

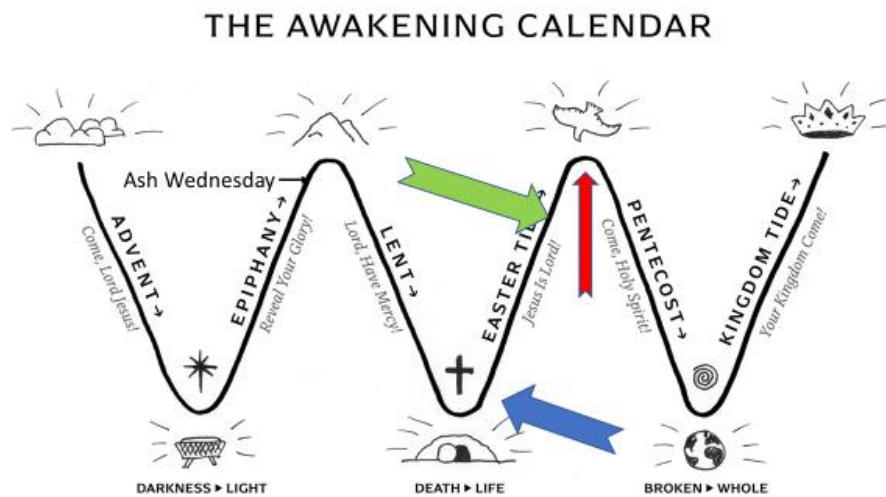
Sermon – April 24, 2022
“My Lord and my God!”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads to life eternal. Come, Lord Jesus, and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Good morning. It is a blessing to be with you this morning after a week of time with our grandchildren and family. Next Sunday we are going to make a change in our service. We are going to switch our Apostle’s Creed from the version we have been using, UMH 881, to the ecumenical version, UMH 882. The only difference we will notice are the additional words “he descended to the dead.” Now we might ask, “Why are we making this change?” Good question. Several weeks ago, during the Afton Bible study while we were discussing heaven, the question was asked about what happened to Jesus after he died on the cross. That is a question that I did not know the answer to and sent me into resources seeking an answer. After a good bit of reading and seeking answers, I learned that what the drafters of the Apostle’s Creed included in answer to that question was that Jesus descended to the place of the dead. I have not been able to find documentation for why these words were dropped in the UMC, but they are part of the original Apostles’ Creed. The Apostle’s Creed is not a United Methodist document. It is a document of the Church, the capital “C” Church. So, we are making the switch to the more original language.

If you have questions, please come and see me and I will share more about what I learned.



Let me update us on our progress on the Christian calendar. Last Sunday was Easter. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the shouts of “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” And then he descended down from the Mount of Olives to die on the cross, but as an Eastern Orthodox hymn states, “thus through death, death is defeated.” We are now at the first Sunday of Eastertide. This is the season when Jesus appears to his disciples and confirms his resurrection from the dead. Ascension Sunday is 40 days from Easter and is marked by the green arrow. This is the Sunday when we celebrate Jesus’ ascension in a resurrected body to heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God the Father. We will celebrate Ascension Sunday on May 29th. Our next arrow marks Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost occurs ten days after Jesus’ ascension and marks the end of the 50-day period of Eastertide and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We will celebrate Pentecost on June 5th. During the season of Eastertide, we will be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.

Let’s look briefly this morning at Jesus’ coming to the disciples on that first day of the week as John records it in his Gospel. John, in the 20th chapter of his Gospel, states the purpose of the Gospel as “that you may come to believe.” Throughout the Gospel, John has repeatedly stressed the idea of groups of people coming to belief in Jesus. Those groups are often split into a part that believes and those who do not. Those groups have included those who follow Jesus,

crowds who have been fed bread, Pharisees who have questioned Jesus, and even the crowds who praised Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem. John also repeatedly shows us groups of people who come to believe when they witness one of Jesus' signs, but then seem to fall away as they struggle with who Jesus is and what that means in the context of their understanding of God. In the upper room on the evening of the first day of the week, John begins to draw his readers deeper into the knowledge of who Jesus is and what belief in the resurrected Jesus means.

Let me call our attention to the action verbs that John uses as he describes Jesus' arrival in the locked upper room where the disciples are hiding in fear. John says that Jesus came, stood among them, and then spoke to them. Notice John does not say Jesus appeared to them as if in a vision, but Jesus came. We should see Jesus coming as fulfilling Jesus' promise that he will come again to the disciples. These actions John describes for us in this upper room encounter with Jesus give us additional physical actions to consider as we think about a resurrected Jesus. Notice that Jesus stands among those in the upper room. Jesus is not appearing at the far corner of the room in some manner distant from everyone, but has come and is standing among those gathered in the upper room as we do when we come into a room. There is a similarity or a parallel here to the angels' appearance earlier in the day at the tomb when they appeared among the women there and shared the Good News. Now it is Jesus who is among his disciples and will share Good News with them and confirm what the women have shared.

