

Easter Worship – April 17, 2022 @ 10:30 am

Easter Greetings and Welcome

Prelude: Praise by the Lord by Bach (Trumpet and Organ)

Litany of Resurrection and the Easter Cross

Gail Lindars

We come as weary yet hopeful people; weary from carrying the weight of our struggles and hopeful that hope might again break through the clouds.

Remind us that You do Your best work when the clouds are darkest, and that You use silence as a prelude to Your grandest music.

Turn our distracted minds from the pain of life to the victory of seeing God remove the boulders from our faithless living.

**Wipe the tears of tragedy and sorrow from our faces
and brighten our tomorrow with Your Presence.**

Change our waiting into hope, our apathy into eagerness and our discouragement into joy.

Bring light into every dark corner in which we live, and life into our dying hopes and dreams.

(All Lenten candles relit)

Prayer: God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for Christ is alive and has become the Lord of life. From the waters of death you raise us with him and renew your gift of life within us. Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Christ our Lord.

***Hymn # 243** *Jesus Christ is risen today*

Prayer for Illumination (unison)

Fiona Gow

Extravagant God pour out your love and mercy on us. Hear our prayers – open our hearts and minds to know the joy of your presence revealed in scripture today. Prepare us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

1st Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15: 12-26

Fiona Gow

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and

you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

The word of the Lord/ **Thanks be to God**

Solo: (hymn 259) *This joyful Eastertide (Lauren)*

Prayer of Confession

Lillian and Dennis Sutherland

We confess that we remain captive to doubt and fear, tied to dark clouds of guilt and sorrow. Turn our attention from defeat to the victory of an open tomb. We trust more in the security of "the way things are", more so than in the new life You guarantee. Walk beside us from the graves where we have buried all our dreams and possibilities. Show us how to walk from death to life and roll away the boulders that separate us from You. Empty our lives of all that wants to die within us and make us all a people of the resurrection.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Lillian and Dennis Sutherland

Forgiven we will forgive others; loved, we too will love and show mercy. By the power of Easter Faith, go and live as forgiven people.

Hymn # 249 *The Day of Resurrection

2nd Scripture: John 20.1-18

The Rev. Laura Kavanagh

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.

The word of the Lord/ **Thanks be to God**

Easter Message: Beginning with Death

The Rev. Laura Kavanagh

Some years ago in the weeks leading up to Easter I participated in what was then a novel thing – a webinar – now such lectures or workshops using Zoom or other web-based platforms are not only common, they are the norm. What I remember was the opportunity to receive information and have a discussion with the guidance and wisdom of the Reverend Dr. Stephen Farris, then Acting Principal of Vancouver School of Theology and Dean of St. Andrew's Hall.

Stephen is also a widely recognized teacher of the art of preaching. He began our conversation about preaching an Easter message by talking about death. Well really, he started with sex – telling us that in Victorian society – that is the society of the Victorian era, not the society of the current city of Victoria – in that time and among those people sex was the most dangerous and avoided topic. Every effort was made to refrain from the view or mention of body parts or intimacy – if not hidden altogether – euphemistic and obscuring language would be used. I imagine it to be the opposite of modern media and our current experience where sex is ubiquitous.

Yes, things have changed and today sex seems to be all the rage – everyone talks about it and no one is supposed to be the least bit disturbed by public displays of affection and the like. However, today we have a different taboo – something just as dangerous and fiercely avoided in current circles as sex was in ages past – death. We work very hard to avoid death – talk of it, acceptance of it, the truth of it. In Victorian times that just wasn't possible, but our current culture is strangely disgusted and disturbed by death – it has become the elephant in the room.

It haunts us all. Perhaps that is why we obsess about what we eat, why we exercise, take our vitamins, search for age-defying (and by extension, death-defying) lotions, potions, and creams – why we see our doctors with some regularity or avoid attending funerals and visiting hospitals. It seems we are running from death.

There are several stories about the surety of death, here is one you may be familiar with...

There was a merchant in Baghdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, saying, "Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture, now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city to avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra where Death will not find me."

The merchant lent him his horse and the servant galloped away as fast as the horse would go. Then the merchant went down to the marketplace and saw Death standing in the crowd. The merchant came over and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?"

"That was not a threatening gesture", Death replied, "only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

Another, from Tolstoy, is about the ever-present threat of death...

