

**April 7, 2024 – Second Sunday of Easter**

**“The Church of the Living God” by Pastor Julio Romero**

**Gospel: John 20:19-31**

Today’s Gospel keeps us on Easter Sunday, as we heard last Sunday the first person the Lord Jesus appeared to was Mary Magdalene. In the other Gospels the Lord appeared to a total of six women including Mary Magdalene. In today’s Gospel, He appears to his disciples, except for Thomas. Judas was no longer with them.

Imagine being in that room with his disciples. Why were they there? We can say that they were there to support each other, to feel safe as the doors of the room were locked for fear of the Jews as the Gospel says. They were there to listen to each other and to try to make sense of what Mary and the other women told them about the Lord’s resurrection.

That group of disciples presents a good picture of the first church. We say that the birth of the church happened on Pentecost Day, but I would move that date to Easter Sunday.

What is Church? We can say that the church is a gathering of disciples of Christ who come together to worship and serve the Resurrected Christ.

This is a very basic definition of what the church is. We know that there is more to it and Pr. Russ Blowers, in his summary of what the church is and does, helps us to see a bigger picture of the church. He said: "I’m with a global enterprise. We have branches in every country in the world. We have our representatives in nearly every parliament and boardroom on earth. We’re into motivation and behavior alteration.

We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centers, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for people from birth to death.

We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants. Our original Organizer owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere. I would add that wherever there is a baptized child of God there the church is. “

The story of Easter reveals what the church is and what it does. The first thing the church does is to witness to the Living Christ. It is interesting that the first witnesses

were women, six of them according to all the Gospels. They are all named, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of our Lord, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mary wife of Clopas and Salome the mother of James and John.

These are the women who saw and received the Good News of Jesus' resurrection, and, as we heard from this Gospel, on that same day, the Lord Jesus appeared to His inner group of disciples, and a week later to Thomas who wasn't with the group on Easter Sunday.

As we all know Thomas is known as the Doubting Disciple, which reminds me that the church of Christ has a place for everyone, even for doubters, for those who need to see to believe.

The church of the Risen Lord has a place for those who one day abandoned and denied Jesus; the Church of Christ has a place for those who live in fear.

As I ponder on the fear of the first members of the church of the Risen Lord, I wonder what the fears of today's church are. I would say that one of our fears is the death of the church of Christ.

This is not an unfamiliar fear. On the first Easter Sunday, the disciples were overwhelmed by fear, the fear that what happened to Jesus could happen to them. The fear of death was real for them; they could be arrested, tried, and condemned to the same kind of death Jesus suffered.

With the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, his Church was born too. The fearful disciples, who would not even dare to unlock the door, leave the room and venture into the streets of Jerusalem, were filled with courage. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and with the authority and mission to forgive sins and witness to the Living God.

This small church of about ten people was born with a purpose: to forgive sins, to spread the Good News, to be partners of God in the healing, loving and blessing of God's people.

The Church of Christ is getting smaller and smaller these days, at least in this part of the world. Fewer and fewer people are attending church or call themselves Christians. These days we worry how much time we have left, but let's look at how small it was when it first began. It began with a small group of fearful people who would not stand a chance without the Risen Christ and see what it became.

It tells us that as long as we keep trusting, witnessing to the Living God and doing what he has commanded us, it doesn't matter if it is only ten, twelve, or fourteen of us.

Serving three congregations opens my eyes to the different ways these three congregations witness to the Risen Lord. None of these three churches is a mega church with many resources. We are small, but each church trusts and loves the Resurrected Jesus and tries hard to follow His command.

Together we help young mothers with clothing and other items to care for their children, together we cook food at a soup kitchen for those in need, together we collect food and funds to support the local food bank, together we raise funds to donate to local community groups that provide services to the less fortunate, together we provide affordable housing to low income families, together we worship our Saviour Jesus Christ and do our best in loving one another.

Looking at all that these three small Lutheran Churches do, we realize that what we do is a lot, and there is more to add to this list of ministries and labour of love we do together.

Imagine what would be lost if one day we ceased to exist, one day we were no more. We should always remember that all we do is possible because of the presence of the Holy Spirit among us and the trust and love we have for the Risen Christ. This is how we celebrate and live out Jesus' resurrection as disciples and members of His church.

And what is even more amazing is that this witnessing doesn't end within these walls; it continues as we live our day-to-day lives, at home, at workplaces, in our social life, in our neighbourhoods and so forth.

We confess that the Resurrected Jesus now is in heaven, but his Holy Spirit is with us, empowering us to believe, forgive sins, serve, and worship Him. Let's pray that the Living God will take away from us the fear of the future of His church, the discouraging fact that we are small or that our days may be numbered because what really matters is that the Holy Spirit keeps our hearts burning to love, trust and serve Christ, and that's all we need to do. **Amen.**