

EASTER SEASON PLANNING GUIDE

2025



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GOD'S WORD IS LIFE

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Pastoral Reflection on Preaching the Easter Season

by Pastor Mark Anderson

There's a temptation in the Easter season to turn the resurrection into a success story. To preach Christ as if he rose to give us a better attitude, a better life strategy, or a model of triumph to follow. But Easter doesn't crown our efforts. It ends them. The empty tomb is not a reward. It is a shock. It is God's own "*nevertheless*" in the face of sin, death, and hell. When the women arrived to anoint a dead body, they were instead told, "*He is not here.*" That is not what they came looking for. That is not what we expect either.

The gospel does not come to improve the old creature, but to slay it and raise a new one. That's Easter preaching. Not encouragement. Not technique. But the Word that kills and makes alive.

I remember once, after preaching on the risen Christ who forgives the very ones who abandoned him, a woman came up to me and said, "Pastor, I don't know how to live anymore." And I said, "Good. Now we're getting somewhere." That's not cruelty—it's the mercy of a God who undoes us in order to remake us.

Luther puts it bluntly: "*The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.*" (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518) Resurrection doesn't meet you at your best. It meets you where all your strength is gone. The theology of the cross teaches us that God is most clearly revealed not in displays of power, but in the weakness and foolishness of the cross. And that includes the risen Lord who still bears the wounds.

The Easter Christ does not erase Good Friday. He embodies it. The marks in his hands are not scars to be hidden; they are the signs of God's faithfulness in suffering. As a pastor who has walked with people through hospital rooms, courtrooms, and gravesides, I've learned that resurrection hope is not a pep talk. It's "*Christ for you,*" right in the pit.

Preaching in the Easter season, then, is not about getting louder. It's about getting clearer. Christ is risen *for you*. Not to give you a second chance at the law, but to deliver you from it. Not to inspire your striving, but to *put it to death* and raise you up in him.

So we do not preach Easter as if it's a motivational slogan. We preach it as the inbreaking of God's strange and beautiful mercy, in the most unexpected places.

If I could offer one piece of encouragement to fellow preachers this season, it would be this: Don't trade the wounds for fireworks. Don't make the resurrection less than what it is. A Word that descends into death and brings sinners out. Preach it for the dying, the doubting, the worn out. Preach the resurrection like it's the last thing anyone ever expected. Preach it, and the Good Lord will raise the dead!

INTRODUCTION TO THE EASTER SEASON:

Raised by the Word, Held in the Promise

Easter is not the end of the story. It's the *beginning*. Not the conclusion to a tragic season, but the breaking in of a new creation. Not a soft spring metaphor for fresh starts, but the announcement of a concrete, crucified, risen Christ alive for us and coming straight into our locked rooms.

This planning guide centers on the *Gospel readings* for each Sunday. Each Gospel text presents the living voice of Jesus: calling, forgiving, healing, confronting, and ultimately giving himself for the life of the world.

The Gospel is not a springboard for general themes or moral instruction but the proclamation of the promise: Christ crucified and risen for you. In the spirit of the Reformation, where the Gospel is rightly heard, faith is created, sin is forgiven, and the church is made new, this guide exists to help pastors, worship leaders, and congregations return again and again to the one thing needful: Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

As we open God's Word,
We'll hear Him call to tired disciples, casting nets in empty water.
We'll watch Him build fires on the beach and serve breakfast to failures.
We'll listen as He prays—not for the best version of us, but for the ones He's already claimed.
We'll hear Him speak to the paralyzed, the doubtful, the disqualified. And every time, His Word does what it says.

We enter Easter not as spectators but as the *baptized people of God*. Baptism is not a symbol of our decision. It is not a ritual of belonging to a club. Baptism is death. And resurrection. Baptism is being joined to the One who was nailed down and raised up. Baptism is being pulled into the same story we've been hearing, of sinners forgiven, of the dead raised by a Word.

So if your nets are empty—good. If your faith is clumsy—welcome. If you feel like your story disqualifies you—take heart. You're right where Easter meets you.
Because the Risen Christ is not waiting for you to make your way to Him.
He comes to you, with wounds still showing. With mercy still flowing.
He calls you by name, feeds you at His table, and sends you, washed, raised, and held.
This is the Easter season: Not our rising, but *His*. And by baptism, His resurrection is now *yours*.
Christ is risen. He is risen *indeed*—for you.

WEEKLY PLANNING GUIDE

Easter 2

Theme: Christ meets doubt not with shame but with mercy. Faith comes through the wounds, not through proof.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** *That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright* (LBW 144)
- **ELW:** *O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing* (ELW 386)
- **ReClaim:** *These Things Did Thomas Count as Real* (ReClaim 142)
- **LHS:** *The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done* (LHS 119)

Greek Word Study ~ John 20:19–31

1. εἰρήνη (eirēnē) – “Peace” (vv. 19, 21, 26)

"Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"

This peace is not simply the absence of conflict, nor is it a soothing sentiment. It is a word spoken into fear, guilt, shame, and death. The crucified and risen Christ speaks peace not as a wish but as a gift. This peace comes through the wounds—it is peace with God, purchased through the cross. When Jesus says “Peace be with you,” it is not metaphorical. It is the real-time application of reconciliation, delivered by his own presence and Word.

The peace declared here is the end of striving, the cessation of the law’s accusation. It’s not peace because things are going well. It’s peace because the Crucified is now the Risen One who brings God’s verdict of mercy.

2. ἐδείκνυσεν (edeiknysen) – “He showed” (v. 20)

"He showed them his hands and his side."

This verb marks a revealing not of strength, but of wounds. Jesus shows what we often try to hide—his suffering and death. He does not cover over the cross; he exposes it as the very place where God’s glory is made known. This is a theology that points not to the hidden majesty of God, but to his revealed weakness.

By showing his wounds, Christ proclaims: *This is who I am for you. Not power abstracted from pain, but power revealed through death and given in mercy.*

3. ἀπέσταλκέν / πέμπω (apestalken / pempō) – “Sent” (v. 21)

"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

This language of sending is the sending of the crucified Christ. As the Son was sent into the world not to make humanity better at the law, but to die for it, now the disciples are sent, not to manage, dominate, or fix the world, but to proclaim forgiveness in Christ's name.

Their mission is not a strategy. It is participation in the same sending that led Jesus to the cross. To be sent by Jesus is to be given over to the world as bearers of mercy, not masters of power.

4. ἐνεφύσησεν (enephysēsen) – “He breathed on them” (v. 22)

"He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

This deliberate echo of Genesis 2:7 is striking. Just as God breathed life into Adam, now Christ breathes new creation life into the disciples. But this new life does not come with heroic moral renewal. It comes with a very specific Spirit, the Spirit that forgives sins.

This is the breath of the crucified Christ. What he breathes into them is not general spirituality but a Word with teeth, the authority to forgive. It is the life that comes only after death, the Spirit given by the one who went into death and came out the other side for us.

5. ἀφῆτε / κεκρατήνται (aphēte / kekratēntai) – “You forgive / they are held” (v. 23)

"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

This is the heart of the passage. The verbs here are not symbolic or hypothetical, they are performative. When sins are forgiven, they really are gone. When they are retained, they are held. The authority to forgive is not a secondary church function. *It is the very instrument of resurrection.*

This is the Word that kills and makes us alive. It exposes sin and declares the end of it in the name of Jesus. The church is entrusted with a scandalous thing: the very voice of God's mercy, spoken into ears that still ring with accusation.

6. πιστεύοντες (pisteuontes) – “Believing” (v. 31)

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

Faith here is not an achievement or intellectual conclusion. It is being caught up into a new reality—the reality of life through the death and resurrection of Christ. This participle suggests an ongoing dependence, a daily clinging to the promise.

Belief is not something we generate. It is what the Word creates. The purpose of Scripture, then, is not information, but proclamation: it delivers Christ, and in delivering him, it delivers life.

