



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
Easter Sunday: April 12, 2020

Gathering Around God’s Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Beloved church, behold the victory of our God: Jesus, our Lord, has conquered the grave.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Sin and death shall reign no more.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Let this place resound with joy.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Thanks be to God.

OPENING HYMN

Jesus Christ is Risen Today

#232

CALL TO CONFESSION

God has opened to us the gates of righteousness that we may enter through them. Confident in God's love, let us confess our sin.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit we have been raised to share in your glorious resurrection. Yet we have not lived as Easter people. We are unsure of your promise, confused about your will, and afraid in the face of danger. Like Mary, we weep at the tomb, but do not recognize your presence. Call us by name, that we may know you with confidence. Whenever we are tempted to fear death, give us courage to confess your Easter victory. Whenever we are distracted by petty conflicts, keep our minds on your reconciling love. Whenever we are overwhelmed by the power of evil, reveal again to us your triumph over the destructive powers of oppression. Forgive us our sin and let our lives be a testimony to your salvation through the love of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Listen, church: God who raised Jesus from the dead has not given us over to death. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Almighty God, by the power of your Spirit, roll away the stone and reveal to us the Word of Life. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-6

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God."

New Testament Reading: John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out

and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

SERMON

"While it was Still Dark"

Rev. David Ukropina

As I sat down to start writing this sermon, I had so many thoughts and feeling and ideas that it was hard for me to pull them all together into a single focus. While I don't think sermons always have to have only one theme or thread, I do think a focused and unified sermon is easier for people to follow and take in than one that is scattered.

So if I had to pick one central theme to concentrate on, it would be the combination of both joy and grief that we feel and experience on this day. Easter itself is always joyful in its very nature. The proclamation that Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin, death and the grave is just always inherently joyful.

In addition, we always experience Easter Sunday worship as a joyful event. I always think of the Easter brass music as a special way to celebrate in a way we don't on other days. Those bright, joyful, musical sounds proclaim the day that is like no other, even though it resonates into all other days and all other worship.

Yet the brass is not the only thing that is different. I love the tradition at Westminster of placing flowers on the cross, and also the special flowers that are in the sanctuary and the church. I love singing powerful Easter hymns on any Sunday, but especially on Easter Sunday. I am remembering the white banners and paraments, especially on the communion table.

As I wrote this, I was thinking back to last year's Easter service. Maybe it's just through the lens of this year, but it seemed especially energetic and joyful. The sanctuary was bursting at the seams and I think we had more kids than I remember having before. Just the whole thing felt

full of life.

Of course, just writing the lines "bursting at the seams" through our current reality immediately made me think of germs and threat and worry, as I imagine it does for you as well. This virus we're all dealing with seems to have invaded every aspect of our lives, including my recollections of last year's Easter worship service.

Every sermon, including every Easter sermon, is contextual and embodied, and this year it feels especially so. When I wrote about this year's central focus being a mixture of joy and grief, the grief part of that seems particularly tangible and immediate. The main part of that grief is over so much death and suffering around the world and around our country.

While death and suffering are always a part of our experience and reality, they seem even more apparent this year. We feel the grief over so many losses in so many parts of our world. We feel the loss of vital parts of our lives and community and work. We feel the loss of simply not being able to worship together the way we always do.

While all of this seems particular to this year, and prior to this year it would have been hard for me to imagine not worshipping at Easter in the sanctuary, the mixture of joy and grief is not anything new to Easter, or to the rest of our lives as Christians. If we take a big step back, and look at the whole scope of Holy Week, it's striking how much grief is mixed in with joy.

Starting with Palm Sunday, preachers and parishioners have always noticed how much joy and sorrow are mixed in with the story. Jesus enters Jerusalem with loud shouts, but the tone always includes grief and sorrow, as we head to the cross. I felt that last week in worship as we concluded with the sorrowful hymn, Ah, Holy Jesus.

This mix of joy and sorrow continues all through Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday, we remember with grief such details as the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. On Good Friday, we remember the agony of Jesus in the garden, the failure of the disciples and the denial of Peter, the beatings and suffering of Jesus by the guards and on the cross. There is just so much grief.

In thinking of hymns, I always think of the hymn When I Survey the Wondrous Cross and the line "Did ever such love and sorrow meet". Love and sorrow, joy and grief meet in a special way on the cross, but they run through all of Holy Week. I remember our kids always asking, "Why did they call it Good Friday if Jesus died?" Even as I respond that it's Good Friday because it leads to Easter and the resurrection, I still find it a good question.

And even though Easter Sunday itself is full of joy and wonder as the resurrection itself finally arrives, when we turn to the text, we continue to find this theme of grief mixed in with joy. In reading and studying the passage this week from John's gospel that centers on Mary at the tomb, there was one line that I've read many times before but which stood out to me this year.

The line was, "while it was still dark." We read in the very first verse that "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." While it was still dark. That particular detail tells us the time of day, but also so much more.

We begin the text with Mary coming to the tomb. It's been said that Mary was hoping to give Jesus a proper Jewish burial by anointing him with oil and spices. That's one of the things that has been most poignant to me about our current crisis is the disruption of our funeral rituals, and watching people have to grieve their loved ones without being physically near them.

