

## EASTER 4/9/23

### WELCOME

Welcome to Alexanderwohl on this beautiful Easter morning!

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Alleluia!

I invite you to spend a moment greeting those in closest proximity. If you wish, you may use the Easter greeting, which is simply, "Christ is risen!" and the response is "He is risen indeed!"

Though Christ died and rose only once in history, we celebrate the resurrection of Christ once a year in spring. We just had a full moon a few days ago, on which the date of Easter is based.

We are seeing more and more evidence of new life after the dormancy of winter. The trees are budding, the grass is green, the tulips are blooming. Birds were singing in the early morning before dawn. All of this is part of a cyclical pattern of new life after death.

Through faith in Christ we put our trust in God's power of resurrection that is present among us and in us.

### PRAYER OF INVOCATION

We thank you God, that you have answered us and have become our salvation.

You have raised Jesus from the dead. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Grant that we might set our hearts on You and on your loving dreams for us. Grant that we may know what it is to be raised with Christ with whom our fully resurrected lives are hidden.

This is the day that You have made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

In the name of Jesus, Amen

### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we stand in awe at the thought of your resurrection.

Can this really be true?

Did this really happen?

What kind of power is this?

What does this mean for our lives? For your church?

Lord, heal our every thought of disbelief in your presence and power.

As you revealed yourself to your followers on that day,  
come to us with your delight and love.

In these moments we reflect, confess and give thanks. (silence)

In Colossians 3:1-4 we read:

**3** Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is your<sup>[a]</sup> life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

And now, responding together – To you, Lord, we commit all our hope and all our worship. Amen. Let us continue in prayer...

#### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

God of the unexpected, we thank you for your amazing creativity, for showing us the possibility that there can be life even after there has been death. That there can be dazzling light even after there has been mind-numbing darkness. There can be solid, trustworthy ground even after one has experienced tumultuous upheaval. Through your love and grace there can be healing and wholeness even after deep pain and wounded-ness. You are the God of Love, of Healing, of Resurrection Life and we give you thanks and praise.

We pray for healing and new life for ourselves, for those we know and love, for those whose life is clouded by grief or fear. We pray for Ann Boese as she continues to heal – we thank you God for healing that has happened for her. We pray for others who are healing from injuries or from medical procedures. We pray for those who are anticipating medical procedures, tests or appointments. Be with them. Grant your loving, healing power and assure them of your presence.

We pray for Caleb and Beth and the boys as they travel to Minneapolis next weekend to candidate at Faith Mennonite Church. Be with them, the Faith congregation and with us as we all seek your wisdom and guidance. We pray also for the Trinity congregation in Hillsboro as they celebrate Easter as well as their life together over these many years. Thank you for your faithfulness to that congregation and bless them as they each find their own, different places of worship now.

O God, whose breath and presence brings peace, we pray for our Orthodox and other Christian brothers and sisters in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, in Syria, in Central and South American countries, in Tennessee and New York, in California and Kansas, and in so many other places in this world where there is hate, violence and fear. Grant your Spirit of confidence, courage and commitment to one another and to you as we all strive to live in your ways and see with your eyes and love with your wisdom.

We pray for your blessing, God, on the Kansas Relief Sale this coming weekend. Bless the efforts and the hard work of so many who have come together over these last weeks and months to prepare, organize, announce, invite and finally to make the sale happen. May the sale and the resources that it raises be for your glory and a sign of your kingdom.

Be with us now through the rest of this service of worship and this day – be with us in the coming days. Keep us in your care. Amen.

## PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Loving God,

The world was changed ever since the faithful women who were the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection proclaimed the good news.

Let all that we offer today be an expression of that same faith, and may it serve your glory.

Amen

## GROUND OF NEW LIFE – PASTOR CALEB

Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew's gospel has a lot of quaking going on.

Earlier there was an earthquake at Jesus' crucifixion. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The centurion saw this and was convinced that this Jesus must be the son of God.

Now in the last chapter there is again an earthquake as an angel of the Lord comes to roll away the stone, and triumphantly sits on it. (I love that picture, by the way!).

Matthew's Gospel uses a lot of "earthquake" language in general. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey at the start of Holy Week, the whole city "quaked." And in our present account, the guards stationed at the tomb quaked for fear of the angel and "became like dead men."

Earthquakes are exceptional experiences. You normally expect the ground to be unmoving, solid, unshifting. I've experienced a couple of earthquakes.