Gospel Commentary

Christ Enters Locked Rooms (John 20:19–23)

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'"

The disciples are behind locked doors—trapped by fear, guilt, and shattered hopes. This is the condition of those who have come to the end of themselves. The One they followed has been crucified, and now they hide, exposed and uncertain. But the risen Christ does not wait for them to come to him. He enters their locked room. He enters their fear.

His first word is not instruction or rebuke. It is *peace*. This peace is not abstract, not a mere greeting, but a reality given through the wounds he bears. He shows them his hands and side—not proof of survival, but the very marks of the cross. This peace is not peace apart from death, but peace born *through* it.

Then he sends them. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Not with power, but with a Word: the authority to forgive sins. The church's ministry is born not in moral superiority or strategic strength but in the Spirit-breathed gift of forgiveness. The risen Christ does not offer the Spirit as a general feeling or vague empowerment but ties it directly to the Word that forgives. Forgiveness is not a byproduct of the gospel—it *is* the gospel. Here, in this breath and this Word, sinners are raised from death.

Faith and the Wounds (John 20:24–28)

"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Thomas wants what many of us want: certainty on our own terms. He voices the deep resistance of the old self—the part of us that wants to remain in control, that demands visible proof before trust. He won't believe unless he can touch the wounds himself. It's a form of self-protection, a refusal to die to one's own conditions for faith.

But Christ comes, again, to the locked room. And he does not shame Thomas. He condescends to him, meets him in his doubt, and invites him to touch what Thomas thought he needed. Not to confirm Thomas's terms, but to put them to death.

When Thomas sees the wounds, he doesn't merely acknowledge evidence—he *confesses*: “My Lord and my God!” The hands and side are not just convincing signs—they are the source of faith. Jesus does not stand before Thomas in glory and triumph, but as the crucified one, risen and still bearing

the marks. This is what brings Thomas to faith—not power, but mercy. Not divine spectacle, but *wounded presence*.

Faith does not arise from mastery, but from being encountered by the One who has died and is alive again—for you.

The Word That Creates Life (John 20:29–31)

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe... These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

This final word is not a critique of Thomas, but a promise for all who come after. Seeing is not believing. Believing is hearing—and being made new by what is heard. Those who have not seen and yet believe are blessed not because their faith is blind, but because it clings to a promise that is spoken, not seen.

Faith comes by being addressed by the risen Christ through the Word. The gospel is not a record for our examination. It is proclamation. These things are written not as biography but as invitation and resurrection—so that you may believe, and in believing, live.

What gives life is Christ himself, crucified and risen, given to you in the Word. This is no distant theology. This is the event by which dead people are raised. Sinners are forgiven. The old self dies. The new self lives. All by the Word that delivers what it says: *Peace be with you*.

SERMON: Christ Enters Locked Rooms John 20:19–31

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's begin here: the doors are locked. That's where the disciples are. Shut in, not just by wood and iron, but by fear, guilt, and failure. Sound familiar? Maybe you know that room. Maybe you've built it. We do it all the time. We close ourselves in. Hide. Protect what little is left. Try not to feel too much. Try not to hope too much. Try not to remember what went wrong.

And then *He* shows up.

Jesus doesn't wait for the doors to open. He doesn't wait for the right prayer or the right mindset. He doesn't demand courage. He simply enters. He steps into the fear, into the failure, into the hiding—and He speaks.

Not, “What happened to your faith?”
Not, “Where were you when I needed you?”
But, “Peace be with you.”

And it’s not just a greeting. It’s a *Word*. The kind of Word that creates what it says. The peace He gives isn’t spiritual advice; it’s the very peace that comes through His wounds. He shows them His hands and His side. The cross still speaks. The wounds still breathe.

And then He sends them. Not with a five-point plan. Not with a marketing strategy. But with forgiveness. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And He breathes on them. The Spirit isn’t an abstract force; it’s breath, the living, creative Word of God, and it carries one thing: forgiveness. The church is born not from success but from this—sinners, forgiven and sent.

And then there’s Thomas.

Thomas, who missed the meeting. Thomas, who says what many of us are too polite to say: “Unless I touch the wounds myself, I will not believe.” He wants faith on his own terms. Proof. Certainty. Control. But Jesus doesn’t scold him. He returns—again, into a locked room—and this time, it’s for Thomas. He offers His wounds. Not to satisfy Thomas’s demands but to bring him to the end of them.

And that’s exactly what happens. Thomas doesn’t just say, “Okay, I believe now.” He says, “*My Lord and my God!*” The wounds don’t convince him. They convert him. Because faith isn’t a decision—it’s what happens when the crucified and risen Jesus meets you in your doubt and still calls you His own.

And then, this final Word: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

That’s you. That’s me. That’s the church, hearing this Word that doesn’t fade across time and space. *These things are written*—not as trivia or history, but as proclamation. So that you may believe. And believing, have life.

Life is not found in your record, your feelings, your spiritual progress. Life is in *His name*. The name in which you were baptized. And His name comes with wounds. With peace. With forgiveness.

So hear it again, as if for the first time: Peace be with you. Not a suggestion. Not a wish. A Word that does what it says. Bringing that peace the world neither knows nor gives.

The peace of God that passes all understanding, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Easter 3

Theme: Grace reframes failure. Jesus restores and sends the fallen.

Hymn Suggestions:

- **LBW:** *With High Delight Let Us Unite* (LBW 140)
- **ELW:** *Come and Fill Our Hearts* (ELW 528)
- **ReClaim:** *Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain* (ReClaim 145)
- **LHS:** *Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness* (LHS 145)

Greek Word Study ~ John 21:1-19

1. ἐμφανίζω (emphanizō) – “appeared”

“Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples...” (John 21:1)

This word means more than just showing up—it implies a *manifestation*, a self-revealing that we can't force or control. Christ appears not because the disciples were seeking him rightly, but because He wills to be known. The initiative is entirely His. The disciples' night of failure sets the stage for a revelation that undoes all illusions of self-sufficiency. Grace is not the result of human pursuit. It breaks in, uninvited, and exposes our empty nets.

2. ἐπυνήσατο (epynēsato) – “he called out / asked”

“Jesus called out to them, ‘Friends, haven't you any fish?’” (John 21:5)

This word suggests an inquiry or question that probes. But here, Jesus isn't looking for information. He is revealing their lack. His question exposes the truth: *they have nothing*. This is the divine diagnosis, not to condemn but to prepare them for the gift. It's a confrontation, yes, but gently done. A word that dismantles any illusion of spiritual productivity apart from Him. The Word here does what it always does—*kills and makes alive*.

3. βάλετε (balete) – “cast / throw”

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat...” (John 21:6)

This command is simple, even absurd to seasoned fishermen. But the Word of Christ doesn't ask for agreement or insight—it commands. This is how faith is born: not through rational comprehension but through a Word that comes from outside us. The net-breaking abundance that follows isn't proof of reward for obedience. It's the consequence of divine speech that creates what it demands, as in the promise of baptism. This is not moral advice but *creative address*.

4. ἀγάπας / φιλεῖς (agapas / phileis) – “Do you love me?”

(John 21:15–17)

The interplay between agapē (self-giving love) and philia (affectionate love) is subtle but profound. Jesus begins with the lofty term, but by the third time, He descends to Peter’s level—“Do you love me (phileis)?” This isn’t a downgrade but a descent of grace. Jesus meets Peter not at his strength but at the weakness of his affection. Faith here is not an achievement but a broken, stammering confession—“*You know... that I love you.*” The call is not grounded in the purity of Peter’s love, but in Christ’s relentless mercy.

