

## EASTER SUNDAY 4/17/22

WELCOME – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!** (repeat)

Welcome to our Easter service! You'll notice that we have different colors in our sanctuary (thank you, LaNae!). I've noticed that just the last week feels like there is even more green and color than the week before, whether yellow daffodils and tulips or bright red cardinals. Trees are beginning to bud and undergrowth has foliage.

A field I have run past that has a blanket of purple. I think it might be purple henbit, a pretty unattractive weed up close, that is among the invaders in our yard. But when they fill a field, it looks like it is blanketed in purple (that said, I have no idea how a farmer would feel about it). I read that they are a food source for pollinators.

The changes at spring time all illustrate the pattern of resurrection that is everywhere in God's world. Trees and ground that were seemingly dead and dormant now sprout and blossom.

We gather today to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior and to proclaim that Christ's way of love prevails over the violence, sin, and death that we see in our world.

More than that, Christ's resurrection is the lifegiving power that gives our lives purpose and meaning.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

*God of our salvation, you are always making all things new, new heavens and renewed earth. The pattern of resurrection from death is found everywhere in your creation as we see new life emerge from dormancy in spring. We stand amazed and in awe when we imagine peering into an empty tomb.*

*Today we pray that we can discover how to be renewed by the power of your resurrection. We pray that we can see you in your risen Power.*

*We pray we are empowered to declare the power of the resurrection, knowing that we are able to worship freely while many of our sisters and brothers around the world face war, poverty, or persecution. Make us bold to live in the power of your resurrection as a renewed people. Amen*

EASTER MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Our morning prayer that will include some moments of quiet for you to bring to mind – to name aloud or silently – individuals or situations that you'd like to offer to God in prayer.

O God, this morning we celebrate your most amazing, most mysterious, most loving act of all. Not only did you send Jesus to be our teacher, our leader, our friend – but you sent him to show us how to live fully, how to love with abandon, how to be humbled to the point of death, and how to trust in resurrection hope. We are grateful. Thank you God!

And we confess that we have more in common with those first disciples than we would like to admit. We're fearful, we're uncertain, our faith seems shaky and in constant need of reassurance.

Sometimes we're afraid of not having enough – enough time, enough money, enough patience, enough grace.

Gracious God, as we look around at the world we inhabit, we can feel pretty discouraged. We offer our prayers for those whose lives are shattered by ongoing war – in Ukraine, in Israel-Palestine, in Ethiopia and Afghanistan. We pray for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones to gun violence or other kinds of fear or hate. God, we pray for those whose lives have been disrupted by fires, floods, other incidents of nature.

We pray, God, for those closer to home who are sick and longing for healing. Whether the illness is physical or mental or emotional, we pray for your healing touch. We pray that your Holy Spirit would work through the doctors or therapists or others whose education and giftedness can bring healing. Lord, we take a moment now to remember individuals or situations in our lives in need of healing. (pause)

We pray for those who are grieving losses – loved ones, hopes or dreams, memories. We pray especially for the family of Louise Schmidt and in these moments we bring to mind other losses and we offer them to you. (silence)

O God, it is such a privilege on this Easter morning to bring you our deep praises and thanks! We thank you for the success last week of the MCC Relief Sale, for the untold hours that faithful folks spent working to make that sale happen, for the generous donations that people gave, for those who will benefit from the work of MCC around the world.

We thank you, Creator God for the ways you show yourself to us – through beauty, through music, through nature, through the gift of family and friendships. God, we have so few ways to pray, but you have so many ways to answer. Keep us alert to your unpredictable answers, to your unexplainable surprises, and by your grace, make each of us one of those surprises, for the sake of the One who taught us the surprises of moving mountains, healing touches, wondrous stories, great banquets, last suppers, broken bread, crosses and resurrections. In his name we pray. Amen.

WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? – PASTOR CALEB YODER  
*“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”*

That's what the angels which appeared to the women said, who were perplexed to find the body of the Lord Jesus missing from his tomb. Something about that question really strikes me. Well, of course, if Jesus is alive then he does not live in a dead body. That's true for any dead body.

But I also understand the women, who in their grief and trauma were reeling after the events of the previous days. They saw this man give his last breath on a cross, so why wouldn't his body be in the tomb where he was laid?

If you have spent much time in a church you have heard the story that Marilyn read for us many times. We actually have four different versions of it in our Bibles, one in each Gospel.

#### WOMEN WITNESSES

In all of these, there is an empty tomb, and a women or women who are the first witnesses of it.

The women are still wanting to mourn Jesus well. Because of the Sabbath day, there was not time to finish the process for a proper burial, including preparing the body with fragrant spices or aromatic oils and perfumes – basically their equivalent of embalming the body.

It never occurred to me that Jesus never received a full proper burial according to the customs of his day. This is what the women would have finished, and had they gotten their chance, it would have brought a kind of closure to the death.

The different gospels give different names for the women, but in all four, Mary Magdalene is among the first to see the empty tomb. It's remarkable that the Gospels all agree on that point, because in their culture, any credible story would have male witnesses. You wouldn't just make up a story that way. It further validates the important role that women had in Jesus' ministry.

At first the women are perplexed, confused as any of us would be. They don't know how to interpret what they see. They are still in disbelief until the two angelic figures speak with them.

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?* There's that question. Why do you think Jesus would be here? He is not in the tomb. God has raised him to life!

The angels ask the women to remember what Jesus had foretold in Galilee. The women were following Jesus in Galilee at that time.