One was in the middle of the night in Honduras. I awoke to a very loud rattling and could faintly see the concrete walls appear to move in a wave-like fashion.

I was very disoriented for a moment, until I realized, "Oh, this is an earthquake." I figured I might lay back down and go back to street, but could hear people in the streets, and realized everyone else had ran out of their homes and maybe I should too.

The second experience was in the middle of the day. I was walking in the street, in Ecuador and heard signs rattling, which I first thought was the wind. The ground started shifting, a little like walking down the aisle on a bus or train. It wasn't enough to knock me over, but it was still a surreal experience.

The ground is supposed to be solid! It's not supposed to move! The ground is what we trust and rely on. When we have our feet firmly set on solid ground, we feel secure.

When we talk about being "grounded," we mean having an anchor point in the vicissitudes of life.

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Just before dawn the first day of the week, after Jesus had been laid to rest, two Mary's went to see the tomb, according to Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew's gospel is unique in having guards present, and the women witness the whole thing as the angel makes the earth quake and then rolls away the stone and sits on it. Death is conquered!

In all the Gospels, the first witnesses are women, and we can't immediately understand how unusual that is.

Jesus the crucified is not there in the tomb because he has been raised. The angel invites the women to see that the tomb is empty. As the women leave, they see Jesus himself. They take hold of his feet, both as a gesture of worship, but maybe also because Jesus' feet represent solid ground.

Both the angel and Jesus give clear instructions for the disciples to go to Galilee and meet Jesus there. In Galilee where they first received their calling from Jesus, they will meet the risen Jesus and receive a renewed call and commission.

They must use their own feet to go and tell the good news.

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There are many ways we can think about ground. Our food comes from the ground or from creatures who graze from the ground. The ground serves as the foundation for our houses and buildings.

In a world where things constantly change, the shape of the grounds – it's contours, rivers, and hills, is often centuries or millennia old.

Level ground shows up in Scripture as a metaphor for righteousness and security found in God.

*"He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure." (Psalm 40:2)*

And in Isaiah 42:16:

*"I will lead the blind  
by a road they do not know,  
by paths they have not known  
I will guide them.  
I will turn the darkness before them into light,  
the rough places into level ground."*

One of my favorite choral pieces, and one I discovered recently, is entitled the "Ground." It is the final movement of the Sunrise Mass composed by a young Norwegian composer, Ola Gjeilo. The words come from the Latin liturgy:

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.  
 Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.  
 Hosanna in the highest!  
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
 Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,  
 Grant us peace.*

You may recognize some of these lines from Palm Sunday. While not specific to Resurrection Sunday, the piece feels like resurrection.

If the Sunrise mass begins just before dawn, one imagines that this is the moment the sun peeks over the horizon. I don't know the composer's reason for the title, but it is as if the ground is swelling, gently rising beneath one's feet.

When our lives feel shaken, quaked, when we or people we know feel like they are only sinking, with no solid ground on which to rest...

Christ is the ground on which we stand, the ground of new life.

The work of Christ is our ground, but it also shakes and quakes those who are comfortable and who participate in oppression. It shakes our complacency and self-centeredness. It shakes away everything we cling to that is not living in and by God's love.

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This old story of the resurrection of Jesus continues to give hope, connect us to God, and inspire faithful witness.

Because Jesus is risen, we are not defined by our past or the worst things we have done. We can find forgiveness and a way forward.

Because Jesus is risen, we know that hope is always a productive exercise, no matter what the circumstances. Hope is not something that we have only in certain circumstances, or the probability of a favorable outcome.

No, hope is an orientation. It is a choice made day by day to not despair, and to believe that there is always a way forward, there are always faithful actions we can take, always rich possibilities to express divine and human love.

Hope is sustained by belief in the power of God, a power not always obvious, nor a power that lets us sit passively and watch. But because we believe in the power of God, when we falter, stumble, and fail, as we will, God's mysterious providence takes our meager offering, and fashions out of it an ever-unfolding redemption.

Because Jesus is risen, we are not without hope.

Like the two Mary's we run to give witness with fear and great joy.

Today, let us take to heart the repeated words in all the Gospels:

“Do not fear.” We don’t have to be afraid.

There is solid ground. There is clear, blue sky.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed!

BENEDICTION (VT 1066)

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet  
walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands  
stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart  
open your hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ  
in everyone you meet,  
and may everyone you meet  
see the face of Christ in you.