5. βόσκει / ποιμαίνει (boske / poimaine) – “Feed / Shepherd”

“Feed my lambs... take care of my sheep...” (John 21:15–17)

These verbs are not institutional job descriptions. They are cruciform vocations. To *feed* and *shepherd* is to serve under the shadow of a cross, to be given a flock not of your choosing, to love the unlovable. The call flows not from personal worth but from forgiveness received. Ministry, then, is not reward but assignment – a call. An entrusting of sheep to one who has learned that love is not earned but given.

6. ἀκολουθεῖ (akolouthēi) – “Follow me”

“Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’” (John 21:19)

This is not an invitation to self-improvement but to surrender. It comes *after* Jesus has foretold Peter’s death. The road is not one Peter would ever choose—it leads to a cross. To “follow” here means to be led by another, even into suffering, even unto death. It is not about building your life for God, but losing it in Christ. The Christian life is not a plan to execute, but a path you are seized by.

Gospel Commentary

Empty Nets, Abundant Grace (John 21:1-6)

“Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered. He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”

The passage opens with the disciples adrift, returning to fishing after Jesus’ resurrection, unsure of what comes next. Their night of toil yields nothing, a vivid picture of human effort exhausted and empty. Then, at dawn, Jesus appears on the shore—unrecognized—and tells them to cast their nets

on the right side. The overflowing catch that follows isn't a result of their experience on the lake but His word breaking into their futility. This moment reveals a truth: life and abundance flow not from our labor but from divine action that precedes and empowers us. The nets, straining yet unbroken, testify to grace so vast it defies our capacity to contain it, pointing to a God who gives beyond measure.

The Fire of Fellowship (John 21:7-14)

"Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

When the beloved disciple identifies Jesus, Peter's response is immediate and raw. He leaps into the sea, swimming toward the Lord. This impulsive act contrasts with his earlier denial, yet there's no hint of rebuke. Jesus is already on the shore, cooking fish over a fire, a scene of humble hospitality. The charcoal fire recalls Peter's betrayal (John 18:18), but here it becomes a place of nourishment, not shame. Grace doesn't demand we erase our past. That is beyond us, at any rate. Instead, Christ reframes our past through divine presence. The Living Christ is making all things new. Jesus invites them to eat, meeting them in their hunger, both physical and spiritual, with no preconditions. It's a quiet, earthy revelation of a God who seeks us out and sustains us, turning failure into fellowship.

Love and the Weight of Mercy (John 21:15-17)

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.' The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'"

After breakfast, Jesus turns to Peter with a piercing question: "Do you love me?" Asked three times, it mirrors Peter's three denials, but this isn't about settling a score. Each exchange strips Peter's self-assurance, moving from bold claims to a humbled, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." The shift in terms from "agape" (selfless love) to "phileo" (brotherly love) doesn't mark a failure but a grace that receives Peter's honest, flawed affection. With each answer, Jesus commissions him: "Feed my lambs," "Take care of my sheep," "Feed my sheep." This is a purpose

born of unearned love. Human sin and weakness do not disqualify us. God's call rests on His initiative, not our merit.

Bound by Love, Led by Another (John 21:18-19)

"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Jesus closes with a sobering prophecy: Peter's life will end not by his own design but by another's hands, a death that glorifies God. "Follow me," He says, binding this future to the present call. This isn't a promise of ease but a promise that Peter belongs to a will beyond his control. The theology here is unflinching: discipleship isn't about mastering our fate but being claimed by a love that leads where we wouldn't choose. Peter's restoration leads to a path defined by divine purpose, not human ambition. It's a stark reminder that our strength does not save us. We are held in purposes that begin and end with God.

SERMON: Empty Nets, Abundant Grace John 21:1-19

Dear friends in Christ,

Some days end like this one: tired arms, empty nets, and no idea what comes next.

The disciples have seen the Risen Christ. Twice. And still, they go fishing. Not because they're sure of their purpose, but because they don't know what else to do. They go back to the boat. Back to what's familiar. But now even the familiar doesn't work. All night on the water. Not a single fish. Nothing to show for their labor but silence and exhaustion.

And then—at dawn—Jesus shows up.

He stands on the shore, not announcing His glory, but asking the most gutting question: "Friends, haven't you any fish?" In other words, "How's all this working out for you?"

We've all been there. Casting our nets into relationships, careers, plans, churches—even our own faith lives—only to come up empty. But Jesus doesn't appear to critique the effort. He doesn't scold their failure. He simply speaks: "Throw your net on the right side."

And suddenly the nets strain under abundance. Grace erupts not from their experience, not from their effort, but from His *Word*. That's how it always happens. He speaks, and the emptiness fills. He commands, and suddenly there is more than enough.

That's the gospel. Not a reward for good technique. Not a prize for those who try harder. It's Christ interrupting futility with grace that overflows.

And then comes the fire.

Peter, soaked from jumping into the sea, comes ashore not to a lecture but to breakfast. A charcoal fire, some bread, and fish already prepared. It's an ordinary meal in an extraordinary moment. And there's no "I told you so." No list of Peter's failures. Just Jesus, cooking on the beach.

The fire is no accident. It echoes another charcoal fire, where Peter denied Jesus three times. But now, the fire is not about betrayal. It's about fellowship. Jesus doesn't erase Peter's past. He reframes it. He doesn't pretend the denial never happened—He absorbs it, burns it away in mercy.

"Do you love me?" Jesus asks—not once, not twice, but three times. It's not a trap. It's a restoration. Peter, broken and honest, can only answer, "You know I love you." Not perfectly. Not proudly. Just... *you know*. And Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

So let's be clear: This is not a story about second chances. This is a story about resurrection. The Peter who answers now is not the same as the one who boasted he'd never fall away. That man died—and this one was raised by mercy. And from that mercy, Jesus entrusts him with people. Not because Peter got it right, but because Jesus is making all things new.

And then the final word: *Follow me*.

Not just to the shore, but to the cross. "When you were young, you went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will be led where you do not want to go." That's the shape of discipleship. Not self-determination, but the vocation of surrender. The future won't be Peter's design. But it will glorify God.

Here's the truth: you don't have to fish perfectly. You don't have to carry your past alone. And you don't have to know where you're going. The Risen Christ stands on the shore of your life, calling out, feeding failures, and turning empty nights into mornings filled with grace.

So today, hear Him say it again: "Peace be with you."

Because the One who was crucified is alive. In baptism's promise, He's already made His way into your story. The good Lord is not waiting for you to clean it up but meeting you in the middle of it, with abundance, mercy, and a real future.

Amen.

EASTER 4

Theme: Christ calls His own by name. Faith comes by hearing. No one snatches us from His hand.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* (LBW 456)
- **ELW:** *Shepherd Me, O God* (ELW 780)
- **ReClaim:** *The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want* (ReClaim 143)
- **LHS:** *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us* (LHS 115)

Greek Word Study

1. εἰ ἐγὼ εἶμι (ei egō eimi) – “If you are...”

“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” (John 10:24)

The crowd’s conditional plea—*“If you are...”*—reveals our age-old temptation to domesticate God. This isn’t a question asked in faith but an ultimatum: show us on our terms. The problem is not a lack of clarity, but a demand for a kind of messiah we can manage, a manageable salvation. But God does not submit to cross-examination. He does not justify Himself before us. The question “if” exposes unbelief’s desire for mastery over revelation. But God’s “I AM” will not be contained by “if you are.”

2. λέγω (legō) – “I told you”

“I did tell you, but you do not believe.” (John 10:25)

This verb reflects not mere speech but a decisive declaration. Jesus is not playing coy. He has *already said* what needs to be said, not just with words but with works. His words and works are one. The problem is not a failure to reveal but the refusal to hear. In the theology of the cross, the Word spoken is the event itself. The unbelief isn’t due to lack of data. It’s the resistance of the old self to the God who refuses to play by our categories. The Word disrupts, destabilizes, offends, and crucifies. That’s why it’s rejected.

