

**Applewood United Church  
An Affirming Community  
Hybrid Worship for April 8, 2024  
Second Sunday of Easter**

(\*please stand in body or in spirit; **bold** print is for all)

**Prelude:** "How Majestic is Your Name"

**Land Acknowledgement and Announcements**

We understand that the land on which we live, work and worship is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory is mutually covered by the "Dish with One Spoon" Wampum Belt agreement. In the spirit of reconciliation, we commit to building relationships with all created beings, those who were here before, those who have settled, and those who continue to settle on this land. We commit to partnering with our Indigenous neighbours in being stewards and caretakers of God's Creation. Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we seek to live as reconciled people through our respect for, and our learning and understanding of, our Indigenous siblings.

**Centering Music:** "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" VU 602 Verse 1

Blest be the tie that binds  
our hearts in Christian love;  
the unity of heart and mind  
is like to that above.

**\*Call to Worship:**

Let us gather with hearts united,  
drawn together by the bonds of faith and the spirit of unity.

**WE GATHER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY** (*Psalm 133: a translation for today*)

One: How good, indeed, how pleasant it is,

**All: for a community to live as one.**

One: It is like precious oil on the head,

**All: running down upon the beard,**

One: the beard of Aaron,

**All: which flows down over his robes;**

One: like dew on Mount Hermon,  
which comes upon the mountains of Zion

**All: for there the LORD has ordained the blessing –  
life forever.**

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**\*Opening Hymn:** "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" VU 602 Verses 2,3,4

Before our Maker's throne  
we pour our ardent prayers;  
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,  
each other's burdens bear;  
and often for each other flows  
the sympathizing tear.

This glorious hope revives  
our courage on the way;  
that we shall live in perfect love  
in God's eternal day.

**\*Opening Prayer:**

One: How good, indeed, how pleasant it is, for a community to live as one

**All: For the early believers were of one heart and mind,  
sharing all they had, creating a harmonious melody of love.**

One: As we enter this sacred space,  
let us embrace the spirit of generosity and communal love,  
just as the early Christians did in Jerusalem.

**All: May our worship reflect this fellowship and unity –  
where no one claimed private ownership,  
but all things were held in common.**

One: In this shared sacred moment,  
let us open our hearts to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit,  
who moves among us, binding us together in love.

**All: We come, not as individuals alone,  
but as a community, where the needs of one are met by the abundance of another.**

One: Let our worship be a symphony of selfless love,  
echoing the chorus of the early believers,  
testifying to the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**All: Together, let us worship in unity,  
offering our hearts, minds, bodies,  
souls, and possessions,  
knowing that in our shared devotion  
we encounter the presence of the risen Christ.**

One: May our worship today be a testimony  
to the boundless hope, joy, grace and faith that unites us,  
over distance and time –

**All: One body, one family, gathered in love.  
Amen.**

**Scripture Readings:**

**Acts 4:32-35** - Inclusive Bible (Cathy Campbell)

The community of believers was of one mind and one heart. None of them claimed anything as their own; rather everything was held in common. The apostles continued to testify with great power to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they were all given great respect; nor was anyone needy among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them and give the money to the apostles. It was then distributed to any members who might be in need.

### **Thomas Reflecting** (Cathy Campbell)

I expected an argument, not-  
as you might think – for doubting  
We had all doubted, at different times, and he was never angry.  
He doubted himself, sometimes, or, if he didn't, he certainly understood  
how it felt, because he would sing the Psalms of doubt with great fervour  
Doubt wasn't an enemy to him. He could stand us doubting. He wouldn't stand for intolerance or  
apathy.  
I expected an argument perhaps for making conditions.  
I did that and I won't deny it.  
'If only I see this and do that...then I'll believe.'  
I had a lot of nerve thinking I could make conditions with God, but he didn't take me to task.  
He saw that I was happy because I had seen and he said that they were also happy who believed  
without making condition without saying 'If only' or 'unless.'  
I expected an argument, because I wasn't there when he first appeared  
The others were present, I was absent. I wasn't their fault or his fault. It was mine  
I had – for whatever reason decided that it was all finished  
He came back to say it was all beginning  
I expected an argument, but he didn't. He gave me his hand and, more than that, he gave me his peace.

### **Gospel John 20:19-31** - NRSV (Rev Alison)

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.

