your return on investment or some other economic strategy, but in terms of lives lived and how the gospel is shared. It's about God inviting each and every one of us, to collectively enter into this life together, this community, and to do so believing that even \$10 a week can make a difference in helping us to *Soar*.

But you didn't come here today to just listen to me climb on my soap box to tell you about stewardship. We came here today, to reflect together on the gospel of John's story about Thomas.

Thomas, the disciple of Jesus. Thomas, the twin. Thomas, the one who doubted. But Thomas was no more inclined to doubt than any of the other disciples. It's just that Thomas had not had their experience; so, Thomas had a roadblock to belief.

We're told that Thomas had a twin. Who is the twin of Thomas? We are. In a secular age, we've all encountered the same roadblock to belief as Thomas. As sons of the Enlightenment and daughters of Modernity, we're all Thomas now.

So frequent are the mentions in this reading of "seeing" and "touching" the risen Lord that we could expect that this text is about proof. Yet, we'd be wrong. This text isn't about proof; it's about absence or a perceived absence. The story isn't so much about doubting as it is about Thomas not being there. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus first

appeared, and so, of course, he wasn't certain. His friends were making wild and crazy accusations that Jesus was alive!

Thomas often gets disdained or scolded why did he not catch on right away? Was he a skeptic, a professional doubter? Hardly; he just wasn't there. He was beyond the sight and sound of Jesus' presence.

This story is not about Good Friday, or Easter Day, or earlier on the evening of the second Sunday. It marks our opening to new stages of faith and church life. Up until this story, faith came in the face of Jesus' physical presence. Here, the Jesus of this gospel sets us up theologically for the experience of God not based solely on sight.

That's the life we live; is it not? We are Thomas' twin, the one who doubts, the one who doesn't have the experience of seeing a physical Jesus. We must come to faith by hearing, not by seeing. Thomas, who was the last doubter among the old school disciples, gets to be the first one to announce from now on hearing would do it all.

We are not told whether Thomas ever did touch. Notice that Jesus spoke an invitation to come and see, to come and touch. And having *heard* the words of Jesus, Thomas gasped, "My Lord and my God!" Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Sometimes the verification comes not through seeing or touching the Christ, but through hearing of him. We, church, can be the ones who testify, who share the story of the risen Lord. We can be the one, who serves him when we serve the least of these. We can be the one, who feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, takes care of the orphans and the widows. We can be the ones, who make space and opportunity for those with disabilities to be included in the full life of the church. We can be the ones, who raise \$27,000+ for Habitat for Humanity to help provide affordable housing.

The real issue with this text is that Thomas rejects the other disciples' story. He can't accept their invitation to belief. He rejects the disciples' good news about what they have seen and heard. He rebuffs his same friends with whom he has shared life for so long. Their eyes and their fingers are not enough for him.

We are this way; aren't we? We detract from the story of resurrection that we see in others. We encounter this same roadblock; we want to touch ourselves. Thus, the community that Jesus has tried so hard to build through the gospel is threatened from the beginning by Thomas's skepticism.

On this final Sunday of April, it is our custom to recognize our graduating high-school seniors. And this moment in the text, I think, speaks to that exact stage of life. We have three graduating seniors this year, and they will likely be invited to try a lot of new

things when they enter college. And the advice I wish someone had given me before I started college was to listen to those who had gone before me. Listen to those who made mistakes and took risks, those who stepped out and learned. So often in life, our temptation is to ignore, to tune out; to step back from the edge. We want to touch and see ourselves, yet sometimes it is worth hearing what others must share. Listen to those you trust, who have gone before you, walk in their steps, and believe in their testimonies.

We turn down other's invitations, when we should accept their realities. We ignore the plight of others because we haven't experienced it.

Do we listen to the disenfranchised in our midst? Do we hear the stories from the transgender student, who shares about their bathroom experiences? Or do we say, because we haven't seen a trans-person assaulted that clearly it doesn't happen?

Ultimately in the gospel of John, it is those who believe without seeing that are the true followers of Christ. Come and see, Jesus' disciples invite us, and then when we, like Thomas, want to see it for ourselves, then Christ appears to show us.

Let's accept the first invitation; shall we? Let's accept that the fully-resurrected life comes with accepting the invitation of Jesus to be generous, to work together for the betterment of all, to defend the weak and the powerless against those who would oppress them. Let's trust it, that it is better to love your neighbor as yourself.

In effect, Jesus is saying, "If I can trust in God to raise me from the dead, you can, too." If God can bring about new life from the Roman cross, a gruesome execution tool, then we can have our own wounds transformed. The wounds not removed but changed.

My favorite detail in this passage is that of Christ. Jesus shows Thomas the wounds in his hands and in his side. Jesus, our resurrected Lord, still bears the marks of life and death. Belief does not remove the wounds. Jesus doesn't promise that there will be no pain in life. Jesus promises to transform your pain, so that you won't, as Richard Rohr says, transmit it.

So, graduating seniors, those considering entering a pledge, those who are wondering if we or they can really soar together. Listen now, we are not in the age where we get to see and touch. We live in a time where the Spirit of God blows where it will, and we are left to chase the wind. The Broadway Spirit is alive and well, but are we up for the challenge to follow where it will blow next?

Let us soar higher in our hot-air balloon together. Let us believe the testimony of a balloonist that we meet in Kansas City. Let us taste and see that God is good, so that we can become real agents of transformation, reconciliation, and newness.

Jesus is asking us to live his way, to follow his commands, even when they don't all seem to make sense. "Love my enemy?" That doesn't sound right!

We must resolve ourselves to belief even when we can't touch or see. But remember, we can hear, we can hear the risen Lord whisper on the winds, "Peace be with you!"

And so, we say together, "And also with you."

Amen.