3. οὐ πιστεύετε (ou pisteuete) – “you do not believe”

“...but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.” (John 10:26)

This isn’t a neutral observation—it’s a theological indictment. Faith, here, is not something you muster to prove you’re in—it is evidence that you already belong. To say “you do not believe” is to expose the illusion that belief can be manufactured. The order is shocking: you don’t

believe *because* you are not His. Belief is not the doorway into God's favor—it's the fruit of having already been claimed. Election precedes faith. Grace chooses, then faith follows.

4. ἀκούουσιν (akouousin) – “they listen / hear”

“My sheep listen to my voice...” (John 10:27)

This is not passive reception—it is surrender. The hearing that Jesus describes is not informational, it's existential. His voice cuts through all competing voices, calls into death, and creates a new being. The sheep don't decide to become sheep by hearing; they hear *because they are already His*. The voice does not call the worthy, motivating them—it calls the dead and gives life. It is not we who make ourselves hearers; the Word makes hearers of us.

5. δίδωμι (didōmi) – “I give”

“I give them eternal life...” (John 10:28)

This word captures the heart of the matter. Eternal life is *gift*, not transaction. There's no deal, no spiritual climbing, no moral calculus—just pure giving. And it's not a future possibility; it's a present declaration. Christ gives, and what He gives, He gives entirely. Here grace is not potential, it is present tense. The giving precedes response, just as the Word creates faith rather than waits for it. We don't come to eternal life—it comes to us.

6. ἓν ἐσμεν (hen esmen) – “we are one”

“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)

This is the theological earthquake. The oneness of the Son and the Father is not abstract metaphysics: it is the ground of our assurance. What the Son does, the Father does. What the Son holds, the Father holds. There's no daylight between their will to save. In this unity, we are secure—not because our faith holds firm, but because the Son and the Father do. Grace is not a possibility—it is a Person who cannot be divided, and whose word does not fail.

Gospel Commentary

Demanding Clarity, Missing Revelation

“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'” (John 10:22-24)

The scene unfolds during the Festival of Dedication, with Jesus walking in the temple courts. The crowd presses Him, demanding clarity: “If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Their question reveals a human longing for control, a desire to pin down God’s identity on our terms. Yet, this moment sets the stage for a deeper truth: God’s revelation doesn’t bend to our demands. Theologically, it suggests that understanding comes not from our insistence but from what God chooses to disclose. God owes us no explanations. The tension here isn’t about Jesus withholding truth, it’s about a people unprepared to hear what’s already been revealed.

You Do Not Believe Because You Are Not Mine

"Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.'" (John 10:25-26)

Jesus’ response cuts through their challenge: “I did tell you, but you do not believe.” He points to His works—miracles, healings, signs done in the Father’s name pointing to His identity. Belief, however, isn’t a matter of proof; it’s tied to belonging. “You do not believe because you are not my sheep,” He says, flipping the usual logic. It’s not that belief earns a place among His flock; rather, being His sheep enables belief. Faith isn’t a human achievement but a gift rooted in divine choosing, election. The works testify, yet only those already drawn by the Shepherd hear His voice in them.

Held by the Voice That Knows Us

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28)

Now Jesus describes His sheep: they listen to His voice, He knows them, and they follow. This relationship isn’t forged by their effort but by His knowing, a deep, personal claim that precedes their response. The promise and claim of baptism. The promise that follows is staggering: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Eternal life isn’t a reward for following; it’s a gift He bestows, securing them irrevocably. As revealed in baptism, grace comes before faith. Our assurance is not contingent on our grip but on His. No external force, not doubt, not evil, can undo what He has declared His own.

One With the Father, Keeper of the Flock

"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10:29-30)

Jesus deepens the assurance: His sheep are given to Him by the Father, whose power surpasses all. “No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand,” He declares, rooting their safety in divine unity and strength. Then comes the bombshell: “I and the Father are one.” The Shepherd and the Father share one will, one essence, ensuring that what the Son holds, the Father holds, too. Our belonging isn’t fragile; it’s anchored in the unbreakable bond between Son and Father. We’re kept not by our faithfulness but by a divine oneness that defies everything that would separate us from the love of God.

Sermon: Held in the Hand That Speaks

John 10:22–30

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was winter. Cold, gray, and uncertain. The kind of season when the light gets thin and hope feels far off. And Jesus is walking in Solomon’s Colonnade, a covered walkway, a place of shadows and waiting. That’s where the people gather around Him and say, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

They want clarity, control, and, like us, a God they can pin down, label, and manage. “Just say it,” they demand, as though the truth of Christ must be submitted to their courtroom and confirmed on their terms.

But Jesus doesn’t hand them a neat answer. He doesn’t meet their demand for spiritual certainty. Why? Because He already has spoken. “I *did* tell you,” He says. “But you do not believe.”

What we see in this moment is not a communication failure. It’s a confrontation with grace. And grace always undoes the old self. You see, the problem isn’t that Jesus has been unclear—it’s that the human heart doesn’t want the kind of Messiah He is. We want strength, success, and visibility. He offers a cross. He offers a voice that doesn’t shout, but calls—like a Shepherd.

“You do not believe,” He says, “because you are not my sheep.”

Now that’ll stop you in your tracks. It flips everything we think we know about faith. He doesn’t say, “You’re not my sheep because you don’t believe.” No, it’s the other way around. Belonging comes *before* believing. You believe because you already belong to Him. Because He has claimed you. Because the Shepherd has already spoken your name.

That’s the scandal of the gospel. Faith isn’t your decision. It’s not your achievement. It’s not something you muster up like spiritual grit. It is what happens when the Shepherd finds His sheep.

When He speaks. When baptism's promise plunges into the grave and raises you from the dead. When His voice, The Voice, cuts through the noise and grabs your heart and says, "You. You are mine."

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

Notice: the voice doesn't describe them. It creates them. His voice calls into death and brings life. His knowing is not information. It's *claiming*. And what follows isn't heroic discipleship. It's trust born of being found.

And here's the gift: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Not because they hold on tight. But because *He* does. Your grip will falter. Your faith will shake. But you are not kept by your performance—you are kept by His promise. "No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." Not your sin. Not your doubts. Not your failures. Not even your death.

And then comes the thunderclap: "I and the Father are one."

This Shepherd is no mere teacher. He is not a messenger of God. He *is* God. The same voice that called light into the darkness now calls you by name. The same power that split the sea now shelters you in His hand. And the same love that raised Him from the dead holds you—even now.

So today, if you are tired of trying to believe hard enough...

If you're stuck in the cold colonnades of your own doubt and demand...

If your prayers sound more like "How long will you keep me in suspense?" than "My Lord and my God..."

Then hear this: the Shepherd is not waiting for you to find Him. He is already here. And He speaks. Not to explain Himself but to give you all the gifts born of His costly cross: forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Amen.

EASTER 5

Theme: We are one not by effort but by grace. Unity is the fruit of Christ's prayer, not our achievement.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** *Chief of Sinners Though I Be* (LBW 306)
- **ELW:** *There in God's Garden* (ELW 342)
- **ReClaim:** *Built on the Rock the Church Shall Stand* (ReClaim 162)
- **LHS:** *Blest Be the Tie That Binds* (LHS 231)

Greek Word Study

1. ἐδοξάσθη (edoxasthē) – “is glorified”

“Now is the Son of man glorified...” (John 13:31)

This verb is passive and perfect—“has been glorified”—not something happening down the road but already underway. What looks like defeat (Judas walking out to betray) is, paradoxically, the moment of divine glory. Glory isn't found in strength or success but in this downward turn toward the cross. The world sees shame. God sees fulfillment. The cross is not a tragic interruption of glory; it is the stage where glory is revealed. Grace happens before anyone asks, believes, or obeys.