One: For the word of God in Scripture  
For the word of God among us  
For the word of God within us

**All: Thanks be to God**

**Choir:** "The Everliving Song"

**Sermon**

**\*Hymn:** "Draw the Circle Wide" MV 145  
Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.  
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,  
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

God the still-point of the circle,  
round whom all creation turns;  
nothing lost, but held forever,  
in God's gracious arms.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.  
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,  
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

Let our hearts touch far horizons,  
so encompass great and small;  
let our loving know no borders,  
faithful to God's call.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.  
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,  
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

Let the dreams we dream be larger,  
than we've ever dreamed before;  
let the dream of Christ be in us,  
open every door.

Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.  
Let this be our song, no one stands alone,  
standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

**Invitation to the Offering:**

I love this vision of the community of the early church. Those with the most resources used them to help make sure that no one was in need. Everyone fed, everyone clothed, everyone cared for: it is a model that we would do well to mirror, because then we are clearly living the Way of Jesus. So let us offer our gifts, following the example of the earliest Christians.

**Offering of Music:** "In the Upper Room"

**Sung Dedication:** "What Can I Do" MV 191  
What can I do? What can I bring?  
What can I say? What can I sing?  
I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.  
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

**\*Prayer of Dedication:**

**All: Dear God, we are thankful to be able to share our gifts in Christ's name. We wish to live out your vision for our lives. Please accept all our sacrificial gifts, those given now and those given through PAR and online, for ministries of this church and those of Mission and Service.**

**Prayer for Others / Intercession: *(Based on 1 John 1:1-22)***

Gracious God,  
As we lift our hearts in prayer,  
we intercede on behalf of Your beloved children,  
recognising the challenges and joys  
that shape our shared journey of faith.

We pray for those who, like the disciples,  
may be wrestling with doubt or fear.  
May the light of Your truth dispel the shadows,  
bringing reassurance and peace.  
Strengthen their faith and grant them the courage  
to walk boldly in Your light.

Lord, we intercede for those burdened by the weight of unconfessed sins.  
May the spirit of confession and repentance bring healing and restoration.  
Shower them with the assurance of Your forgiveness,  
cleansing them from all unrighteousness.

We lift those who long for genuine fellowship  
within the community of believers.  
May Your Spirit foster unity, understanding, and love,  
creating a bond that reflects the beauty of the fellowship  
the early Church aspired to.  
May our shared life be a testimony  
to the transformative power of Your grace.

We intercede for those who feel isolated or lonely,  
yearning for connection.  
Wrap them in the warmth of Your love  
and guide us to be instruments of companionship and support.  
May we actively seek out those in need  
and extend the hand of friendship.

God, in your mercy, we bring before You  
the broken relationships within our communities.  
Heal wounds, reconcile hearts, and inspire forgiveness.  
May the love that binds us together overcome any discord,  
and may *our* unity reflect the unity found in Your Triune nature.

We pray for those facing adversity, illness, or distress.  
Embrace them with Your comforting presence  
and grant them strength to endure.

Use us, Your church, as channels of Your love,  
bringing practical help and compassion to those in need.

In our intercession, we remember those  
who have not yet encountered the fullness of Your light.  
Illuminate their hearts and minds,  
drawing them into the fellowship of believers.  
May our lives be living testimonies,  
inviting others into the transformative relationship found in Christ.

And now Lord, we bring before You the names and situations  
that lie heaviest on our hearts.

Loving God, as we intercede for these needs,  
we place our trust in Your boundless love and mercy.  
In Jesus' name, we pray.  
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer (spoken)  
Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**\* Closing Hymn:** "Christ is Alive" VU 158  
Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
The cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
but saving, healing, here and now,  
and touching every place and time.

In every insult, rift, and war,  
where colour, scorn, or wealth divide,  
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth,  
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,

and find the way, the life, the truth,  
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive, and comes to bring  
good news to this and every age,  
till earth and sky and ocean ring  
with joy, with justice, love and praise.

**\*Blessing / Closing Prayer:**

Remember God loves you.  
May the Spirit of unity hover over your hearts like a gentle dove,  
knitting you together in the love of Christ.  
May your bonds of fellowship be strong,  
your understanding deep,  
and your shared purpose unwavering.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
may the peace, grace, strength, joy and love,  
given so freely by God  
be your constant companion,  
not to be kept, but to be offered in fellowship  
and shared with all whom you meet. Amen.

**\*Choral Benediction: "Peace Be With You" MV 215**

Peace be with you, peace forever,  
Peace be with you, my friends.  
Till we meet again, may God be with you.  
Peace, peace, peace.