A man was running from a bear, and to get away from it he jumped down a dry well, and he clings to a small tree growing between the bricks on the side, only to look down and see a lion at the bottom of the well waiting for him. And when he looked to the top of the well, he saw a bear trying to reach him. As he hangs there by the small tree, knowing he cannot stay there forever, he sees a rat crawling out on the limb he was hanging onto, and the rat begins to gnaw at the limb.

Today around noon my sister Anne will not be returning from an Easter worship service as we will. She will be with her children and friends near Stanley Glacier dispersing the ashes of her infant son, Colin, who died shortly after birth more than 20 years ago, and the ashes of her husband, Angus, who died in early December. Colin had been born with a chromosomal abnormality that meant he would not survive. He died within two days. When Anne and Angus visited here last summer, Angus was fine – maybe not the fittest 66-year-old – but not sick. A few days after Thanksgiving he suddenly started talking strangely. They thought maybe he'd had a stroke, but it turns out he had a rapidly progressing neurological disease that is always fatal – always. Less than seven weeks later he was dead. Anne will be mourning and celebrating today as she remembers the life and death of these loved ones and moves forward in hope.

If we can't outrun or outsmart death, we try to camouflage it – artificial grass at the cemetery – slumber rooms for the deceased to make it appear that they are not dead but merely sleeping. We put makeup on the corpse in preparation for viewing. But none of this hides the fact of death – or the fear of death – from us. We deny death with our language too. We do not die – we pass

away – we cross over – we enter our eternal rest – we are promoted to the church triumphant. And so it goes.

Death is a fact of life, and we must face it. We can't in good conscience deny it as some would have us do because if we can't talk about death how can we possibly talk about the promise of new life? Why would we need to or want to? Without death there is no need for resurrection – no promise that Easter conquers death – no hope. But death is real – and we are all subject to it, so thanks be to God for the message that is shared in John's gospel – a story that admits the despair of death but proclaims the hope and joy of new life – resurrection that is also very real!

The story is of a young woman who has had an up and down sort of life – shot through with heartache – a life much like anyone – in any pew, in any church – suffering their own heartache. No one is immune – rich or poor – young or old – fit or frail – we all carry our own bag of rocks and catalogue of disappointment.

A little more than two years ago something unusual happened to this woman – she met someone special. Life changed – there was no passionate love affair – no bells and whistles or angels with arrows – but she loved him deeply nonetheless. When she was with him she felt changed – healed. After a while – whether she was with him or not – she felt somehow “better” – whole – a new person.

If you asked what he gave her she might grope for words and come up with responses like *hope – vision – dream – mercy*. It is difficult to know for sure. She would gaze far off – get a certain look in her eyes – and quietly say, *“He gave me a glimpse of a new world where I was different – where people were different – relationships were different.”* And if someone asked, *“Different in what way?”* she would search again for the words to express herself and say, *“He seemed to be asking me to imagine what the world would be like if God's will was always and everywhere obeyed. What it would be like if everyone, everywhere really believed God's love – lived God's love – accepted God's love. He called it the kingdom of God.”*

This woman gave her time – her “self” – her life – to be with the man. There was also a community of people who gathered around him – who were beginning to share his vision. One day the woman – Mary – left her village by the lake and followed him and the community that was with him. For nearly two years, she followed.

Sometimes in those years were calm and wonderful but there were unpleasant days and moments too – arguments, disagreements, an insulting crowd, danger. The man Mary and the others followed moved gracefully through all the brokenness – despite the stress and the cost.

Then things changed. Gradually there were more and more enemies – more and more conflicts. The danger became immediate and frightening. Later Mary would remember those weeks and days reluctantly, as though they were a dream – a terrible nightmarish dream.

Then came a day she would never forget – a day she was sure she would carry forever in her heart. She was on a slope across from a small hill. On the hill were three obscene crosses and

on one of them, the man she loved was hanging in agony. His body naked and bleeding – his face drawn and pale – unbelievable pain relieved only at his death. She stayed there until evening – until she saw his body taken down by friends – and she watched where he was laid to rest. She left the place – sure of death.

Mary had been with him all the way. She had seen lives made new – bodies healed – eyes opened. She had heard the complaints and the criticisms. She saw how the crowds adored him and the rulers hated him. She stood near the cross as they killed him, and her heart broke. She had seen the adoration of the people when they entered the city just a week ago and their hostility when they stood before Pilate on Friday. Now it was all over. Mary knew the despair of death – couldn't deny it or dismiss it or pretend it away.

We join her this morning – it is the first day of the week – not yet dawn – *still dark*. She has just reached the rock wall where she saw him placed. To her amazement and horror, the rock has an opening. The stone is rolled aside. She backs away – terrified – and then she runs.