2. ἐν αὐτῷ (en autō) – “in him”

“...and in him God is glorified.” (John 13:31)

This tiny phrase undoes religion. God is not glorified in our piety, our strength, or our righteousness—but *in Him*, in the one who will be lifted up on a cross. All attempts to locate God's glory in our religious striving or outward signs of religious success are exposed. God hides His majesty in the very place we'd least expect: a broken, brutalized man, betrayed, on the way to die. If you want to find God, don't look in the mirror or the heavens—look in Him, crucified.

3. εὐθύς (euthys) – “at once” / “immediately”

“...and glorify him at once.” (John 13:32)

There’s no delay. No room for negotiation or moral readiness. The glorification of the Son *happens now*, before repentance, before obedience, before the disciples have a clue what's going on. It is pure, sovereign grace—an immediate, irreversible act of God. The divine plan doesn’t hinge on our timing or cooperation. It just happens. And once it does, everything else—including love—comes in the wake, not the lead.

4. τέκνια (teknia) – “little children”

“Little children, yet a little while I am with you...” (John 13:33)

This term is tender but also revealing. The disciples are not partners in redemption—they’re children. Dependent, confused, weak. It’s not a flattering term, but it’s honest. And it sets the tone: Jesus isn’t coaching fellow heroes; He’s caring for those who will fail Him. He speaks as one who must do it alone, and He names them not by their maturity but their helplessness. This is not a shared mission. He goes where they cannot go.

5. ἀγαπᾶτε (agapate) – “you love” (command)

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...” (John 13:34)

This imperative isn’t a hallmark slogan! It’s a crushing demand. “Love as I have loved you” means love that washes feet and bears crosses. We can’t do this. That’s the point. It unmask the delusion that we are naturally loving. It drives us back to the source: *His* love. Only by being loved into new life can we begin to reflect love. The command stands, but it exposes before it empowers.

6. μαθηταί (mathētai) – “disciples”

“...you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)

This word gets turned inside out. We often treat discipleship as a status earned through dedication. But here, Jesus links it to love—and not just any love, but the love He gives. If love is seen, it will be His doing, not ours. Being a disciple isn’t something we achieve. It’s a name He gives, and any visible sign of it is fruit, not cause. We’re not proving anything. We’re bearing what has first been given. He is the vine; we are the branches.

Gospel Commentary

Glory in the Shadow of Betrayal

"When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified;'" (John 13:31)

The scene shifts as Judas exits to betray Jesus, and immediately, Jesus declares, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified." This isn't glory as the world sees it, triumph through power, but glory through the cross, a divine act exposing the human perversion of God's truth. God's scandalous work in Christ's death and resurrection is the hinge on which history turns, not our response to that work. It's a done deal, glory breaking in before we lift a finger. Love will enter the picture, but it's not the engine that drives the life of faith. It's the echo of this prior, unearned move of grace and forgiveness.

The Glory Already Given

"if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once." (John 13:32)

Jesus doubles down: God's glory in the Son loops back to the Father, a mutual glorification sealed "at once." This isn't contingent on what comes next. The divine will is rushing toward the cross. Salvation isn't hanging on our ability to love or obey; it's rooted in this glory, a gift already given. We're not building it; we're caught in it. Love's command will loom large, but it's not the ticket. It's what spills out after the fact.

You Can't Come This Way

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, Where I am going you cannot come." (John 13:33)

Jesus tenderly calls them "little children," but delivers hard news: He's leaving, and they can't follow. This isn't rejection. It's the reality of the cross. He goes alone to do what they can't. Again and again the truth is hammered home that our salvation isn't a joint effort. He's not waiting for us to match His steps or prove our love. He's forging the path solo, securing what we could not and would not.

Love Isn't the Ticket—It's the Trace

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Here it comes: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.” It’s tied to His love—“even as I have loved you”—a standard set by foot-washing, self-giving, and soon, a cross. This is the heaviest load of all, the most burdensome command because it’s impossible for us. Yes, we should love as He does, but that’s a bar we’ll never clear. Love isn’t what saves us. Love is the fruit of faith, the mark of being His, not the means. It flows from His prior love, poured out in glory, but it doesn’t earn us the title “disciple.” That’s His gift, not our achievement. Sure, everyone will see it, but if there is any love to be known, it will be His doing shining through our stumbling.

Sermon: Love That Comes After *John 13:31–35*

Grace and peace to you—from Jesus, who speaks even as the darkness gathers.

“When he had gone out...” That’s how this scene begins.

And who is the *he*? Judas. The one who walked with Jesus, ate with Him, heard all the same parables, and is now on his way to hand Him over.

Jesus has just washed their feet, including the feet of His betrayer. And now, *as Judas exits stage left*, heading into the night with betrayal in his pocket, Jesus looks at the remaining eleven and says: “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and in him God is glorified.”

Now? *Now* is glory?

You and I wouldn’t have called it that. We would’ve said this is the unraveling. This is the tragedy. This is where everything falls apart. But Jesus calls it *glory*. And not future glory. Not post-resurrection glory. *Now*. Right there, with betrayal hanging in the air like a storm cloud, Jesus says it’s already begun.

You see, we think glory comes after we get it all together. After the doubt clears. After the church cleans up its act. After our hearts stop wandering. But Jesus sees glory in a moment that looks like failure. Because God’s glory is not about what we bring. It’s about what He gives.

And what He gives—*right there*—is Himself.

This is glory through the cross. A love that doesn’t wait for loyalty. A grace that enters betrayal and doesn’t back down. A Savior who kneels to wash dirty feet even as they march off to deny Him.

And then He gives a new commandment.

Not “Get it together.” Not “Protect the truth.” Not “Fix the world.” But: “Love one another, just as I have loved you.”

Now don't mishear this. This is not a pep talk. This is not Jesus setting the bar a little higher so we'll try a little harder. If that's all it is, we're done before we begin. Because who among us has loved like *that*? We are all bad lovers, after all.

No, this commandment doesn't start with you. It starts with *Him*. "As I have loved you." That's the order. Not love *so that* He'll love you. But because He already does.

This isn't a test. It's a *mirror*. He's describing what love looks like when born from the cross. He's telling them—and us—that love is not the ladder to God. It's what overflows *after* He's already come down. After He's already knelt. After He's already said, "You are clean."

So no, the love Jesus commands is not what earns discipleship. It's what reveals it. "By this," He says, "everyone will know that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another."

Not success. Not power. Not theological precision.

But love. Not the kind you manufacture. But the kind you *receive*—over and over again—when you realize that you have nothing left, and Jesus still shows up, still calls you His own, still washes your feet.

So maybe you come here today after a night like Judas's. Or maybe your faith is hanging on by a thread. Or maybe you're just tired of trying to make the Christian life work.

Hear this: Jesus does not start with your love. He starts with His.

And it's already been poured out. Already given. Already nailed down in hands that will not let go.

The new commandment is not the entrance exam to the kingdom. It's the *echo* of a Word that came first. And the Word is for us, the bad lovers: You are loved. You are forgiven. You are His.

Amen.

EASTER 6

Theme: Christ's glory is the cross. His love makes us His.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* (LBW 315)
- **ELW:** *This Joyful Eastertide* (ELW 391)
- **ReClaim:** *Abide With Me* (ReClaim 282)
- **LHS:** *O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High* (LHS 80)

Greek Word Study

1. Ἀσθενέω (*astheneō*) – “to be weak / sick / powerless”

“A great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed...” (John 5:3)

This root word means more than physical sickness. It connotes *powerlessness, weakness, inability*. The man’s condition is not just medical but theological. He represents the truth we resist most: that we are incapable of saving ourselves. The theology of the cross doesn’t romanticize this weakness. Rather, it exposes it as the very condition grace addresses. Christ doesn’t wait for strength to appear. He meets us precisely in this ἀσθένεια, where we have nothing to offer but our inability.

