



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
Easter Sunday
April 4, 2021

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. (If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At- Home Worship service, please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen, indeed!

This is the day that the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

OPENING HYMN

Jesus Christ is Risen Today

#232

CALL TO CONFESSION

Jesus’ rising from the dead assures us that we, too, have been given new life. Let us repent of our sin before God and one another, certain of God’s mercy.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, we confess that, even on this most holy day, we have trouble believing in the victory over death shown to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We confess our total dependence on you not only for life but also for faith, hope and love. Without your presence with us through the ages, we would be lost. Forgive us and transform us, that our work and prayer will make whole what is broken and bring peace on earth. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

By the grace of God and the witness of our ancestors, the good news of Jesus’ resurrection is our rock and our salvation. I declare to you the forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Open our eyes and soften our hearts, O God, through the work of your Holy Spirit, that in the hearing of your Word we may receive new life. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly." I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

New Testament Reading: Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

ANTHEM JS Bach Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010 (ca. 1720) Sarabande Kim Uwate

SERMON "Terror and Amazement" Rev. David Ukropina

One of my favorite lines that I heard repeated while I was in seminary came from one of my favorite professors, Lewie Donelson. And the line that I remember Lewie repeating was that all of us Christians are on a continuous crucifixion and resurrection journey. That is, we are continuously in a process of dying off to our old life and being reborn into a new, resurrection life.

I think this is the case during all of our lives, but it feels especially true during Holy Week and Easter, and also especially true this particular Easter. On this Easter of 2021, we are in an interesting place, where we are gradually emerging from a global pandemic, but are also still worshipping apart from one another, as we did last year.

As I was preparing this sermon, I looked back to my sermon from last year. I remembered the circumstances of the sermon, and also how in the sermon, I talked about the way that joy and sorrow are always a part of Holy Week and Easter, and that they were particularly that way last year.

Now a whole year of the pandemic has passed, and on Easter I find myself comparing how this Easter feels to the way the last one felt. Through the lens of an exhausting year, it feels like this year seems more like

being at the end of a war than the beginning, and while we're glad to be near the end, we're exhausted from having gone through one.

I don't want to be overly dramatic, but it reminds of how one commentator compared our covid battle right now to how the spring of 1945 felt to the Allies, where they knew the war was almost over, but they weren't quite at the end yet.

Of course we've all read and talked and listened about the "ending" of the pandemic, and how covid will always be with us in a way. We will not wait until there are zero cases to go back to our lives pre-pandemic, including worship, but we also know that our lives will never be exactly the same as before, because we've all been through something so momentous.

In my sermon last year, I also remember talking about how joy and sorrow run throughout all the details of Holy Week and Easter. On Palm Sunday, there are shouts of Hosanna, but also foreboding as the cross looms on the horizon. On Maundy Thursday, there is sorrow and grief as we remember the failure of not only Judas but all the disciples, as well as ourselves.

On Good Friday, we experience the sheer grief of the suffering of Christ, and his death on the cross. And even on Easter Sunday, with all of its joy and celebration, there is grief as well. Last year, our gospel text was from John and included the story of Mary weeping at the tomb, and Jesus meeting her through her tears.

This year, our text comes to us from the gospel of Mark, and it includes the narrative particular to that gospel writer. We read from Mark that "when the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him."

It's interesting to reflect on the way that it was the women, and not the male disciples, that went to the tomb. During Lent, one of the things we reflect upon is our own sin, and the way we fail Christ and his ministry. In doing this, we remember the failure of Peter who lies out of his fear, and Judas, who betrays Jesus, and the Romans and the religious leaders, who put him to death.

However, in Mark, it's hard to say that these women have really failed in any way. They alone, and not the male disciples, are going to the tomb to honor Jesus. They must have been dealing with a lot of grief, and even fear, visiting their leader who had just been violently put to death by those in power.

Still, they exhibit great determination in moving through the darkness with their oil and spices. I guess the only way you could say they failed is that they still did not believe that the resurrection Jesus promised would happen, as they still planned to anoint a dead body, and they still wondered who could roll the stone away.