When Jesus comes, he speaks to those in the room the ancient Hebrew greeting of "Peace be with you." There are no words in Jesus' greeting telling those gathered "to not be afraid." The absence of these words points to Jesus' coming as real, physical, and nonthreatening. Notice that Jesus then shows those in the room his hands and side, the wounds he had received on the cross. It is at this point the disciples' response is recorded by John as "the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord." There is no fear. They recognize Jesus the risen Lord in his resurrected body, and they rejoice in Jesus' presence. Don't miss the connection here to the words of the women who came from the empty tomb earlier this day and shared the news, "We have seen the Lord." While John does not mention the women's testimony, he does connect to it as he writes about the disciples' response to the coming of Jesus into the upper room.

Notice in verse 21 that Jesus speaks again the same Hebrew greeting to those in the upper room and then he breathes on them. On the cross on Good Friday, Jesus breathed his last; here in the upper room Jesus breathes again! His breath is another example of a physical action pointing

to the physical nature of his resurrected body. There are no manifestations of the Holy Spirit seen in this giving of the Spirit by Jesus; instead, there is an empowering of the disciples to move into the mission Jesus has prepared and now enabled them to enter. As the Father sent Jesus to be the Good News, to defeat death through death, so now Jesus sends out the disciples to share this Good News that death has been defeated, our sins are forgiven, we are empowered to live a new life, and we have the promise of resurrection power. We should also keep in mind that in John's writing there is no second volume that addresses the coming of the Holy Spirit as there is with Luke's Gospel. In John's Gospel, the breathing of the Holy Spirit is within the Gospel.

John then opens the disciples to this same issue of belief and nonbelief that all other groups have experienced in this Gospel. Thomas was not present and has not seen the risen Lord as the others have who are now rejoicing. Just as the women came from the tomb with Good News and their words seemed like an idle tale to the apostles, so now those same disciples have shared the Good News with one of their own and their news has not been believed. Thomas will not believe unless he also is able to see Jesus and he wants to touch the risen Lord, verifying the wounds of the cross by his touch. I don't think we should give Thomas any special status as a doubter of Jesus' resurrection. He, like so many, seeks something he can touch and see to allow him to confirm Jesus' resurrection. A week later, which would be this Sunday, Thomas is given the grace he needs to believe. Jesus appears to the disciples again in the upper room. This time the doors are shut, but there is no mention of them being locked. It is as if the disciples are beginning to understand they are sent to the world and locked doors limit the world's access to the Good News, and with Jesus now present again, the locks are not needed. Notice the repetition in John's Gospel with Jesus' earlier coming. Jesus comes, stands among them, greets them, and then addresses Thomas directly, offering his hands for Thomas' sight and his side for Thomas' touch. There is no indication that Thomas touches Jesus; instead, he becomes the first to proclaim Jesus as God. Thomas' reply to Jesus is "My Lord and my God!" Mary Magdalene was the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples in John's Gospel, but Thomas is the first to proclaim Jesus as God. Through their proclamations, our understanding of Jesus continues to grow, moving from a resurrected Jesus, in a physical body who comes, stands among, speaks and breathes, to Jesus as Lord who is God. Thomas believes in Jesus because he has seen the risen Lord.

Jesus' response to Thomas' belief is to tell the disciples, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Jesus' reply points to those who have not yet seen the resurrected body of Jesus Christ, but believe in him as our Lord and Savior. Notice John points to the signs given in his Gospel as signs provided to bring belief in Jesus. We might recall that those signs include the changing of the water to wine at Cana, healing the royal official's son, healing the paralyzed man at the pool, feeding the 5000, walking on water, restoring the sight of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. John Wesley states in his comments on this passage that "Faith cometh sometimes by reading; though ordinarily by hearing." We may yearn, like Thomas for the hastening of the day when our faith will be sight, but most come to belief not by seeing, but by hearing the Word of God.

We might ask ourselves a reflection question that relates to the disciples' upper room experience, "What brought us to belief?" This is a great question for us to think about and seek to understand as we go out in the world interacting with nonbelievers. How would we answer this question about our own belief? Was it the love of others who shared the love of Christ with us? Did we have an encounter with Jesus? Did we come to the realization we are a sinner and need a Savior? Did we hear the word of God shared and our heart responded? Perhaps we have witnessed a transformed life that spoke to us of a better way of life. Maybe we read a Bible that someone placed in our hand or path and found the risen Lord through the reading of the Word. However we came to know Christ, we need to realize that we, like the disciples, are sent out as the Father sent Jesus and we are to be ready to share with others the hope that we now have within. Let me challenge us during this season of Eastertide to ponder our own encounter with Jesus and prepare to share our story with those we are sent to that they might hear and believe.

Pray with me: Jesus, you shared signs with the disciples that we might come to believe. Lord, we believe like Thomas that you are our Lord and our God. Jesus, breathe on us that we might become prepared to go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to those to whom you are sending us, so that they also may come to believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing, they may have life in your name. Amen.