2. Ἐτάθη (*etathē*) – “was stirred” (implied from v. 7)

“...when the water is stirred...” (John 5:7)

This rare term reflects the ancient belief that healing was tied to movement in the water. A mysterious sign that something divine was at work. But it also reveals how we seek salvation in signs, rituals, and systems if we can catch the right wave. The man’s fixation on the stirred water is tragically familiar: we all hope that if we act at just the right time, we might catch a miracle. But Jesus isn’t in the water. He’s standing beside the man, bypassing the mechanism. Grace doesn’t depend on our timing.

3. Θέλεις (*theleis*) – “do you want / will you”

“Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6)

This verb sounds deceptively simple—*do you want to...?*—but it exposes a profound truth: we don’t always know what to want. We imagine healing in terms of our effort, our will, our ability to reach the pool. But Jesus’ question isn’t about desire in the therapeutic sense. It’s about whether the man can even recognize the gift that’s being handed to him. And he can’t. He dodges the question. But Jesus heals him anyway. That’s grace. God’s will doesn’t wait for our will to align.

4. Ἐγειρε (*egeire*) – “Get up / Be raised”

“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (John 5:8)

This is resurrection language. The same verb used for raising the dead is now spoken over this man’s decades of paralysis. It’s not a motivational pep talk! This is God’s creative word that brings into being what it commands. The man doesn’t get up because he’s ready. He gets up because the Word has acted on him. This is the hallmark of grace: it doesn’t invite us to rise; it *raises us*. The imperative contains the power to fulfill itself.

5. ἰάθη (*iathē*) – “was healed / made whole”

“At once the man was cured...” (John 5:9)

This passive verb makes the point clear: *he was acted upon*. He didn’t heal himself. He didn’t earn it. The healing came from outside him, apart from his will, without a confession of faith or a profession of love. There is no reward here for repentance. The Word alone *creates* faith. Healed by sheer divine speech, the man becomes living proof that God’s mercy breaks in uninvited, undeserved, and unstoppable.

6. Σάββατον (*sabbaton*) – “Sabbath”

“The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.” (John 5:9)

The Sabbath is not just a day. It’s a symbol of the law, of rest achieved only through obedience and religious fidelity. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus doesn’t merely perform a miracle. He confronts the system that says, *you must not work. You must rest!* He breaks the rule in order to fulfill the promise. Grace, then, doesn’t fit inside religious schedules or structures. It violates them, not to destroy, but to complete. The true Sabbath is not found in regulation but in the Rest that Christ gives when He says, “It is finished.”

Gospel Commentary

A Fragile Hope, A Lifelong Wait

“Now there is in Jerusalem... a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.” (John 5:2–3)

The scene at the Pool of Bethesda is a portrait of human brokenness and divine intervention. A crowd of the afflicted huddles around this pool, clinging to a fragile hope that the stirring waters might bring healing. Among them is a man crippled for 38 years, a number that evokes a sense of endless waiting, a life defined by incapacity. With its five colonnades, the pool becomes a symbol of human striving for deliverance—if only one can get there fast enough. If only one can do the right thing at the right time. Yet for this man, it’s a promise perpetually out of reach: “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred” (v. 7). His words drip with resignation, trapped in a cycle of dependence on a mechanism that never delivers. That should sound familiar.

The Question That Interrupts

“When Jesus saw him... he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’” (John 5:6)

Jesus doesn’t play by the pool’s rules. His question, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6) pierces through the man’s world of excuses and half-hopes. It’s not a call to self-help or a test of worthiness; it’s an intrusion of grace that doesn’t wait for the man to figure things out. The invalid’s response sidesteps the question, fixating on his inability to access the water. He doesn’t even say “yes,” perhaps because he can’t imagine a healing that doesn’t involve his own effort or someone else’s. But Jesus doesn’t need his permission or his perfection. “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” (v. 8). The result? The man is healed. No conditions, no rituals, no dipping in the pool. The word alone does it, and the man rises, whole.

The End of Earning

“At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.” (John 5:9)

This moment shatters the illusion that salvation comes through human achievement. The pool represents every system we devise to earn God’s favor: if we just try harder, if we just get the timing right, if we just follow the right steps. But Jesus bypasses the religious, legal system. His power isn’t contingent on our ability to cooperate. His power is unleashed in spite of our weakness. The man has done nothing but wait and complain. Yet restoration and redemption come anyway, free and unearned. That’s the scandal of it: God’s action doesn’t negotiate with our efforts; it obliterates them, replacing them with something better.

The Word That Frees

“The day on which this took place was a Sabbath.” (John 5:9)

The timing on the Sabbath (v. 9) only sharpens the point. What the religious system saw as a day to enforce rules, Jesus turned into a day of liberation. The man’s 38 years of paralysis mirror humanity’s bondage to sin and law—the wearying treadmill of trying to arrive, trying to be “enough.” But when Jesus speaks, the bondage ends. The word of Christ is sufficient. To “get up” isn’t a suggestion to pull himself together; it’s a Word that proclaims he’s already been made new. The Word does what it says.

Sermon: The Word That Raises the Powerless *John 5:2–9*

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a pool in Jerusalem. A place called Bethesda, which means "house of mercy." But there's not much mercy in the air. Around it lie the sick, the blind, the paralyzed. Waiting. Hoping. Watching the water.

The legend was this: that when the water stirred, an angel had touched it—and the first one in would be healed. You can imagine the scene. Desperation. Competition. The strong stepping over the weak. A place that promises healing, but only for the quick. Only for the able. Only for the winners.

And Jesus walks into *that* place. Not the temple. Not the synagogue. But the pool where the desperate gather.

And He finds a man who's been there thirty-eight years.

Thirty-eight years of watching. Waiting. Being passed over. And Jesus asks him one question: "Do you want to be made well?"

Now, that sounds like a strange question. Of course, he wants to be healed, right? But listen to the man's answer. He doesn't say yes. He tells Jesus why it hasn't worked.

"Sir, I have no one to help me. Every time the water stirs, someone else gets in first."

Do you hear it? He doesn't ask for a miracle. He doesn't recognize who Jesus is. He just explains the system, and his failure in it.

Because that's how the world works: Help yourself. Be first. Earn it. Deserve it. Try harder.

And if you can't, well... wait by the water.

But Jesus does not give him advice. He doesn't offer to help him into the pool. He speaks: "Get up. Take up your mat. And walk."

And just like that, the man is healed. No stirring water. No first place. No effort. Just a Word.

Because that's how grace works. It doesn't play by the rules of the pool. It doesn't reward the strong. It doesn't wait for readiness or permission. It *speaks*—and what it says happens.

"Get up."

This is not a suggestion. Not a motivational slogan. This is the very Word that creates what it commands. The man doesn't rise because he's determined. He rises because the Word has already done it.

And here's the part that makes it even more scandalous: it happens on the Sabbath.

The religious leaders would've said, *Wrong time, wrong method, wrong theology*. But Jesus isn't asking for permission. He's announcing the end of religion as a system of merit.

The Sabbath—the day of rest—becomes the day of *restoration*. Not because the man finally got it right, but because Jesus spoke, and the old world of law and striving cracked open to let resurrection in.

So if you're stuck in patterns that don't heal, weary from systems that promise grace but only reward the strong, if your prayers have become explanations instead of confessions,

Then hear this:

Jesus is not waiting for the water to move. He is not waiting for you to move. He is already standing beside you. And He speaks. Not with a list. Not with a deal. But with a Word that does what it says.

So, "Get up, baptized Christian." Not because you can. But because *He already has*. Because His grace doesn't depend on your movement. His grace *is* your movement.

Amen.

