

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, April 16, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on John 20:19-31)*

One: Christ is risen! He greets us with a word of peace.
All: **We welcome the risen Christ! We worship and adore him!**
One: Christ is risen! Locked doors and doubting hearts cannot keep him away.
All: **We welcome the risen Christ! We worship and adore him!**
One: Christ is risen! He comes to bless us with the gift of the Holy Spirit.
All: **We welcome the risen Christ! We worship and adore him!**

***OPENING HYMN** "The Day of Resurrection!" GtG 233

1. **The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad,
the Passover of gladness,
the Passover of God.
From death to life eternal,
from sin's dominion free,
our Christ has brought us over
with hymns of victory.**
2. **Let hearts be purged of evil
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal
of resurrection light,
and listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and hearing,
may raise the victor strain.**
3. **Now let the heavens be joyful;
let earth its song begin;
the round world keep high triumph
and all that is therein.**

(continued...)

**Let all things seen and unseen
their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord has risen,
our joy that has no end.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Victorious and gracious God, how quickly we forget that we are an Easter people. We fall into despair and have no hope. We forget you are with us and do not know your peace. We wander aimlessly in life, ignoring your sure signs to us. Forgive us, compassionate God. Come to us and touch us with your life-giving Spirit. Renew us by your resurrection hope. And fill us with the love of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on John 20)*

One: “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’.”

**All: The Living Christ is in our midst.
God’s mercy abounds,
and we are granted new birth into a living hope.**

One: In Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God;
that is a promise of peace and joy.
Know that you are forgiven;
receive Christ’s peace;
and share that peace with one another.

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING John 20:1-23

JOHN 20:1-23 (Common English Bible)

¹ *Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.*

² *She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said,*

*“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him.”
3 Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. 4 They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. 5 Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. 7 He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus’ head. It was not with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. 8 Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 They did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.*

11 Now Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. 12 She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. 13 The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him.” 14 As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.

15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” Then she told them what he said to her.

19 It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” 22 Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Angles in the Aftermath” by Pastor Bill Vincent

We know at least something of the disciples' experience and response following Jesus' death and the first Easter.

We read of their confusion, their bewilderment, their excitement.

But I have often wondered about others.
There were plenty of people in Jerusalem that week, from near and from far.
What did they think?
How did they respond?
What was their take?
Imagine some of them with me, if you will.

There was the soldier who stood at the cross and watched. A Roman soldier trying to keep the peace, impatient with the Jews' strange ways and silly beliefs. "They get all worked up over nothing." He was part of Pilate's contingent that took up quarters in Jerusalem during the Passover festival: a time when religious ferment raised the political stakes and the rhetorical temperature, and the specter of possible threats to the rule of Rome. Disgruntled that he had to spend time in Jerusalem, he didn't understand why the Jews thought it such a big deal, this Jerusalem; when, if they really wanted to see a grand city, they should go to...Rome.

There was the woman who lived in Jerusalem. It was always an exciting time, Passover was. So many people crowding the street right outside her door. She always saw lots of family and friends. It was a special time of reunions and renewing friendships. The only blot on an otherwise special celebration was the Romans' crucifixion of those three the day before Passover. Ugh! What a mean, nasty, cruel thing to do. She shuddered to think about it. So she didn't, instead choosing to remember and cherish friendly conversations, a special Passover, and family that had to leave all too soon.

There was the man who was a Zealot, always carrying a concealed dagger, ready to strike down a Roman soldier if the opportunity presented itself. He barely made it out of the city alive; escaped being rounded up by the Romans in the midst of all the ruckus and crack down, which centered on this Jesus. He would have been prepared to stand by Jesus and strike a blow for freedom. He didn't know Jesus well, but he would have rallied around him had he taken a stand against Rome. But Jesus didn't. So now he was laying low for a while. Heard his friend Barabbas had been set free -- ha! there's a twist for you -- and thought he might link up with him.

Now he had heard some silly rumors: some of Jesus' followers had found his tomb empty and claimed to have seen him. Ha! Their dreams die hard, you know. When will they get their heads out of the clouds: the only way to freedom is through a knife in a Roman's heart.

There was the Levite who had come in from one of the neighboring towns to help with the Passover celebration. It was always a madhouse, with so many people and so much going on. Slaughtering all those lambs, draining all that blood. It was a messy business, for hours on end. And he was exhausted. He was glad to help, and it was his duty to help; and, yes, Passover is special and important. But he was always glad when it was over and he could return to his quiet village, done for another year. Yes, he had heard some of the clamor about this Jesus from Nazareth; and he agreed that, yes, it was a shame, but probably for the best that Jesus had been gotten out of the way to allow peaceful and peace-loving people to get on with their lives, without the fear of Roman retaliation.

Then there was the 12-year old boy from out-of-town. He had traveled all the way from Antioch with his father for his first Passover in Jerusalem. How exciting it was! How wonderfully meaningful! He had been somewhat curious about some commotion he had noticed here and there in the days before Passover -- something about a wandering preacher from up in Galilee. But when he asked his father about it, his father avoided the question and said nothing. Now he and his father were on their way home. They would have so much to tell the rest of the family about their journey.

There were many others, from different corners of life, who looked at events from their different angles.