Next in the passage, there is a lot of running. Mary sees the stone is removed, so she runs

to the disciples and tells them the Lord has been taken and they don't know where, again so that she can observe the burial ritual. Peter and John then run to the tomb, with John arriving first, followed by Peter. After seeing the empty tomb, they return to their homes.

But after they leave, Mary, after all that running, is finally standing still outside the tomb, and she is weeping. For me, this is always a poignant moment, but this year it especially resonates with all the grief the world is going through. Reading it this time, I was hit with an image I saw of a nurse crying outside the hospital after her shift was over.

Then Mary sees two angels, who ask her why she is weeping. When Mary says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him," I can still hear her thinking about honoring him with a burial ritual. Then she turns around and sees Jesus, but the text tells us that she did not know it was Jesus, and supposed that he was the gardener.

Many have wondered how Mary cannot recognize Jesus, someone she knew well. Some have focused on the mystery of a post-resurrection Jesus being somehow different. I've always been moved by the idea that when Mary's eyes were filled with tears, it must have been hard for her to see anything.

Whatever the case, when Jesus says her name, Mary, she recognizes him. During communion, we often talk about how the disciples at Emmaus recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, but here we recognize Jesus through eyes filled with tears when Jesus speaks our name to us.

Like the rest of you, I have been reading a lot of news and a lot of headlines these past few weeks. One of them caught my attention, but initially I did not know why. The headline appeared last Monday, April 6th, and it said, "U.S. Coronavirus Fight Enters Crucial Week." At first, it seemed like a normal headline, stating that this week was going to be an important moment in our collective journey.

But as I thought about it more, the headline stayed with me. I started thinking about the word crucial. In the headline, the word meant important. But the word crucial comes from the Latin word crux, which means cross. Suddenly, I read the headline as "U.S. Coronavirus Fight Enters Cross Week."

Cross Week. I suppose that could be an alternative title for Holy Week. I don't think that particular news source had Holy Week on its mind, but as a pastor, I tend to see things through a theological lens, so that's how the headline struck me. All of a sudden, there was Holy Week, there was Jesus, in the middle of a secular headline.

Jesus meets us in the middle of our lives. Like Mary, he meets us, and he speaks our name. Jesus meets us on every level we can picture. He meets us cosmically, as his resurrection is for the entire universe, in ways I still cannot wrap my head around. He meets us globally, in countries like China, Italy, Iran, both Koreas, Spain, the United States, and every other country.

Jesus meets us in every state. In New York and Louisiana, Alabama and Oregon. He meets us in our families, in our businesses, in our communities and our churches. And in Jesus Christ, God made a way where there was no way. When it was still dark, on that morning, in our world, God was already at work.

When darkness comes in our lives, God is still with us. Every person in this world is filled with heartache, during this crisis or any other time. Rich or poor, Democrat or Republican, American or other nationality, we are all filled with grief. But even in the most difficult

situations, God is at work, knitting life back together, and binding up our hearts.

And just as Jesus calls Mary by name, he also calls her to meaning and to ministry. Jesus tells Mary, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" When Mary goes to the disciples and announces to them, "I have seen the Lord," she gives the very first Christian sermon.

I love that the very first Christian sermon in the Bible is delivered by a woman. She was not ordained. She didn't take preaching classes. All she needed was a word from Jesus, and then she went and proclaimed what she had seen and what she had been told. That is our message. Christ is risen. Go and tell someone.

Jesus calls Mary to meaning and purpose, even in the midst of grief and sorrow. He does the same to us. Though it is sad that we cannot meet today in person, I also find it amazing that through a computer, we can all still worship together in spirit and in truth. Even in our grief and our distance, we can tell one another, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Amen.

Let us say what we believe by reciting the Apostles' Creed:

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

PRAYER'S OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us unite our hearts in prayer, saying, God of Resurrection, hear our prayer.

For the church throughout the world, that as we celebrate the feast of Jesus' resurrection, we may renew our faith and strengthen our witness in Jesus' name. **God of resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For pastors, teachers, and ministers, that they be wise in leadership and humble in service. **God of Resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For the leaders of the world, that they may practice compassion and reject the politics that use death and suffering as a means of control **God of Resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For our planet Earth, that people may be good stewards of its resources and share in its abundance; **God of Resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For the sick and those in distress, that they may find healing for their pain and be restored to fullness of life; **God of resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For our neighbors, that together we may dwell in harmony; **God of Resurrection, hear our prayer...**

For our enemies, that we may love them and be agents of reconciliation in the name of Jesus; **God of Resurrection, hear our prayer...**

Almighty God, receive these prayers we offer, and by the power of your Holy Spirit use us for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN:

Thine is the Glory

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BENEDICTION

May God who raised Jesus from the dead bless you, and by the power of the Holy Spirit raise you with him in glory. Amen.

Take a moment today to make a sign (handwritten, typed, etc.) that says:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (or something like that).

Or, draw a picture or create a message using sidewalk chalk!

Hang it in your front window. Take a picture and email it to the church and we will share them on Facebook throughout the Easter Season.