

# First Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<https://fpresbyterian.ca> Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Third Sunday of Easter - April 18, 2021

## Call to Worship *(inspired by Luke 24:45-48)*

We are witnesses,  
to the love God has poured into us.  
We are witnesses of God's love,  
sharing it with each person we meet.  
We are witnesses to everyone we encounter,  
little children like us,  
sisters and brothers in God's family.

*Written by Thom Shuman and posted on LiturgyLink. <https://www.liturgylink.net>.  
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2018/04/call-to-worship-witnesses.html>.*

## Hymn

*Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord*

260

### Refrain

Alleluia, alleluia,  
give thanks to the risen Lord;  
alleluia, alleluia,  
give praise to his name.

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|--|--|
| 1. Jesus is Lord of all the earth;<br>he is the King of creation:<br><i>Refrain</i>    | 2. Spread the good news o'er all the earth;<br>Jesus has died and has risen:<br><i>Refrain</i> |
| 3. We have been crucified with Christ;<br>now we shall live forever:<br><i>Refrain</i> | 4. Come, let us praise the living God,<br>joyfully sing to our Saviour:<br><i>Refrain</i>      |

"Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord," words by Donald Fishel. Text: © 1973.  
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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God our Maker, we come before you this day,  
giving thanks for all the wonder in your creation:  
For the detailed perfection revealed in a baby's tiny fingers,  
in pussy willows unzipping their jackets to greet the spring,  
in each rock face worn by wind and water,  
witnessing to your ancient design like wrinkles around an aging smile.  
These details lift our hearts to praise you.  
So let the details of the story of the Risen Christ lift our hearts this day,  
that we may greet a new week  
as an occasion to discover him in our midst,  
making all things new with the springtime of your Spirit.

God our Redeemer,  
in raising Jesus from the dead, you showed us your power  
to defeat all that brings fear and sorrow to our lives.  
In his resurrection, Jesus promised to be with us always.  
Yet we confess we are sometimes uncertain about your presence,  
unsure if we can trust the promise of resurrection for ourselves.  
Forgive us when we struggle to trust your goodness for us.  
Forgive us when we miss the signs of your love in our midst.

God of Word and Wisdom, when the Risen Christ interpreted the scripture to his  
friends, their hearts burned with excitement. Send us your Holy Spirit to open the  
scriptures for us today, revealing truth and love that will fill our hearts and change  
our lives, too. ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Third Sunday of Easter April 18, 2021. Year B.

### Assurance of Pardon

What marvelous love, what wondrous grace,  
what abundant mercy God offers - to us!  
We really are God's people - that is exactly who we are!  
We are God's children - those whose lives have been changed  
by the One who loves us and forgives us. Thanks be to God!

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### Scripture Reading Luke 24:36-48

<sup>36</sup>While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup>They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup>Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." <sup>40</sup>And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup>While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate in their presence.

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## **Message** Jesus stands among us.

Who would ever have thought that not being able to gather in groups would be so unlike the experience of God's people throughout the generations? Stay at home orders in Ontario have made it so that, even outdoors, one is only to be with people who reside in their household, save for the person who lives alone in their own home who can join one other household. And I get it. During these unusual times, that have become far too much the norm, protecting others and stopping the spread of the Corona Virus is imperative so that, at some point in the hopefully not too distant future, we can begin to be near one another again.

It is affecting so many things. The funeral for Prince Phillip showed that even a monarchy can be humbled when normally dignitaries and generations of family and friends would have been present to show the Queen and family love and support in this time of loss and for the funeral. The streets would certainly been lined with people offering their love and support. But not now. Now we do our best to comfort one another from a distance, but it is not the same.

The scripture from Luke also tells of the days after a death, this time after Jesus' death. Unlike this past year, it has always been normal for people to gather in times of loss of loved ones and so the followers of Jesus are gathered. The story is set at the end of the day that has been the witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' followers, women and men, have found the tomb empty, and they have witnessed to the others their shock, wonder, and amazement.

There has been a walk on the road to Emmaus where Jesus is at first unrecognized as he journeys with two others. They talk and share the things that have happened. Then the two invite the man into their home and as he took bread, blessed and broke it, then gives it to them, suddenly whatever has kept them from recognizing Jesus changes, their eyes are opened to who is with them and with that Jesus vanishes from their sight. Of course, this is far too amazing to keep to themselves, so they head back to where the others are gathered and staying. This is where we began our reading.

It is as they are talking and sharing that Jesus stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." Their reaction was the same as yours or mine might be, startled and terrified. This guy is supposed to be dead; they saw it happen; they were witnesses to the event. And it is one thing to see an empty tomb, then to hear the wonderful story of walking with a stranger and a shared meal, though his vanishing act would have been hard to explain, but this larger group gathered has not yet witnessed Jesus resurrected body for themselves. Who knows what rumors are flying around? What explanations have been reasoned for the empty tomb? But in this moment Jesus has stood among them. It seems clear that this was unexpected. No one knocked on the door. No one went to see who was there. Jesus is just there among them.

Jesus spends the next while addressing their fears and doubts. It would seem Jesus is using a calm and caring voice as he says, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts

arise in your hearts?" (24:38). It feels more like someone who is trying to assure and console one who is grieving, afraid, and not knowing what to do. He tells them to look at his hands and feet, see that it is him. Touch him and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as they see Jesus has. He continues to show them that his body is as real as theirs by asking for food and eating a piece of broiled fish.

