

# Easter 2

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April 27, 2003

## Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the festival of our Lord's resurrection. Graciously help us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## Acts 4:32-35

{32} Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. {33} With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. {34} There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. {35} They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

32. *private ownership held in common*: See Acts 2:44. This is a comment on early Christian social organization rather than a principle of Christian economics. In the ancient world the family was the primary location of economic activity. Families members shared material resources with other family members. When people became Christians they were alienated from their families. The early Christian community was shaped as a surrogate family for such people, and within the Christian community members shared material resources with other members as they had in their biological families.

34. *as many as owned lands or houses sold them*: Personal property was generally unknown. Individual ownership of land or houses would have been unusual except among the wealthy. To put such possessions at the disposal of the community would endanger the owners' economic security, and indicates the deep level of commitment of early Christians to each other. The general principle is addressed to Jesus' disciples: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor," (Luke 12:22, 33). [1]

35. *laid it [the proceeds of what was sold] at the apostles' feet and it was distributed*: There is a disjuncture between the selling of lands and property and the distribution to the needy. Those who possessed, sold. But they did not distribute. They did not act the role of "benefactors" in the ancient model. Instead they delivered the proceeds to the apostles, and they distributed. The needy were not beholden to the wealthy!

## Psalms 133

{1} How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! {2} It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. {3} It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Living together in unity, as in the early church, is good and pleasant, a foretaste of eternal life. For the early church this unity found expression in the common concern of all members of the community for each other. Jesus taught that the act of service was

fundamental to one's Christian identity, because he (Jesus) was a servant (Luke 22:24-27). Christians use the language of family, brother, sister, father, mother, to designate members of the community. God has promised that when we live in peace with each other "the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). Somewhere along the line Christians seem to have forgotten Jesus' teaching, and God's promise.

### 1 John 1:1-2:2

{1} We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- {2} this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- {3} we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. {4} We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. {5} This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. {6} If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; {7} but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. {8} If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. {9} If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. {10} If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. {2:1} My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; {2} and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

1-4: "the author of this Epistle is conscious of himself as having a personal authority, i.e., as being a representative of the bearers of the tradition." [2] He writes so his readers may be enlightened and be in fellowship with him, and those he represents, and finally, so the joy of the Church may be complete.

5. *God is light and in him there is no darkness at all:* For John this is the fundamental message of the Gospel. In sending Jesus God has brought light into the world; in him we see the world as it was intended by God to be; we see ourselves as God intended us to be.

6-10: Three times John equated denying sin with lying, and admonishes his readers to walk in the light, to confess their sins.

7. *we have fellowship with one another:* Fellowship in the Christian community is grounded in the "light" in which Christians walk.

2:1-2. *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ:* John is writing so his readers may avoid sin, but when they do they know that Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is their advocate with the Father.

### John 20:19-31

{19} 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." {20} After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. {21} Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." {22} When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. {23} If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." {24} But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. {25} 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." {26} 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." {27} 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." {28} Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" {29}

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." {30} Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. {31} 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.

*19. the evening of that day, the first day of the week:* It is the evening of the day of the resurrection. Cf. John 20:1.

*the Jews:* "This expression is to be explained on the grounds that the Jews are not regarded here as a people, but as a community hostile to Christians, from which the disciples (who are also of course Jews by birth) are to be basically distinguished. At the same time, this is an indication of the relationship of Jews and Christians towards the end of the first century CE." [3]

*Jesus came and stood among them:* Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, and Peter and the beloved disciple had seen the empty tomb. Now Jesus, not bound by physical conditions, comes to be with the disciples (except for Judas and Thomas). Luke's account of the appearance (Luke 24:36-43) differs a bit from John. In both cases, Jesus' appearance is intended to overcome the doubt of the disciples that Jesus had risen.

*I send you:* Jesus commissions the disciples. "The disciples and not just the twelve or an elite group or spiritual leaders enter into the office and position of Jesus. Power and service are joined." [4]

*22. he breathed on them "Receive the Holy Spirit":* In Greek the words for breath and for spirit are from the same root.

*23: if you forgive the sins of any if you retain the sins of any:* Cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:19. The Christian community has the power to forgive sins or not.

