



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
3rd Sunday of Easter: April 26, 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

Followers of Jesus, by his cross we are redeemed from the futility of sin.

Alleluia!

By his rising we are free from the fear of death.

Alleluia!

By his love we are made new in the living and enduring Word of God.

Alleluia! Thanks be to God!

OPENING HYMN

That Easter Day With Joy was Bright #254

CALL TO CONFESSION

God judges all people impartially according to their deeds. Trusting in God's love in Jesus Christ, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, our world is filled with corruption: power disguises itself as truth; convenience masquerades as goodness; selfish pleasure imitates love. We confess to you, O God, that we have been caught in the web of the world's sin. By the power of the Holy

Spirit, save us from these deceptions and free us for glad obedience, that we may see the joy of Jesus' resurrection and receive the promise of everlasting life. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Followers of Jesus: God has promised salvation to us, to our children, and to all who are near and far. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Lord, you opened the meaning of the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and set their hearts ablaze. By the power of your Spirit kindle our hearts as we hear your word proclaimed, that we may receive you with joy. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!" What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

New Testament Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body

there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

SERMON

“Resurrection Happens”

Rev. David Ukropina

I’m a sucker for a resurrection story. There are stories you find, here and there, which remind you that people sometimes do come back from the dead. When I was a pastor in Texas, there was a woman at the church there named Edna Mares. She and her husband Henry were wonderful people, and they had a daughter named Emily who at the time went to a nearby college.

You couldn’t meet a person who had a bad word to say about Edna. She was our back-up Office Manager, and served in just about every volunteer role in the church at one time or another. I led a small group that Edna and Henry were in, and we met for about three years, so we got to know each other pretty well.

One weekday I was in my office and I got a call from one of our church members who worked in the Emergency Room at a nearby hospital. He said Edna had just been brought in to the ER, so I headed right over there. She had been at home sitting on the sofa next to her daughter, and suddenly Edna’s eyes rolled back and she fell to the floor. Right away, Emily called 911 and gave Edna CPR.

Pretty soon after getting to the hospital, they started cooling her body down with ice. That was one of the first times I had seen that technique. This all started on a Tuesday. Bonnie, another church member who worked in the ER as a nurse, told me that roughly 98% of people who went through something like this did not survive it.

I spent a lot of time with the Mares family on Tuesday and Wednesday, as family members flew in to Dallas Fort Worth airport to be there. It was very tense, but there were a lot of prayers, in between the tears. We were told by the doctors that they would not start warming her body back up until Friday, and we wouldn’t know anything until then.

That Thursday morning, on the way to work, I decided to stop by the hospital again, knowing there wouldn’t be much news until Friday at the earliest. I walked into the ER and

asked the charge nurse if I could say a prayer. She walked over to Edna's room, and then waved me over. I looked in, and there was Edna, sitting up on her bed, answering questions. My heart just about jumped out of my chest. I remember crying and hugging Emily. It was the closest thing to a resurrection I had ever seen.

Resurrection. It happens sometimes. As I think about resurrection, I think about what it must have been like for those two people, Cleopas and his friend, on the road to Emmaus that first Easter Sunday. The text says that when Jesus, who they didn't recognize, appeared and asked them what they were talking about, that they stood looking sad. Obviously, the good news had not yet gotten through to them yet.

When they talked about the death of Jesus, they said, "We had hoped that Jesus was the one who was to redeem Israel." For these two people, they saw death only as a frustration of their hope. Jesus ends up rebuking them for being slow of heart to believe. And yet after Jesus appeared to them in the breaking of the bread, and then vanished, they said to themselves, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road?"

Cleopas and his friend remind me a bit of ourselves, living here 2000 years after the resurrection. Like them, we've heard rumors and hints and whispers about Jesus, that he really rose from the dead, and our hearts burn with hope. And yet all of us wrestle in some way or another, in the midst of our everyday lives, with whether we can really believe the story or not.

It's interesting to me that Cleopas and his friend never appear in the Bible before this story or afterwards. And the town of Emmaus never gets mentioned before or after. And yet even though we don't hear about Emmaus again or see Cleopas in the Bible again, we do learn one important thing about he and his friend. They immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem to tell others about what they had seen. It's a typical command for post-resurrection experiences of Jesus, to go and tell others about the good news, and this is exactly what they do.

The experience of God is never a private gift, never for us alone. Easter is not over on Easter Sunday. It stretches into our lives. Cleopas never saw Jesus again, and we never again see Cleopas, but it doesn't matter. His life would never be the same again.

One of the most remarkable resurrection stories I ever heard came from one of the most powerful books I ever read. The book is called *Waking Up, Alive*. It was written by a psychologist named Dr. Richard Heckler, and though the book is pretty intense, it's very powerful as well.

Dr Heckler wrote the book about people who had tried to end their lives, and who had lived through it. The book is mostly in the words of the survivors themselves, though Dr Heckler organized the book around common themes that ran through the stories. He charts a common narrative that runs from early childhood trauma and loss, through a descent into depression, a tunnel like trance, an attempt, and then the long journey back towards living.