She runs to where there are others who know her – to others who loved him. She bursts in shouting, *“They’ve taken him! They’ve taken the Lord out of the tomb!”* They stare blankly – hold her until they can make sense of what she is saying – then, as it comes clear to them, they rush from the room and Mary follows – back to the rock wall.

The disciple he loved gets there first but hesitates. Peter charges past – lowers his head and disappears into the darkness. The other follows and they stand in the shadows, thunderstruck. They see the linens that had wrapped the body. They are piled on the stone slab – the head cloth apart from the others. There is no body. They stand and stare – speechless. I wonder what they felt – the mixture of emotions: fear, excitement, grief, joy, disbelief warring with faith, anxiety, and hope. There is an atmosphere of tension in the misty morning dawn as they leave and return home.

Mary weeps outside the tomb. She stoops to look in – expecting to squint in the gloom – but instead of shadows she sees blazing light. It is as if the light itself is questioning death. She steps back into the open air – hears a voice – turns. She makes out a figure in the fragile light but does not know who it is. There it is again – a voice – asking why she is weeping. Mary pleads for pity – begs to be told where the body is. Then she hears her name, and she is overcome by the same light that met her in the tomb – the light of death defeated. Now – in this moment – resurrection is realized.

She makes her way back into the city – this time there is no running – no shouting – no weeping. The news is too great – too joyful. She looks at the gathered community, those who loved him as she did – as she still does – and says, *“I have seen the Lord.”*

Mary tells what she knows to be true: *Jesus was dead – Jesus is alive – he has been resurrected and so death had been outdone – destroyed.* Mary acknowledges the elephant in the room – death – and announces that it is defeated. Darkness is no longer her fate – or ours – because the light is here. God in Jesus has shattered sin and death – ***I have seen the Lord.***

When Mary met Jesus, she felt healed – restored – like she was on her way to becoming a new person. As she experiences the risen Christ, her whole world changes! Death is just as real, but it no longer has any power because it is no longer the end. Sin is no longer an insurmountable barrier between her and God. She is raised up *with* him – a new person – complete in the resurrection. There is hope – joy – life! What good news she has to tell – ***I have seen the Lord!***

If the story of Jesus ended on a cross – on a hill – outside a busy city in a land far away – it would be a story that could not have survived the journey from person to person – community to community – year to year. If the story of Jesus ended on a cross Mary would be weeping still. But the story does not end on the cross – it does not end in death. The story ***begins*** at the cross – ***begins*** at death – the story of Jesus continues to resurrection and new life.

Proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, we announce the only cure for death. With Jesus we no longer seek to avoid death – death is dead – now new life begins. We all have Mary’s good news to tell – news of hope – joy – new life. News that God’s grace cannot die but triumphs in resurrection – a message of promise that we witness to each day as we participate in God’s love ***for*** the world, ***in*** the world – the story of Jesus Christ – risen and present in the world – alive in each one of us. There is hope – joy – life! What good news we have to tell – ***Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!***

Choir Anthem: *“Let the trumpet sound” arranged by John Leavit (trumpet, choir, organ)*

Invitation to Table

The Rev Mitch Coggin

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord’s Prayer

The Rev Mitch Coggin

Service of Bread and Cup

The Revs Mitch Coggin and Laura Kavanagh

Prayer after Communion

The Rev. Laura Kavanagh

Loving God, we thank you for knowing when we are hungry – even before we know it ourselves. We thank you for the mystery of being joined with Christ in this meal as communities of faith. Grant us the humility and enthusiasm to return again and again to feast at your table so that we may be nourished for the journey.

We thank you, Holy One, for the gift of Easter that runs beyond our explanations, beyond our categories of reason, beyond the sinking sense of our own lives.

You, O God, make all things new. We come to you this day in dazzled thanksgiving for the reconciliation, transformation and healing you have created in our midst – daring to hope for reconciliations, transformations, and healings we want yet to receive by your grace.

Today we move from this table into the world – seeking to be made new in Christ’s name. **Amen**

Music Reflection: *Christ lag in Todesbanden* by J S Bach

Prayer of Dedication for the Offering

The Rev Mitch Coggin

Response: *Doxology (tune 822)*

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father, son and Holy Ghost*

***Hymn # 247**

Christ the Lord is Risen Today

Charge and Blessing: *Sing Amen # 264*

The Rev Mitch Coggin

Postlude: *Toccata (from Symphony #5)* by Charles-Marie Widor