

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

➤ **Don't be afraid (repeat)**

Call to Worship [Psalm 118: 19-24]

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 marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope / The Lord's Prayer

Holy God, the tomb has been opened and we dance into your future. Your life has dawned on us and we surround you with our praise. You reach out your hand and lead us into joy. You pick open the locked doors of our hearts and come in to be with us forever. You breathe peace into our souls, so we may bring healing in a troubled world.

Holy One, Breath of Peace, you show us our hearts so we may give love to others. You show us our hands – sending us to serve the needy. You show us your hope so we may live in your joy.

O God – who is, was, and is to come – hear us as we pray. When we keep our faults and failures locked safely away, we feel no need to confess. But as you come into our hearts we can be filled with forgiveness, hope and peace.

God of empty tombs and emptier people, when we hesitate to speak of your hope, forgive us, and give us a voice. When we find it difficult to love one another, forgive us, and give us fresh compassion. When we stay locked behind our fears and doubts, forgive us, and send us out to share your grace. When we cannot believe your Word of new life, forgive us, and fill us with your joy. [Silence is kept...] **Amen**

Christ comes into every shadowed corner of our lives with the light of Easter. Christ comes into the locked rooms of our faults and gifts us with grace and hope. Christ comes to fill us with peace, so we may proclaim the good news of mercy and forgiveness. We join our voices in thanksgiving as we pray...

...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

➤ *Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord* 260

† Prayer for Understanding

O God of Resurrection, breathe your Holy Spirit upon us now, so that as your Word is read and preached, we might hear, understand, and believe. Amen

Scripture

Acts 5: 27-32 [NT 123]

When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us."

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

Revelation 1: 4-8 [NT 245]

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 20: 19-31 [NT 115]

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Whew! Easter is over – we got through the penitence of Lent and the intensity of Holy Week so now we are finally on the other side of the resurrection. The tomb is empty – Christ is risen – death has been defeated – love wins – we’re a resurrection people – the victory is ours – and nothing on earth will ever be the same again. Right?

For me – this year – it feels more about being on the “other side” of COVID – at least, the other side of my very personal experience of it. In some ways I feel like I missed Easter. I participated via the live stream for all the services, but I missed you – missed the euphoria and triumph that is part of Easter worship. Welcome to the “week after”.

This is one of those Sundays often described as a “low Sunday” (the Sunday after Christmas is the other one of note) – nothing much happens in the church during the week following Easter. This is the point in the liturgical year when we take a stand back, looking at God’s post-resurrection world, thinking: “Now what?” and “So what?”

I say we let the Easter celebrations continue! Embrace resurrection along with the challenges that an uncertain, morally ambiguous world presents us. Resurrection is a present and future, as well as past reality, just as Christmas is as contemporary as each new experience of divine incarnation. Jesus is born in us, and resurrection gives new life! Christ the Lord is risen today – and every day! Resurrection is just a breath away! And, yet these days, we must breathe deeply as we read about the rise of racism, genocide in Ukraine, famine in Afghanistan, and anti-science and anti-democratic movements in Canada as well as other countries.

If I had one post-Easter prayer – a single prayer that expressed the bits and pieces of prayer that litter my thoughts – it might be that I could truly live as if I fully believed in the resurrection all the time. To believe and live from the conviction that God's resurrection life will conquer all the demons of death that threaten us – like the barbaric violence in Ukraine that has killed thousands and displaced 10 million ordinary citizens – like the scourge of our global pandemic – like our environmental degradation of the earth – like the corrosive effects of political nihilism around the world.

Would that I could easily confess with Peter: *“the God of our ancestors raised up Jesus...”*. Or freely assert with Paul as we heard in his letter to the Corinthians last Sunday, *“but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.”* In my experience, this is a challenge and has been easier said than done so I am always encouraged by Thomas and Jesus' reassurance to him: *“Do not doubt but believe”*.

In fact, I wonder if I am more the norm than the exception in this since many of the earliest stories in our tradition describe a broad-based antipathy toward Jesus. It seems that many people found lots of reasons to disbelieve.

Some complained that Jesus told people not to pay their taxes. His family thought he was crazy. One village ran him out of town. He scorned religious traditions. He broke the boundaries of class, gender, and ethnicity. As a result of these and other offenses, John says that *“many of his disciples turned back and stopped following him”*.

Maybe this widespread lack of belief shouldn't surprise us. We tend to forget how bitterly divisive Jesus was. A stumbling block – foolishness – despised and rejected.

When Jesus appears to his disciples that evening shut away behind closed doors, Thomas is absent, so he is sceptical about what they say has happened. He's most famously known as “Doubting Thomas” – the cynic – the holdout. His reluctance to accept the testimony of his fellow disciples – his insistence on physical proof – his late arrival to the joyous belief of his peers – these are often described as spiritual flaws. They are pointed out as signs of stubbornness, or of a weak faith, but doesn't Thomas represent each and every person who has pondered faith and how these things happened? It is all too easy to separate Thomas from the group rather than see that he represents all of us.

Yet, Thomas does something amazing. He doesn't abandon the cause of Jesus, nor does he deny the resurrection. He simply wants to experience Jesus' presence, to know that Jesus is alive, before he believes. Thomas demonstrates a vision of a healthy faith rather than a weak one. He yearns for a living encounter with Jesus, not settling for someone else's experience of resurrection, but hoping of having his own. He dares to confess uncertainty in the midst of those who are certain. And Jesus meets Thomas right where he is, freely offering the disciple the testimony of his own wounds – his own pain. After such an encounter, I can only imagine the tenderness and urgency with which Thomas was able to repeat Christ's words to other doubters: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe"*.

