

EASTER 2021

Introduction & Call to Worship

This is a wonderful day, like no other on the Christian calendar, not only because we greet each other joyfully on this happy morning, or because we can sing together again, or because we have decorated the cross with spring flowers, but because this is the day that bursts into our lives as a “whole new day.” Today we celebrate new life, new possibilities, the power of resurrection. Today we exclaim: The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Hymn

Christ the Lord is risen today

Opening Prayer

God of resurrection, with the sun rising we have awakened to the promise of new life. With the dawn has come a new creation. Hear our glad voices and know our joyful hearts for we see this Easter morning that nothing can separate us from your love. Amen

God of all ages and all people, the shadow and gloom of Good Friday has been dispersed by the light and brightness of this new day. We rejoice in your power to turn sorrow into joy, despair into hope, defeat into victory and evil into goodness. Help us on this Easter day to burst out of the tombs that contain us: tombs of selfishness, greed, pride and prejudice. Help us to embrace a new life of divine grace and human love. And may we boldly proclaim and live this new life on this Easter day and forever more. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the Risen One, who gives us new life. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Mark 16: 1-8

Reflection

As you know, each of the four Gospels tells the story of Easter and each tells it differently. Mark’s gospel is the briefest in its description; for Mark it is enough to provide us with only a few details in the eight verses that he writes about Jesus’ resurrection. Matthew needs 20 verses to describe what happened three days after.....and Luke and John spend at least fifty verses writing about the resurrection. Surprisingly, Mark does not report an appearance of the risen Lord. He just leaves us wondering.....Did the

resurrection really happen? And is an empty tomb enough to persuade, to stir new life in the followers of Jesus? I like this short resurrection account, just because it is so plain and simple. It plainly tells us the truth about our faith and reminds us of our very human responses to the amazing and troubling experiences in our lives. It seems very real. “So they went out and fled from the tomb, in terror and amazement and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid”. The women, the first witnesses to the resurrection were terrified, surprised and stunned into silence. We can never predict our own reaction and behaviour in difficult and surprising situations, but I guess many of us would react the same. As Mark describes the scene, the (male) disciples have already given up and are nowhere to be found. The women do not really get it either. They arrive at the tomb, expecting to find a body that they can anoint. When the young man in white tells them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee, they run away and withdraw in silence, too afraid to move or to speak.

The women were not expecting the resurrection. They came at first light, arriving quietly at the tomb just as the sun came over the hills. As they walked along, they must have felt many emotions....anger, fear, shock and deep grief. This was a time in Israel’s history of violence and repression, so what must they have been thinking as they made their way through the night? They came to the tomb to anoint the body with oil. They were expecting to have life go on as usual, even in the midst of the death-dealing powers that they had witnessed a few days ago. Can you imagine how their lives were changed on that day? As we think of the world, all the pain and suffering during the ongoing pandemic, and as we consider the challenges of life on this Easter Sunday, we can look toward the women at the tomb on that first Sunday. They were certainly full of sorrow and frightened, but they somehow managed to “hang in there” and keep going. Throughout this Holy Week, the women stayed at the cross, it was the women who quietly watched as they laid Jesus in the tomb and it was the women who came early in the morning to anoint him. Somehow, amidst the confusing events of those days, there were those who maintained a quiet, faithful and stubborn presence. It took an earthquake, a stranger in the tomb and a missing body to send them fleeing, but we know that they would find the courage and confidence again to move forward into the rest of their lives and into the world.

The first words that were spoken to the women amaze us even today; “Do not be afraid.” Over and over again in the Gospels we hear these words spoken. “Do not be afraid.” Your life is going to change in ways you never dreamed of. “Do not be afraid.” There is new hope. “Do not be afraid, in grief, sorrow, pain, I will be with you.” And each one spoken to finds a way to move forward into newness of life. We know that God is present in our lives this morning, not only in the joyful alleluias that we sing and the glory of Easter. God is present and persists in our bewilderment and fear; God persists, bringing hope out of hopelessness, helping us to go forward, even when we are gripped by terror and grief. God persists when we are broken by pain and suffering and utterly overwhelmed by the sheer force of the power of death around us. God persists in love, with love. *Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution....or peril. No, nothing can separate us....*

As the women flee the tomb, in terror and amazement, perhaps it is what all of us want to know and desire to feel at Easter. Utter amazement...wonder! There is in this moment, holy awe. The wonderful thing about Mark is that he circles around and brings us back to exactly the place he begins. There was awe and wonder at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and so there is at the end....“Go,” the angel told the women. “Tell everyone that he goes to Galilee, ahead of you, there you will meet him.” Yes, we remember the beginning of Mark’s gospel, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God....!” That is where we are going to meet him.....as we follow him.....as he goes before us.....to Galilee and into all the world proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. We meet him when we follow him as he goes before us, on the way of the cross.....and of the resurrection!

What will we do? Flee or follow? “We do not entirely understand what resurrection means, but if we understand the story, we should be holding fast to what we do know; that Jesus goes before us, summoning us to the way of the cross. That is the hardest thing about the ending of Mark; not tragedy, not victory, but the ending challenges us to follow anew.” I guess that we are here this morning because we have decided that we will not flee but we will follow. And as followers we rejoice: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

Prayers & Lord's Prayer

God of the bright and morning star, God of the rising sun, God of new life, we praise you! For your presence, alive, powerful, resurrected, we thank you! We celebrate your victory over death, over all the powers that would defeat us. Help us to grasp resurrection; to understand its life-giving power; to see its force at work in our world, defeating death dealing powers, overturning unjust structures, changing attitudes, moving the world slowly, forcefully, bending us towards love and peace.

On this day of great gladness empower us to be faithful followers of Jesus, proclaiming the good news.....your good news of peace and justice wherever we are and wherever we go. Help us to *be* good news, walking lightly on this good earth, caring gently for all people, living hopefully into your kingdom.

Today we think of all who are grieving.....

and we pray for the sick and weary.....

for places in the world that are torn by violence and bloodshed.....

for people harassed and abused.....

for communities and families struggling during the pandemic.....

for ourselves.....May the spirit of Easter give us hope, courage and confidence as we move forward in our lives and in the world. Christ is risen. Alleluia! And we pray together....OUR FATHER

Offering

Bless these gifts so that the world may know that you are always appearing.

Bless our hands so that your love might appear in the work we share.

Amen.

Hymn

Thine be the glory

Blessing

May the joy of resurrection and the hope of Easter fill your hearts and minds. Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Let us go and share the good news.

Amen