"Remember how he told you... that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

#### CROSS AND RESURRECTION

In the Christian account of salvation and redemption, the cross and the resurrection go together. In the cross, Christ was in full solidarity with human brokenness and broke the power of sin and death. But we would still be in defeat without the resurrection of Jesus. This resurrection announces to the world the **salvation** and **new life** that God is bringing to all of creation, and which we can know in part in our present.

Death does not have the last word. God's power is paradoxically present in weakness. The tragedy of crucifixion and every other tragedy is woven into God's work of redemption. The Messiah suffers violence rather than do violence, in loving solidarity with all who suffer.

*We have the power to cultivate the seeds of resurrection in our lives and communities and bear witness to the transformation of our sin, shame and grief into new life.*

The empty tomb scene concludes with the women returning to tell the other disciples what they saw. Unlike Mark's Gospel which says the women were afraid and told no one, Luke says they told everything to the Eleven and says nothing about fear at this point in the narrative.

The disciples don't believe the women. They think that their story sounds crazy. Even in the next scene, two disciples on the road to Emmaus tell the stranger they meet on the road about this story, but don't seem to believe it themselves. Their faces are downcast.

*The disciples stuck in sadness are unable to see that Jesus is risen and is in their midst.* It is only in the moment when Jesus breaks bread and offers it to them that they recognize him. Somehow it clicks; they connect the broken bread with Jesus' broken body on the cross.

#### ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

As I read Luke's Gospel, the women are the first to believe that Jesus is truly risen. They had the benefit of explanation from the two angels, reminding them of Jesus' words back in Galilee.

Still, what were the women really thinking when they told this all to the other disciples? How did it feel to them when the male disciples treated their words as nonsense?

At least Peter went to check things out for himself. He does not see angels, but he does see the empty tomb with the strips of linen lying by themselves.

(I've always wondered a little about the strips of linen. I suppose it would have been a lot of trouble for someone robbing a grave to painstakingly remove the burial cloths from the body.)

It's hard to judge Peter's reaction in that moment. The NRSV says that Peter "*went home, amazed at what had happened.*" Meanwhile the NIV says, "*he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.*"

"Wondering to himself" sounds more like confused, like he isn't getting it. He is not sure what to make of it. "Amazed" could mean he is starting to believe, or it may mean nothing more than that Peter is surprised at the empty tomb, but stops short of coming to resurrection faith in that moment.

No, the empty tomb by itself doesn't seem to have been enough to convince the disciples. It is the actual encounters with Jesus himself – first the two travelers to Emmaus, then the Eleven. In Matthew and John, the women see Jesus himself.

#### LIVING A RESURRECTION FAITH

How do we come by resurrection faith? How will we practice resurrection in our lives?

This doesn't mean seeing the fullness of God's work of new creation. It means that we perceive signs of God making all things new in the midst of brokenness. In some way we know Christ to be present and walking alongside us.

It might seem strange to say this on Easter Sunday, but I believe part of a resurrection faith is acknowledging the brokenness or grief that we feel.

Some of you were present at our Maundy Thursday service in which we invited you to pick up a small rock symbolizing something that feels broken, and place that rock in a bowl of clear water symbolizing transformation.

That rock could represent sin that you regret or presently struggle with. It could represent loss or struggle in your life.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, we certainly have those.

- Lost plans during two years of pandemic,
- missing loved ones who are gone,
- feeling rifts in relationships, especially at a time when so many forces pull us apart
- living with health issues or undesired circumstances,
- missing faces of people who used to worship beside us and no longer here.
- Feeling grief for larger events in the world like wars, social injustice, or climate change

Grief doesn't stop just because of a church holiday. If you are going through something, it doesn't necessarily work to suddenly "be happy" because of a doctrinal affirmation.

I suggest that practicing resurrection faith means **fully acknowledging** what is broken while **walking forward** with hope and a sense that Christ is in our midst. ...Fully acknowledging and walking forward.

As a practice, you might find a space to reflect and process your own experience – in prayer, by journaling, or conversation with someone who is close – whatever is right for you.

In that space, be honest about the disappointments and grieves, but be sure to add the blessings and gratitude present in your life.

-- What feels broken and where do you see God at work?

For a time, the travelers to Emmaus were still downcast even while Jesus was walking right beside them. Imagine what the unexpected confirmation that Jesus was alive and walked with them felt like.

In your space of reflection, deliberately invite the Spirit of Christ to work in what remains broken. Imagine what it might look like for God to bring second breath or healing into your life, as well as the life of our congregation.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

We've been talking about what it means to be church a lot over the past couple of months.

We need to be church in light of a resurrection faith, and we need to do this together. Christ invites us not only to resurrection faith, but to make us into a resurrection people.

A major part of being church together is that we are in relationship with each other so as to have faith and hope in the resurrection on behalf of one another. Even if the male disciples needed a little time, the faith of the women made an important contribution to the faith of the church.

It is too much to follow Jesus and be strong in hope all the time if we are each individually to do that on our own. We need each other. When I am discouraged, you believe in the power of the risen Jesus on my behalf. When you are discouraged, I believe in the power of the risen Jesus on your behalf.

I don't mean that you rely on others to have faith for you. I mean that we build each other up, and on the difficult days, the faith of our sisters and brothers carries us.

Sometimes we expect to find Jesus only in Bible stories, traditions, or past history. The past is important and informs how we recognize Jesus. But that's not where we will find him. We find Jesus walking with us in our present.

Christ is risen! Christ does not live in the past. He is with us in the present! He is not somewhere else. He is *here*. He is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

#### BENEDICTION

From this time and place into whatever awaits, may you follow Jesus' upside-down way. May you have the courage to step beyond certain understanding into the unsettling miracle of the resurrection. Christ is risen. Alleluia!