**Sermon**

The disciples have locked themselves up in fear of retribution from the Jewish elite and the Roman authorities. The stone was rolled away and accounts given that Jesus is no longer in the tomb but risen. One of the disciples seemed to have missed Easter, and has arrived in a state of wonder, doubt, disbelief of guilt for having missed the appearance of the risen Lord. Today's listeners of Thomas have their own views. We are a scattered people, distraught by a denial of what was once promised. Our church is wavering by public opinion, often demoralized by the loss of hope for a future. Like Thomas, we have heard stories of the resurrection, and we desire the intrusion of Jesus to believe. It is still the first day of the week, according to the written record. So much happened from sunrise to evening on that day to turn the world into an astonishment. For us today, we can linger in the original testimony. For some, it is still news that the entire witness to the resurrection began on the testimony of women. Like a viral video, this report is not easily upstaged. This week's passage is told as the fourth resurrection report according to the John.

First, a mourning Mary discovers an empty tomb and, perplexed, reports this news to Peter and the other, unnamed, disciple whom Jesus loved; and a new scene emerges. There, a mystified couple of disciples race to the tomb, entering the space to find the linen that wrapped the body of Jesus, but, as

Mary said: no body. What it is the beloved disciple believes, the writer confirms, is believed without seeing the body, without knowledge of the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead, and without the testimony of others who have indeed seen Jesus. Before this week's passage, the writer turns back to Mary—the third report and first sighting. It is this testimony of something a woman said, that prepares us for this week's witness to the resurrection. Disciples have gathered. Here, the record does not specify how many, as in other places (6:66-67; 20:24), but Thomas is not present. The unconfirmed rumors of the resurrection started by Mary has brought neither understanding nor obedience. Perplexity and amazement, cynicism and unbelief. The disciples are clueless concerning the meaning of Jesus' death, disappointed by this presumed dashing of their hopes, and astounded by reports of the empty tomb (not much has changed).

The disciples are fearful. Good news does not erase fear. Good news, incredible news, can ignite hope, but even hope does not eliminate genuine fear. So, there they were in a familiar place desperate with unfamiliar fear. An empty tomb isn't enough to confirm all that Jesus promised is true. What does the resurrection mean? It means God still shows up. The writer of this gospel account continues to rehearse elements of the storied witness to God as testimony to Jesus. Like God finding the first couple behind trees, the disciples are found behind closed doors, perplexed by the knowledge they have. Jesus shows up. (Now you want to talk about fear ...) Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." No doubt it was Jesus. They recognized the scars. They see the stripes on his back and the hole in his side. And in recognition, John says they rejoiced. Astonished, ashamed, afraid, the intruder into their hidden place which may have needed peace. God is (still) with us! And Jesus, like God breathing life into the first human, breathed on the disciples. The prospect of insight comes with the intrusion of Jesus—for the Spirit of God proceeds from him and in so doing, opens the eyes of the disciples. Which brings us to the rest of the story. What they saw is all Thomas desires. Too often the focus here is on Thomas' doubt. But Thomas was not present when Jesus showed up on the other side of a locked door to greet fearful followers with peace and the instruction to forgive.

Thomas' request is merely for what the other's experienced. The wonder of this moment is Jesus' willingness to meet Thomas exactly where Thomas names he needs meeting. Thomas names what Jesus knew his disciples needed. The doors are shut. Jesus appears, nail scars and all. His offering of peace is followed by a demonstration of forgiveness— no condemnation for Thomas' request—a simple invitation. The disciples rejoiced, but Thomas' response is praise. There is a difference. The question Jesus does ask foreshadows those who will believe because of the testimony of these witnesses. In this inquiry and promised blessing, what the one whom Jesus calls Father sent him to do, Jesus assigns his followers. Jesus sends these followers out with the mission of forgiving the sins Jesus' death has taken away.

The whole of this is neither about phantom appearance nor even a doubting disciple. It is how to tell of a world when the divine shows up in disaster. It is how to tell of a world when forgiveness is forever possible. It is how to tell of a world when a woman's witness welcomes wonder. It is how to tell of a world when life is to know the God whose mission is to forgive sins and reconcile communities scattered by oppression. There are many stories to be told, but these stories confirm Jesus' identity as the one who has the divine prerogatives to give life and exercise God's rule. It is this message that makes possible the myriads surrounding the throne and singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12). Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.