EASTER 7

Theme: Jesus prays for his followers to be united in truth and love as they are sent into the world.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** Son of God, Eternal Savior (LBW 364)
- **ELW:** The Church of Christ in Every Age (ELW 729)
- **ReClaim:** O Christ, Our Hope, Our Hearts' Desire (ReClaim 138)
- **LHS:** Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word (LHS 230)

Greek Word Study

1. Πιστευόντων (*pisteuontōn*) – “those who believe”

“...on behalf of those who believe in me through their word...” (John 17:20)

This is the present participle of *pisteuō*—to believe, to trust. But it’s not a badge of human achievement; it describes a people *acted upon* by the Word. They believe *through* the apostolic witness. This faith isn’t conjured up from within—the Word itself creates it. Jesus is not praying for the strong but for the ones faith finds. The unity He prays for is born of this believing—receiving what Christ has already secured, not striving to manufacture unity from below.

2. ἓν (*hen*) – “one”

“...that they may all be one...” (John 17:21)

This is the central word of Christ’s prayer for unity—not institutional unity, not external conformity, but oneness rooted in the inner life of the Trinity: “as you, Father, are in me and I in you.” This “one” is not a human achievement but a divine gift, not something the Church builds but something it receives. It’s not about structure. It’s about being included in the eternal relationship of Father and Son. Unity is not the goal of mission; it is the *fruit* of the gospel’s completed work.

3. Δόξαν (*doxan*) – “glory”

“The glory you have given me I have given to them...” (John 17:22)

The glory of the cross is the paradoxical splendor of divine self-giving. Jesus shares that glory not as a reward but as a gift. Glory here is not a heavenly light show; it’s the weight of God’s presence in the crucified and risen Christ, now handed over to a people who didn’t earn it. If unity is the fruit, *this* is the root. Glory is what binds us, not what we bring.

4. Θέλω (*thelō*) – “I will / I want / I desire”

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...” (John 17:24)

The divine will—*Christ’s will*—binds heaven and earth together. He doesn’t say, “I hope they’ll find me,” but “I will that they be with me.” His desire is decisive. His wanting makes it so. Our salvation is not born from our wanting Him but from His wanting us. This is the deep comfort of election: not that we reached for Him, but that He claimed us from the foundation of the world.

5. Ἔγνων (*egnō*) – “has known / knows intimately”

“Righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you...” (John 17:25)

Ginoskō implies deep, relational knowledge—communion. The world, with all its religious speculation, doesn’t know the Father. But Jesus does. And He doesn’t just know *about* the Father—He knows Him and makes Him known. The contrast couldn’t be sharper: the world’s ignorance versus Jesus’ intimate knowledge. And what we know of God we know because the Son has revealed Him, not because we climbed the ladder of understanding or received secret, mystical knowledge.

6. Ἐγνώρισα / γνωρίσω (*egnōrisa / gnōrisō*) – “I have made known / will make known”

“I have made your name known to them, and will make it known...” (John 17:26)

Here is the great reversal. Salvation is not about our grasp of God but His self-disclosure in Christ. This verb—to reveal, to make known—speaks of action that flows entirely from Jesus. He *makes known* the Father’s name (i.e., identity, character, presence), and *will continue to make it known*. Even after the resurrection. Even now. The love of God is not a concept to master but a reality planted in us by the speaking of Christ. The Word makes it known, and what He speaks does not fail.

Gospel Commentary

A Prayer for the Not-Yet-Born

“I am not praying only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word...” (John 17:20–21)

This passage pulls back the curtain on something breathtaking: Christ praying not just for His disciples but for all who will believe through their word, right down to the present day. It’s not a prayer contingent on our performance or worthiness but a bold declaration of what Christ will secure on our behalf. Jesus asks that we “may all be one” (v. 21), not as a goal we scramble to achieve, but as a reality rooted in His union with the Father. This oneness isn’t a human project of outward uniformity. The ecumenical movement will not bring it. It is a gift given through His glory, not earned by our efforts. This unity is the unity of faith. The world’s belief hinges not on the Church’s ability to get along but on the sheer fact of what He’s done: “so that the world may believe that you sent me.”

Glory Handed Over, Not Earned

“And the glory that you have given me I have given to them... that they may become completely one.” (John 17:22–23)

What’s striking here is how Jesus ties this unity to His own relationship with the Father: “I in them and you in me” (v. 23). There’s no ladder for us to climb, no moral perfection to attain. He’s already in us, and the Father’s love rests upon us, too. The glory He’s given us (v. 22) isn’t a reward for good behavior but handed over freely. So we’re bound together not by our stumbling attempts at unity, but by His giving. Our unity is not a sign of our virtue but a sign of His grace.

Claimed by Love, Destined for Glory

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...” (John 17:24)

When Jesus prays, “I want them to be with me where I am” (v. 24), it’s not a wishful plea. It is grounded in the Father’s prior gift: “those whom you have given me.” We’re not gatecrashers in this story. We are claimed, taken up in baptism, pulled into Christ’s orbit by divine decree. Seeing His glory isn’t a prize for the pious but the inevitable outcome of being His. And this love, this unity, this glory—it’s all so “the world may know” (v. 23). Not so we can boast, but so the world gets hit with the truth: God sent Jesus, and His love doesn’t play favorites or wait for us to measure up.

Not Our Knowing, But His Making Known

“I have made your name known to them, and will make it known...” (John 17:25–26)

The world’s ignorance of the Father (v. 25) contrasts with what Jesus has done: “I have made your name known to them, and will make it known” (v. 26). This isn’t us figuring God out. Christ Jesus is delivering the goods, planting the Father’s love in us by His word. It’s not our knowing that saves us, but His making known. We’re not building this oneness or earning this love; we’re caught up in it, because Jesus prays it, wills it, to be so! And His prayer, like every aspect of His Word, doesn’t fail.

Sermon: A Prayer That Holds You *John 17:20–26*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We step into John 17, and it's holy ground. This isn't Jesus preaching, teaching, or performing miracles. This is Jesus *praying*. Right before His betrayal, before the cross, before everything falls apart, He prays.

And who does He pray for?

Not just the twelve. Not just the strong or the faithful.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."

That's you. That's me. That's every sinner who's been pulled into faith, not by effort, but by the Word.

This prayer is not a wish. It's not sentimental. It's not hoping for the best.

This is Jesus *handing us over* to the Father.

This is the Son, facing death, saying, "They are yours."

And what does He ask?

"That they may all be one." Not as a project. Not as a reward. But as a gift.

This oneness is not about the Church getting along, it's about *Christ giving us His own life*.

"As you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us."

This is not organizational unity. This is *being caught up* into the love that existed before the world began. This is not something we make. It's something we're given.

And Jesus says it again and again:

"The glory you have given me I have given to them..."

Now listen—that's not the kind of glory we're used to. It's not recognition. It's not success. It's the glory of the cross.

The glory of *being loved by the Father when you don't deserve it*.

The baptismal glory of dying to yourself and being raised by grace.

And in the middle of that glory, Jesus says,

"I want them to be with me where I am."

Not because they've earned it. Not because they're ready.

But because *they've been given to Me*, He says.

You are not in this story by accident. You didn't find your way into faith by luck.
You were *claimed*. Given. Named. Baptized.

Jesus doesn't pray for a future version of you—the cleaned-up one, the strong one, the confident one. He prays for *you*, now. In your doubt. In your stumbling. In your failure to love as you should. And the prayer He prays... *does not fail* because God's Word does not lie.

"I have made your name known to them, and will make it known."

Notice that—it's not "I told them once and hope they remember."

It's "I *will* make it known."

This is Jesus *continuing* to speak. To preach. To reveal the Father.

Not through visions or spiritual mountaintops, but through His Word.

Faith is not something we work up from within. It's something given from outside.

We're not building unity. We're not earning love. We are *caught*—by a prayer that holds us, a Word that names us, and a Shepherd who won't let us go.

So if you wonder today whether you belong, if you feel your faith is too weak, your love too fragile, your doubts too many? Welcome to the church.

Jesus has already prayed for you. And what He prays, He gives. What He says, He does.

"That the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

That's not a future hope. That's a present promise.

And it's yours.

Amen.

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Theme: The risen Christ reigns. His authority is for the life of the Church.