Isn't this all of us on the Sunday after Easter? Don't we all wrestle with hidden doubts – hidden fears? Don't we all wonder sometimes if the miracle of resurrection will hold as we leave the joy of Easter Sunday and move into the reality of day-to-day life?

Doubt reflects the seriousness with which we take our faith. Thomas' doubt is a quest for faith. It is not doubt for doubt's sake. When he finally encounters the Risen Jesus, he is transformed and eventually journeys to the East to share the Gospel in India. Doubt can be a good thing! Perhaps we all need to be more critical regarding theological and ethical issues. Uncritical thinking – along with intellectual and ethical dishonesty – has led to so many people embracing conspiracy theories, anti-science rhetoric, and racism.

Disbelief in the resurrection, among both the followers and detractors of Jesus, shapes part of our origin story. But gradually, somehow, among a growing movement of people from all segments of society, doubt and confusion gave way to a deep-seated conviction – easier to describe than to fully explain.

There eventually emerged a consensual tradition of "first importance" that Paul said he had received, preached, and passed on to others — that Christ died, was buried, raised on the third day, and that he appeared publicly to many people. *"This is what we preach, and this is what you believed,"* Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

Do you believe this? And if you do, what difference does it make? What does resurrection faith look and feel like to you today? What would it mean to live as if this truth were true?

Resurrection is a future hope that is presently unseen. But this future hope isn't a cop-out or a fantasy that makes us withdraw from the world – it's a concrete orientation that shapes everything we do and are. In the Ukraine right now, president Volodymyr Zelensky has reminded us of how hope in a hopeless situation exerts a powerful force.

As we struggle for hope we remember that God loves doubters, agnostics, and strugglers as well as those who perceive themselves as certain of their faith. All are invited as equals to share in God's love for the world – to participate as partners in healing the world – to *practice resurrection* with each new day.

This phrase, *practice resurrection*, was referred to by the Rev. Mitch Coggin in his Easter message last Sunday. It comes from a poem entitled, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, by Wendell Berry. Here is the whole poem...

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

*Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.*

*So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.*

*Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.*

*Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion — put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?*

*Go with your love to the fields.
Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.*

**“Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”
from The Country of Marriage, copyright © 1973
by Wendell Berry**

When Berry says, *practice resurrection*, he asks us to remember that we are the witnesses to Christ's one-time resurrection. We demonstrate the power of God's redemption of the world in how we live and love. Practicing resurrection is obeying Jesus's call to love our neighbors and our enemies.

The good life, Berry tells us, is found from living peaceably and honoring life even in its smallest forms. It's from doing honest work and considering how one's actions impact other people, animals, and the natural world.

While the world entices us with shiny things that have no long-term, lasting value, Berry asks us to invest our time differently. He entreats us to spend our lives following God, building strong communities, and remembering what matters.

We all can practice resurrection in many different ways...

- welcome the stranger
- visit the prisoner
- shelter the homeless
- feed the hungry
- forgive one another
- care for the widow
- imitate the children
- speak up for those who have no voice
- honor and protect the dignity of every human being

Practicing resurrection reminds me how much I need God to transform my heart – how much practice I truly need to live an abundant life. As we move through the year away from and back again to the mystery of Easter, may we practice resurrection daily – living from the conviction that God’s resurrection life in Christ and in each one of us will conquer all that threatens. **Amen**

➤ *At the dawning of salvation* 248

† Offering

In this season of Easter, we celebrate God’s most precious gift to us in Christ’s dying and rising. As we present our offering today, let us give with thankful hearts, trusting that God can do amazing things through the gifts we offer in Jesus’ name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Generous God, along with our gifts we offer you our thanks for your steadfast love, our foundation when things around us seem uncertain. Bless these gifts and the ministry of our congregation. May what we offer spread the blessings we know to others, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

We give thanks to you, O God, for you are good – your steadfast love endures forever.

We thank you for the many ways you provide for our needs – for air and water – food and shelter – work to do and rest to sustain us. We pray for your creation, too often at risk because of the choices we’ve made. Help us care for the earth – all its creatures and relationships. Show us how to cherish the gifts you have given and protect them for future generations.

We thank you, Holy One, for family – the families we were born or adopted into – the families we married into – and other families who welcomed us into their midst as friends and neighbours. We pray for those who have lost family members and relationships, and for any who know abuse or pain within the family circle...

Loving God, we also thank you for friendship – for friends who support us – bringing us joy and wise counsel. Help us extend the gift of friendship to those who are experiencing isolation, loneliness or grief.

We thank you, O God, for the peace and freedom we enjoy in Canada, and pray that the conflict over what these gifts mean will be soothed with deeper understanding among us all. We pray for those who know neither freedom nor peace – those living under oppressive regimes or in conflict zones, and those who have fled their homelands, in search of safety. We think especially of people in the Ukraine and in Afghanistan...

Give us courage to stand up for people who cannot stand up for themselves, so that they too will know peace and freedom.

We thank you, O God, for your Church – for our congregation and its leaders, and for all who volunteer time, talent, and energy to the work we undertake in Jesus' name. By your Spirit, guide and inspire us with new insight into mission and ministry. We pray for other churches in our community and in our presbytery, and the sense of mission that guides each one into service. We think especially of the work of *Our Place Society, Cool Aid, Shelbourne Community Kitchen, and Artemis Place...*

Fill us with a deeper sense of unity so that we can model relationships that transcend differences in this divided world.

O God, thank you for the gift of Jesus, whose resurrection empowers us to look to the future with hope. Thank you for the gift of your Spirit who draws us into unity with you and one another. **Amen**

➤ *Come to us, beloved Stranger* 262

Blessing

Jesus said: *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."*

The busy world awaits our compassion.

May the help of the saving Christ, the wisdom of the Living God, and the support of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Sing amen* 264