And, unnoticed by most of them, he died for them all. And he rose for them all. For each one of them. Those who saw and believed. Those who refused to see and wouldn't believe. Those who didn't know to look, and those who couldn't be bothered to look.

He came for them all.

In giving peace to the disciples and sending them out, Jesus is offering his peace to the world, to all the world.

And thus he comes, to each and every character in the story: those with major roles and those with minor ones; those on stage and those off stage.

He came for those who betrayed him, and denied him, and deserted him ... to give them a second chance, and new courage for a new life.

He came even for those who crucified him ... to show them a new and better way, and to offer them a new beginning, a fresh start.

He came for those who didn't want him around ... to show them their true need, and to offer them satisfaction for their unacknowledged yearning.

He came for those who couldn't believe ... to stand by them until they could.

He came for those who could believe and did ... to fill them with new joy and greater courage to pass on and embody the good news that was even then transforming them.

He came for those who were too busy to notice ... to show them a slower pace and a better rhythm that they may know true life in him.

And so for us after Easter:

Yes, some of us still know the joy and excitement.

And some only know the let down after the high, the exhaustion after the flurry, maybe even the relief after the inconvenience -- you know, almost glad it's over, all the hoopla.

There are those who are elated after the killing, so to speak -- the economic 'killing' on candy, cards, new clothes, flowers.

Those shaking their heads after all the bother.

Those for whom it passed by without so much as a nod.

For each of us and all of us, he died.

For each of us and all of us, he lives.

To each of us and all of us, he comes. Offering life and love; second chances, new opportunities, fresh possibilities; bringing hope and peace.

To each and every corner of this world, he comes: to the famous and the infamous; the well-known and the unknown; those in the center and those on the periphery; those in the thick of things and those out of the loop.

To each and every one of us he comes, no matter what part we have played in the great drama of life.

He comes bringing his presence. He comes bringing himself. He comes and says, "Peace be with you."

- peace in his presence
- peace through his forgiveness
- peace by the power of his Spirit.

He comes in the ups and the downs of life.

In the questions and the answers -- though more of the former than the latter.

In the hopes and despairs.

In our successes and our failures.

He may come in the spectacular -- like a cross and an empty tomb.

But he also comes in the spectacle of everyday life: in the ho-hum and the hum-drum.

For in pondering the cross and the empty tomb,
in the aftermath of all the flurry that was Holyweek and Easter,
in the calm after the storm of activity,
we remember...

...there is no part of human life he has not experienced.

...there is no aspect of human life he has not known.

...there is no corner of human life where he is not present.

And he comes for you and me -- in the midst of our funk and in the midst of our joy.

He comes when we are keenly aware of his presence, and when we are blindly unaware of his presence -- though he definitely prefers one over the other.

Even behind the most tightly locked door of our lives, he comes.

Even into the most securely guarded corner of our hearts, he comes.

He comes with power in his hands and healing in his presence, to offer forgiveness and to bring blessing.

He comes to give us the Spirit, and to breathe into us new life.

And he comes for us all. Whether we are looking for him, or not.

He comes in the noise and celebration. He comes in the quiet aftermath.

He comes in the ordinary gardener and the extraordinary occurrence within the garden.

He comes in the earthquake that rolls away the stone (see Matthew 28:1-10). And he comes in the eerie silence of an empty tomb.

He comes for you and for me. For he died for you and for me, and he lives for you and for me.

And he comes to us and says, "*Peace* be with you."

"*Peace be with you.*"

"*Peace...be...with...you.*"

***HYMN** "Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers" GtG 231 [Tune 509]

1. **Christ has risen while earth slumbers;**
Christ has risen where hope died,
as he said and as he promised,
as we doubted and denied.
Let the moon embrace the blessing;
let the sun sustain the cheer;
let the world confirm the rumor:
Christ is risen, God is here!

2. **Christ has risen for the people**
whom he died to love and save;
Christ has risen for the women
bringing flowers to grace his grave.
Christ has risen for disciples
huddled in an upstairs room.
He whose word inspired creation
can't be silenced by the tomb.

3. **Christ has risen and forever**
lives to challenge and to change
all whose lives are messed or mangled,
all who find religion strange.
Christ is risen, Christ is present
making us what he has been:
evidence of transformation
in which God is known and seen.

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living 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.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: In your almighty mercy...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Traditional)*

**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.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Risen and redeeming God, you have given us more than we could ever give you in return. You are gracious and generous in your love. Accept our offerings as signs of our gratitude and bless our work on Christ's behalf. May we love as Christ loved. May we serve as Christ served. Call us forth into your world, guided by Christ's spirit. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "The Risen Christ" GtG 257 (*Verses 1, 2, & 4*) [*Tune 517*]

**1. The risen Christ, who walks on wounded feet
from garden tomb through darkened city street,
unlocks the door of grief, despair, and fear,
and speaks a word of peace to all who hear.**

**2. The risen Christ, who stands with wounded side,
breathes out his Spirit on them to abide
whose faith still wavers, who dare not believe;
new grace, new strength, new purpose they receive.**

**4. May we, Christ's body, walk and serve and stand
with the oppressed in this and every land,
till all are blessed and can a blessing be,
restored in Christ to true humanity.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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