Even though there were over fifty people mentioned in the book, and I read the book about 20 years ago, the one person who stands out in my memory is Karl. He told Dr Heckler when they were planning to meet for the first time at the airport that he was the one who was 6 foot 4, 240 pounds, and looked kind of like an Elvis impersonator. Karl had grown up in a small town in Kansas in the 1970's and when the steel industry went downhill, the only thing he could

see growing in town were the number of bars.

As a teenager, he started getting into alcohol and drugs. To supply his growing habit, he became a drug dealer, and later a member of the mafia. Over time, his relationship with the mob turned bad, and the FBI began to take his property. As the net closed in on him, Karl descended further into drug addiction. After falling deeper and deeper into his own pit, Karl knew he wanted to end what he called “his poor, pitiful life.”

One time, Karl loaded up on drugs and alcohol and intentionally sped down the highway, looking for a place to crash. He slammed into a concrete divider, but emerged with only a scratch on his face.

Another time, on the run from both the mob and the law, he sat alone in his car at night, cold and alone. Feeling that he had no hope, he took out a gun he had and fired it. By some estimates, the chances are 2000 to 1 that a new cartridge would fail to fire, but it did. It took Karl a few moments to realize he was still alive, and then he fainted.

His third run-in with death happened when the mob finally caught up with him, after he had crossed them a few times. The mob guy cornered him in a room, but said to him “I don’t know why I’m doing this, but if you walk out and don’t turn around- keep on going and keep your mouth shut- I’ll let you go.”

Soon after that, the FBI told him that if he surrendered everything he owned, left town and sought rehab, they’d back off. Karl, a veteran of the drug world, knew an opportunity when he saw one, and he took it. A day later, he went to Reno, arriving tired, confused and frightened. After two weeks there, out of sheer desperation and loneliness, he walked into a church service.

He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been in church. Suspicious by nature, he sat with his back against the wall. Karl said he wasn’t really listening much to the sermon, until he heard the words, “Come out of the darkness. Come out of the darkness and into the light.” It wasn’t part of an altar call – just part of the sermon - really simple, basic stuff, but all of sudden, the years of pain and of his childhood were all right there.

Karl fell to the floor, with tears streaming down his face, and as he said, something inside of him just broke, and for the first time in years, he felt like he might have a future. He got over his drug addictions, and in the following years, Karl became an addiction counselor himself, and an organizer of inner city missions to feed the homeless. He also offers to be a witness to others about Jesus, though he always waits to be asked, as he says that his own life has taught him a great deal of patience. At the point Dr Heckler met him, he had been thriving for several years.

Resurrection happens sometimes. And even though all of us can probably think of someone who did not make it through the trauma and pain of their lives, we can also think of some who have. Like I said before, I’m a sucker for a resurrection story, but I sometimes find myself wondering why.

Is the longing I have for resurrection just wishful thinking? Is it pie in the sky, Polyanna, delusional thinking that’s just plain wrong? Or is there something real and true there - not a story, not a fairy tale, but something that really did happen once a long time ago. And is it also something we see and hear about every once in a while, in stories we hear from time to time? And if it happened with Jesus a long time ago, and if it happens sometimes around us, we know that it will happen again, for those we love and for ourselves as well.

All of us have been broken at one time or another. All of us have prayed before for a resurrection that did not happen. But we can still lean towards the resurrection, hoping and praying that it will happen, that death will be overcome, that brokenness will be repaired, that we will see at the communion table a preview of what will come.

And if we see the resurrection, then we can go and tell others. Easter is not over on Easter Sunday. How can we not go and tell? Edna did, Cleopas did. Karl did. What are we going to do? We can tell others about Easter with our worship, with how we treat others, with our mission, with pastoral care. After we've seen the resurrection, how can we not? Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

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

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

O God you are greatly to be praised. Through Christ Jesus your Son you have shown yourself to us, for he is in you and you are in him. In Christ Jesus you have conquered the power of death and enabled us to face our own death and the loss of those we love with trust and confidence. Help us to live with joyful anticipation of entering the heavenly places that he has prepared for us in your house, and to show forth our hope in Him to all who we meet before we gather before your throne in glory... Lord, hear our prayer...

Loving God, we pray for your church, the church of Christ Jesus your son. May our life as your holy people always be marked by faithful testimony in both word and action. Like Jesus, may we be known as people of prayer and service - truth and love - and mercy and help - especially for those who are in need - those that our world rejects - those that without your Son in our lives, we ourselves might turn away from. Lord, hear our prayer..

Lord, we pray for people all over the world who long to see your face and do not know how to find you. May they see you in us - and us in you - through the loving care you call us to show. We pray for the victims of neglect and of oppression, for those scorned and mocked, for those who are overlooked by the rest of our world. May they be convinced that they are precious in your sight and may their needs be met according to the abundance of your grace. Lord, hear our prayer...

We pray, O Lord, for our families and for our neighbors - and for all those whom you have placed upon our hearts this day - those who grieve and those who rejoice - those who struggle with conflict in their families and those who celebrate new birth - those who need work - and those who need a special healing - or a sense of peace to come over them. Hear now the prayers we make for those we name silently before you at this time.... Loving God - do not let our hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Rather fill our lives with devotion and service and help us to follow Jesus, the way, the truth, and life, and the one who taught us to pray, saying...

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

Christ is Alive! (v 1-4)

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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.