*24-29:* Thomas received only what second-generation Christians received, namely the testimony of eye-witnesses. But he does not believe; indeed he consciously refuses to do so. He is finally convinced by a special appearance of Jesus. We should remember Jesus' comment of the power of the resurrection to create faith in Luke 16:31, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." The Resurrection does not create faith; faith acknowledges the resurrection. "for the Evangelist, the true Christians are those of a later generation, who never saw an earthly nor the risen Jesus, but only knew the message that had been transmitted to them, with respect to which they came to faith. As a consequence, they, and not Thomas are blessed." [5]

*31. these are written so that you may come to believe:* What is written is not intended to record what happened, or to satisfy curiosity, but to create faith, and through faith, life in Jesus' name.

## Reflection

We pray that we may "show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do." That is a very daring prayer to say the least. To be a Christian is not just to claim to "believe" in Jesus. Being a Christian is not just one component among others in a successful life. To be a Christian is to live as Jesus lived in unity with one another, loving one another and caring for one another. It has ramifications for all aspects of life: financial, social, intellectual, political.

It is not a simplistic answer to the question, "What would Jesus do?" Rather it is the conscious and deliberate surrender of one's whole life to the will of God, even when God's will runs contrary to our personal comfort and well-being and desire.

## Hymns [6]

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).  
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson;  
G=Gospel

147--E--Hallelujah! Jesus

Lives

132 --D--Come, You Faithful,

400 --II--God, Whose

Almighty

658v --II--The Word of God

649v --II--I Want to Walk

724v --G--Shalom

641v --G--Peace Came to Earth

774v --G--Dona Obis Pace

675v --G--We Walk by (806s)

135, 139, 246, 779s,

129, 379, 806s/675v

## Prayers of the People [6]

A: A faithful Israel claimed the deliverance of their forebears as their own. Although centuries removed from Jesus' death and resurrection, by faith we do the same. We pray, "Hear us, dear Lord of life." We respond, C: Christ, save and keep us.

A: For Volunteers in Mission and those commissioned as full-time missionary servants, we ask that all may serve in the strength and power of our resurrected Lord. Hear us, dear Lord of life. C: Christ, save and keep us.

A: For the nations embroiled in questions of nuclear armaments and disarmament, we pray that peace may be preserved and reason control, in order that life may be pursued and death abhorred. Hear us dear Lord of life. C: Christ, save and keep us.

A: For those in hospitals or shut-away at home, especially \_\_\_\_\_, let hope arise. Let those who support and attend them be strengthened by the resurrection word. Hear us, dear Lord of life. C: Christ, save and keep us.

A: For those in the throes of death, we ask that they may trust our Lord for forgiveness and claim life eternal. Settle their hearts for a quiet and hopeful departure Comfort those who sorrow. Hear us, dear Lord of Life. C: Christ save and keep us.

*When the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness is not used, the following may be said:*

A: Forgive us for such dullness and sloth in our Christian living that the glory of Jesus' resurrection is eclipsed and our energies are given to selfish pursuits. Hear us, dear Lord of life. C: Christ, save and keep us.

P: We celebrate your coming through the locked doors of our fear, doubt, and unbelief. O Jesus, receive our unbroken praises. C: Amen.

## Or [7]

*Presider or deacon*

Gathered as believers in Christ, made one body through baptism, let us offer prayers to God for the living hope of all the world.

*Deacon or other leader*

For peace from on high and for our salvation.

For the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all.

For this holy gathering and for those who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

For our new brothers and sisters illumined by the light of Christ.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and

for all the holy people of God.

For the world and its leaders, our nation and its people.

For all those in need, the suffering and the oppressed, travelers and prisoners, the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who gives us eternal peace through Jesus Christ.

Hear our prayers which we offer in the hope of glory, and breathe upon us with your Holy Spirit. Glory to you for ever and ever.

## Notes

[1] This ideal family very quickly found it necessary to take on other organizational components. In Acts 6 the selection of deacons to oversee charitable activities replaced the direct involvement of the apostles, because "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2). Later, the community in Jerusalem could not respond to the needs of its members, and Paul urged the congregations he founded to send gifts to the poor in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 15:25-27).

[2] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, p. 11.

[3] Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 210.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

[6] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[7] [http://www.worship.ca/text/inter\\_b1.txt](http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_b1.txt)

[8] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>