Hymn Suggestions

- **LBW:** *A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing* (LBW 157)
- **ELW:** *Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious* (ELW 826)
- **ReClaim:** *Crown Him with Many Crowns* (ReClaim 100)
- **LHS:** *Alleluia! Sing to Jesus* (LHS 117)

GREEK WORD STUDY

1. Εἰρήνη (eirēnē) – “Peace” (v. 36)

“Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν” – “Peace to you”

This is not just a casual greeting. In the mouth of the risen Christ, *eirēnē* becomes a word of absolution and restoration. The same disciples who fled, denied, and despaired are now greeted not with condemnation but peace. It is the peace that flows from the cross—the end of hostility between sinners and God. Jesus speaks shalom into their fear. This word still breaks through locked rooms and trembling hearts.

2. πνεῦμα (pneuma) – “Spirit” or “Ghost” (v. 37)

“δοκοῦντες πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν” – “thinking they saw a spirit”

The disciples assume they are seeing a *pneuma*, a disembodied apparition. Luke uses this to contrast the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus. He is not a ghost. The resurrection is not about souls floating free but the defeat of death itself. This word highlights their misunderstanding and sets up Jesus’ correction: *“a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*

3. τεταραγμένοι (tetaragmenoi) – “Startled” or “Troubled” (v. 37)

“ἐπτοημένοι καὶ ἔντρομοι... τεταραγμένοι” – “startled and frightened... troubled”

This verb comes from *tarassō*, meaning to stir up, agitate, or disturb. The disciples are not merely surprised—they are internally shaken. The risen Jesus confronts not only their reason but their fear. This emotional reaction reveals the rupture resurrection brings: it upends expectations, forces a reckoning, and reorients life around God’s in-breaking kingdom.

4. διαλογισμοί (dialogismoi) – “Thoughts” or “Doubts” (v. 38)

“διὰ τί διαλογισμοὶ ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν;” – “Why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

The word suggests inner reasoning, often associated with skepticism or mental debate. Jesus addresses not just intellectual uncertainty but the way fear and doubt cloud the heart (*kardia*). This is not a rebuke as much as a compassionate exposure. The risen Lord comes not to shame doubters but to show himself to them—to invite faith through wounds.

5. ἅψασθε (hapsasthe) – “Touch” (v. 39)

“ἅψασθέ με καὶ ἴδετε” – “Touch me and see”

This imperative from *hepatoma* invites physical contact. Jesus doesn’t remain at a distance. The resurrection is tactile and embodied. It speaks to the sacramental nature of faith: hearing, seeing, and

touching the Word made flesh. The invitation is intimate, personal, and reassuring. The same Jesus who was crucified is now risen, and he is not ashamed to be touched.

6. σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα (sarka kai ostea) – “Flesh and bones” (v. 39)

“οὐκ ἔχει πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα καθὼς ἐμεῖ θεωρεῖτε ἔχοντα” – “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have”

These concrete words underscore the bodily nature of the resurrection. Jesus is not resurrected into an ethereal or symbolic state but into a glorified body. *Sarka kai ostea* echo the full humanity of Christ—now raised, yet still marked by the cross. Christian hope is not in escape from the body, but in its redemption.

Gospel Commentary

Peace in the Midst of Fear *Luke 24:36–40*

“As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.”

Jesus appears not in judgment, but in peace. The disciples, startled and afraid, are met with the greeting that only the risen Lord can give—peace born not of absence of conflict, but of the presence of the Crucified now raised. His scars remain visible, the marks of the cross not erased by resurrection, but transformed. This peace is not earned by the disciples' faithfulness (they had none), but gifted in the presence of the wounded Redeemer.

Flesh and Bone, Bread and Fish *Luke 24:41–43*

“And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.”

In a world that too often spiritualizes salvation, Jesus insists on his body. *“Touch me and see.”* He eats broiled fish before them. The resurrection is not a ghost story, nor a metaphor, but a bodily promise. His risen presence affirms that God has not abandoned creation, and our hope is not escape, but renewal. Redemption reaches to the gut, the grave, and the grill—God for us in the most human ways.

Minds Opened, Scriptures Fulfilled *Luke 24:44–47*

“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”

Jesus reinterprets the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—not as moral instructions, but as witnesses to his suffering and rising. The key to Scripture is not what we must do, but what Christ has done. Repentance and forgiveness of sins are now proclaimed in his name to all nations. This is the mission of the church: not to improve the world by our own strength, but to bear witness to the One who died and rose—for us.

Worship and Witness *Luke 24:48–53*

“You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

The disciples are named as witnesses. But the power comes from above. *“Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”* The blessing of Jesus at Bethany mirrors his earlier lifting of bread—and now he lifts his hands in blessing as he departs. But this is not absence. It is ascension. They worship not a memory, but a living Lord. And from that place of blessing, they return with joy. The story is just beginning.

Sermon: Wounds, Fish, and the Word that Won’t Let You Go *Luke 24:36–53*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let’s be honest.

You wouldn’t have been calm and collected if you’d been there in that locked room when Jesus suddenly showed up. You would have jumped out of your skin. That’s what happens when dead men don’t stay dead.

Luke tells us the disciples were startled and frightened. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Because that's what makes sense. When someone's been crucified—publicly, brutally—they don't come back. So when Jesus appears, standing right there among them, they think: *This can't be real.*

And that's exactly where the risen Jesus wants them.

Not confident. Not ready. But caught off guard. Shaken.

Because Jesus hasn't returned to give them some pep talk, He hasn't returned to teach a masterclass in spiritual resilience. No—he returns to do the one thing only the crucified and risen Son of God can do: forgive sinners. Raise the dead. Give peace where there is none.

“Peace to you,” he says.

And let's be clear: this is not a polite greeting. This is absolution. They had abandoned him. Peter denied him. Thomas doubted him. They were hiding behind locked doors. And what does Jesus say?

Peace. Not because they deserve it. Not because they've made amends. But because he brings it.

Now look at what he shows them. Not lightning bolts. Not a shining halo. He shows them... his hands and his feet. His wounds.

Because those wounds are not shameful to him. They are his glory. They're the receipt of your redemption. The evidence of what he paid to have you—every last bit of your sin, your doubt, your hiding, your guilt—taken up into him, and crucified.

And then he eats fish. Let that settle in. The risen Son of God, fresh from the grave, sits down and eats broiled fish. Why?

Because he wants you to know—this is no ghost. No metaphor. No symbol. This is real flesh. Real blood. God doesn't save you from a distance. He comes close. He eats. He bleeds. He breathes. He breaks bread. He calls you by name.

And then he opens their minds to the Scriptures.

Not to show them how to be better people. Not to inspire them to do great things for God. But to show them that all of it—from Moses to the Psalms—has been about this one thing:

“That the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name.”

There it is. The whole message. The whole mission. Not advice. Not activism. Not achievement. Just this: forgiveness of sins—preached in his name, for people who don't deserve it.

That's the church's job. That's the only reason we're still here. Not to impress the world. Not to build a brand. But to stand in pulpits, sit at bedsides, lean across coffee tables, and say: *'Peace to you. Christ is risen. And he's not out to get you. He's out to save you.'*

"You are witnesses," he says.

But not because they're so gifted. Or bold. Or theologically trained. They're witnesses because they saw what should not have been possible to see: a crucified man raised from the dead. They heard what failures should not hear: forgiveness for them.

And before he leaves, he lifts his hands—those wounded hands—and blesses them.

That's how the risen Jesus leaves: in the middle of blessing.

That's how you may leave today: But not because you're so gifted. Or bold. Or theologically trained.

You may leave today as a witness—because you have seen what should not have been possible: a sinner raised from the dead. You have heard what failures should not hear: forgiveness—for you.

That's how the risen Jesus leaves: in the middle of a blessing.

And that's how you may go now—blessed and forgiven in Jesus' name.

Amen.