Yet this is understandable. Until the resurrection happened, who could really imagine it, even if Jesus had already proclaimed it. But one of the amazing things about God is that God comes to us as disciples both in our failures and our triumphs. Whether we are like the disciples who repeatedly fail Jesus, or whether we are like the determined women who are bravely fighting through our fear and grief, God is with us.

God is present both in the loud hallelujahs and joyous proclamation of Easter Sunday, and God is also with us in the midst of painful suffering and death, which we have collectively experienced so much of this past year, but also in any year of humanity living upon this fallen planet.

One of the interesting details about the ending of Mark's gospel that you may have noticed before, is that there are basically two different endings. One ending, sometimes called the "shorter ending", ends where we end today, with the women fleeing from the tomb, "for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

The other "longer ending" has a description of Jesus meeting with the eleven disciples and asking them to preach the good news to all of creation. Many commentators suspect that at some point in history, this longer ending was added on to the narrative, as the earliest manuscripts end with verse 8.

It's possible to speculate that if the longer ending was added, it was because the shorter ending was so bleak. The women fleeing the tomb in terror and amazement, and also in silence, hardly seems like a great proclamation of faith. However, it also seems more realistic, and silence seems like a more appropriate response to the desolation of the cross and everything they had seen happen.

Again, an amazing thing about God is that God is present in both reactions. God is present in the grief we all feel, whether during Lent and Holy Week or in the pain of this past year. God is also present in the triumph of resurrection, and also in all of the joys we have experienced this past year, even in the midst of pain and sorrow.

As I was preparing this Easter sermon for this year, I was reminded of a shorter funeral homily that I gave about a dozen years ago. It was for a funeral service that I presided at for a medical doctor. He had been both a pediatrician and family doctor in the city of Gainesville, Texas, and it was said that you couldn't walk down a street in Gainesville and not meet a person who Dr Lusk had delivered.

One of the small details I remember about that homily was that it was close to Easter, and that particular year, Easter fell on March 23, which was one of the earliest days Easter can fall on. The date of Easter follows the lunar calendar, and it can range from between March 22 and April 25th.

And one of the things I remember from that year in Texas was that we had a late snow fall that year, late for Texas anyway. And there were pictures from the area of new spring buds of flowers just starting to bloom, that were then covered in a layer of snow. This fact at the time reminded me of how we live in both an Easter and Good Friday kind of world.

We know that Easter is a time of rebirth and renewal. It's a time of hope, and we can see signs in our world of the hope of Easter trying to break through, just as we see signs of hope this year of the pandemic lessening and people getting back to things they have lost and missed during our distancing.

At the same time, we also live in a Good Friday kind of world, a day when Jesus lay dead on the cross and his mother was crying and the disciples were running away. I remember how that mixture of Good Friday and Easter maybe me think of Dr Lusk, and how he fought in World War II, and cared for his patients, and served his church.

And in the midst of a world such as ours, with its mix of joy and loss, we are called to take part, to participate in that hope that is trying to get born. We are called to be a part of the kingdom of God that is advancing against the forces of darkness and despair that are always a part of our world.

In a way, none of this is new. We hear these words from the church, year after year. But in a way, every year is a new year and every Easter is a new Easter, and a renewed opportunity to join in the advancing kingdom of God. Our joys and our sorrows are always with us, and always will be. We will always lament the loss and suffering we and others go through.

But the choice we have is to see and know that this is a special kind of journey we are on. As Christians, we have the special privilege of knowing that it is a crucifixion and resurrection journey that we are on. Christ sanctifies all of our joys and sorrows, and places them under the sign of the cross and of the empty tomb.

In both our sorrows and our joys, in both our pain and our blessings, in both our silence and our loud hallelujahs, we can proclaim that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH - from 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 Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was

crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on 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 Ghost; 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

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation

Great Thanksgiving and Lord's Prayer

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.

The Breaking of the Bread and Distribution of the Elements

Thanks After Communion

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

Christ is Alive

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BENEDICTION

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!