

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

**Old Orchard Church
Third Sunday of Easter**

May 8, 2011 – 10:15 to 11:50 a.m.

**God has fixed a day on which he will judge
the world in righteousness by a man
whom he has appointed,
having furnished proof
to all by raising him from the dead.**

—Acts 17:31—

Cover Art:

The Incredulity of St. Thomas. Woodcut. Albrecht Dürer (1511).

Celebrating the Immortal Jesus as the Resurrection Community of Mercy and Justice

Jesus, the majestic Word of God
From all eternity,
Humbled himself to serve us,
Even when we had no claim
Upon the divine Mercy.
Now he rules the universe,
Forever joyful in his victory over Death
On our behalf.

As his mighty resurrection inspires our joy,
So it constrains us to love justice and practice mercy,
To rise cheerfully to the occasion
Of serving and defending others.
In this we follow the great example
Of our once-suffering, now-glorified Servant King,
Who is coming to establish a Perfect Justice in the earth!
Bless his high Name.

Alleluia!



Today's Scripture

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 58:6-10

New Testament Reading: John 20:24-31

Today's Sermon

“Be Good”

Romans 16:16-23

*Nelson Jennings, Professor of World Mission
at Covenant Seminary, preaching*

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

The Empty Tomb, Justice and Mercy

Christians have been accused of lots of things: having their head in the sand, being culturally irrelevant, being preoccupied with middle class “consumerism.” Too many of us believers, too often, are probably guilty as charged.

And yet, stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, it is striking that, through the centuries, where human needs have been genuinely served, it is Christians who have so often been there. To be sure, there are all sorts of service organizations and relief efforts in the world that were not founded and are not run by Christians. But it's arguable that Christianity has been the *main* inspiration behind the development of the modern “charitable organization” in the West. Who took in the infant girls left outdoors to die by hard-hearted fathers in the Greco-Roman world of the first century? Christians. Who founded orphanages, hospitals, and homes for physically and mentally disabled people in every age? Christians. Who reached out to the poor urban class created by the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800's? Christians. Who fought for the freedom of black slaves in England and America in the 18th and 19th centuries? Christians. Who rescued young girls sold into prostitution in India and pressured the government there in the 19th century to outlaw the barbaric practice of burning widows after their husbands died? Christians. Who is reaching out to unwed mothers in the 21st century with crisis pregnancy clinics and adoption services and is fighting for the rights of unborn children? Christians. Who started some of the most effective “relief agencies” to respond to people devastated by natural disasters? Christians. Who is raising money for a “safe house” for girls lured into and kept in prostitution right here in St. Louis? Christians are.

It's true that Christians have sometimes been the *cause* of social problems: it was Christians, largely, who enslaved black Africans. And often our service has been paternalistic and condescending. But still it's true that wherever the risen Christ breaks into the lives of men and women, he inspires them to defend the weak and to show mercy to those around them by giving love, time, money.

What's the connection between resurrection and practicing mercy and fighting for justice? It's simple. *Those who have grasped that they are loved so much by God that he gives them an eternal share in the immortal life of Jesus Christ can afford to be generous and think about the well-being of others.* They love Christ in return for his love. They want to obey his command that as he served them—and was not ruined by putting others first—so his followers should walk in his footsteps and serve others.

We could do much better in this area at Old Orchard. Love must begin at home. But be encouraged: as imperfect a fellowship as we are, the risen Christ is building us up, teaching us to draw a straight line from his empty tomb to our neighbor's need.

--Ron Lutjens