These hours, and what will become another forty days of Jesus making appearances to people, are interesting in that Jesus didn't teach them anything more in that time than he had done in the time before his death. It would seem that his resurrected body, complete with flesh and bones with the ability to consume food, a body that was completely human and yet different, as is noted by his ability to defy our understanding of how he comes and goes, this appears to be the only thing that is needed.

It is a time for understanding all that has already been taught, all that was in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, which is short hand for the all of the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament. It is a time for reflection, insight, and understanding the scriptures and of how Jesus is the fulfilment of those scriptures. It is time for linking that to what he had taught them in the last three years as they followed this itinerant rabbi, teacher, and healer from one place to another, from one moment to another, from one person to another. For forty days Jesus keeps showing up and standing among the gathered people.

It was because of this experience that the apostles knew that their life's work would be to share this gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. They were witnesses of these things. Their witness has become the words handed down through the New Testament. Just as the disciples and others followers had the Hebrew scriptures that taught them, words they studied and believed because of the witness of generations before them, we now have those scripture and the words of the New Testament as well to study, learn, reflect. We are given the choice to believe the hope, the truth, the grace, and the love that are promised through believing that Jesus lived, died, was resurrected, and finally ascended. This Jesus was fully human, fully divine and could occupy both spaces without the need to explain it to us. It is a mystery, but the witness that has been passed down to us can to be trusted.

The men and women whose stories are told in these pages risked everything to share this good news. To choose to proclaim this message meant taking on authorities, being beaten, ridiculed, and at times death. Believing that Jesus had risen from the grave did not bring security, but it did bring hope for a transformed future, a future that began in that moment and continues in our time.

Jesus stands among us.

It may feel harder to grasp that right now as we can't gather together, but Jesus is present with us in our isolation, in our homes, in our families. There is a story that perhaps you have read or heard told, it is longer than what I am sharing but basically a pastor ends up at the bedside of a man. There is an empty chair beside the bed and the pastor

assumes the man had been informed of his visit. He takes a seat and they talk about why the chair is there. The old fellow says,

One day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I'll be with you always. ' Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now."

He continues, "So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon. "Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked.

"Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, in fact, beyond strange--kinda weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus stands among us. He sits among us. He moves among us. It may be something to reflect on, realizing that Jesus is present – always. God is present – always. The words we speak, the way we behave, the joy and anger we express, Jesus is present. In our times of virtual meetings and video chats, would it change the way we interact if we placed an empty chair beside us knowing that it was not really empty but rather the place that Jesus is taking up with us as we plan, catch up, meet, gossip or take up the really important conversations about race, equity, marginalization, economics, and power.

This is our time to trust the witnesses that came before us and to trust in the scriptures. It is our time to become witnesses of the resurrection to the people of our time. Jesus stands among us. Glory be to God, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

God our Maker,  
Source of Easter power and hope,  
You have walked with your faithful people through many generations,  
people facing challenge and uncertainty,  
people seeking your purpose and promise.  
We still face challenges and uncertainty, even with Easter in our hearts.  
Walk with us and with those for whom we pray for this day,  
so that your resurrecting power may lead us in lives of faithfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.jaredstory.com/empty\\_chair.html](http://www.jaredstory.com/empty_chair.html)

We pray for children and young people  
who must think about the future in uncertain times  
facing threats new to this generation like the pandemic and climate change.  
Give them hope rooted in the knowledge that their lives matter to you.  
Show them how to make a difference in the world,  
whatever threats they face as they grow.

We pray for people for whom age or experience, illness or disability  
create barriers to full participation in your world.  
Surround each one in pain or despair with your comfort  
and renew in each one a sense of dignity and purpose.  
Show them how much they matter to you and to us.

We pray for all those facing grief and loss in these difficult days  
when it is still so hard to gather for support.  
Stay with those who must rearrange their lives without their beloved.  
Give them strength and comfort through your promise of resurrection.  
We pray for communities challenged by forces beyond their control—  
natural disaster, political strife and the economic consequence of the pandemic.  
Give courage to those facing challenges, and wisdom to those who lead,  
so that well-being may be restored soon  
and hope for the future prevail.  
In the name of Christ our Risen Lord, Hear our prayer.

As Earth Day approaches this week,  
we remember before you the struggles within your creation,  
creatures losing habitat, unique species dying out, oceans filled with plastic,  
the climate warming and the havoc that results for all of us.  
Jesus, you are the firstborn of all creation;  
Help us to honour you by caring for the earth and its fragile balances  
in the ways we live and the priorities we set.  
In these ways, too, we would be your disciples  
and so we pray the words you taught us:

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## Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## Invitation to make an offering

God our Maker has given us life in a world filled with so much abundance. In Christ God have given us new life and abundant hope. There are people from different

churches and places following this service. As you offer your gifts to God this day to your church community...know they are part of God's abundance. May God bless them and bless us, that we may bring hope and new life in Christ's name to a world that so badly needs these gifts.

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If you would like to learn more about First Presbyterian, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of First Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay, visit our website at <https://fpresbyterian.ca> for more information.

## Hymn

### *Come to us, beloved Stranger*

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1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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!

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## Benediction

Go now, to be God's children in the world.  
Open your minds to understand the needs around you.  
Go now, to be Christ's servants in the world.  
Open your hands to share your blessings with all.  
Go now, to be the Spirit's hope for the world.  
Open your heart to welcome those who have no one to care for them.  
Go with love overflowing.

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