

Scripture

Matthew 28: 1-10 [NT 33]

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come; see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, *'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'* This is my message for you."

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"

And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

➤ *Jesus Christ is risen today*

243

PWS&D Easter Liturgy

Written by Jim Goring and the Rev. Ian Fraser (Pointe Claire, Quebec)

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

The tomb is empty.

Life has defeated death!

Rising from the grave, Jesus brings life to all the wrong places.

Christ lives where death has ruled.

Rising from the grave, Jesus brings life to all the wrong people.

Christ welcomes those who are often overlooked.

Christ's resurrection means that we are no longer lost in the wilderness.

He provides us with a living hope & travels with us to places where death had once prevailed.

The world has been turned upside down.

Life has defeated death! Hope has overwhelmed despair! Joy has conquered gloom!

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have walked this land – a relationship at the centre of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

PWS&D Message ***Christ is Risen!***

Every day that we respond to the poor, the hungry and the displaced, we discover God's resurrecting power. The poor are raised up, the vulnerable are cared for, and the sick are healed.

Inspired by God's promise of abundant life and rooted in the living hope of Jesus Christ, our church responds to the call to serve those in need with compassion, justice and love. Through PWS&D, we are working in some of the most vulnerable communities in our global village to restore human dignity, ease the pain of want and promote community cooperation that benefits all.

Thanks to your support and faith in action, we are creating positive change —with lifesaving and life transforming actions.

In a world filled with need, we are responding with food assistance, medical care, sanitation services and emergency relief. We are responding with educational opportunities, sustainable agriculture practices and skills training. Together, we are promoting human rights and supporting refugees.

Faithful to our calling, we respond together as we support the work of PWS&D.

➤ ***Now the green blade rises***

256

† Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / sung Words of Hope

"Unless a grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Now we know, O Christ, what you meant. Today we celebrate the bounty of your rising, and the pure fire of your love. Earth itself is blessed to have been your tomb. The love that

kept you on the cross and the love that raised you from the dead cannot be contained by death – it is life.

In the midst of jubilation, we pray for forgiveness: we have been slow to live as Easter people – slow to live by faith – slow to forgive others – slow to love. Bear the fruit of your love in our lives, we pray – the fruit of goodness, humility, justice, and peace. We confess and ask for mercy in the name of Jesus who encourages us to pray together ...***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, for ever. Amen***

➤ ***How deep the peace*** (repeat) – please remain seated

† Prayer for Understanding

Spirit of power and new possibility, open our minds to understanding, our hearts to loving, and our wills to carrying out the mission of the Risen Christ, who is God's Living Word. Amen

Scripture

Jeremiah 31: 1-6 [OT 733]

At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

Thus says the LORD: *The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God."*

Acts 10: 34-43 [NT 129]

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You

know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all.

That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

After two thousand years of barnacle-like incrustations, institutional failures, grotesque betrayals, familiarity that breeds casual contempt, idiotic counterfeits, and watering down the astringent wine of the gospel, Easter calls us back to the full-throated message that God sends.

This is the Good News...



- the grave is empty, Christ is risen. HALLELUJAH!
- the light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out.
- once we were no people, now we are God's people. Thanks be to God!

The message that God sends is simple to describe but hard to explain. You can track some of the most brilliant minds ever, like Augustine and Aquinas, Pascal and Kierkegaard, and try to wrap your brain around this message but sooner or later you will have to resort to metaphor and mystery, poetry and praise.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and in so doing vanquishes sin and death by the divine.

The repercussions of this basic message are radical and comprehensive. Anticipation displaces dread. Regret gives way to composure. Cynicism vanishes before joy.

Reconciliation overtakes estrangement. Death gives way to life, darkness to light, fear to confidence, and despair to hope.

The Easter message shatters and subverts conventional human wisdom.

The earthquake



Matthew's empty tomb account proclaims the glory, wonder, and majesty of the resurrection. It begins with a great earthquake, and we are instantly reminded of the crucifixion scene – when Jesus dies the earth trembles, rocks split, tombs open, and many of the saints are raised from the dead.

The events of the cross foreshadow the resurrection and the echoes resound.

Both crucifixion and resurrection shake the foundations of heaven and earth, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Crucifixion and resurrection also shake the imperial regime's political grip – Roman rule does not have the last word. The earthquake accentuates the supernatural, spectacular dimension of Jesus' resurrection – but we are modern folks, unmoved by what people in ancient times found impressive and fantastic – right?

I wonder... It seems as though the disciples were people not unlike us – people who believe you can have resurrection and still have the world as it was yesterday – people who want to have Easter and still have our world *un-rocked* by resurrection. Maybe Matthew says that when there is Easter, the whole earth trembles – so the disciples and so that we might get shaken up a little!

Teacher, preacher and author, William Willamon tells of his experience of an earthquake: *He was preaching in Alaska and during the sermon, the earth heaved a moment that seemed forever. The little church shook. The Alaskan Methodists sat there like it was another day at the office. Their only response was the woman who said, "How about that, the light fixtures didn't fall this time." Willamon ended his sermon abruptly because he was shaken by the earthquake but also a bit shaken by the nonchalant congregation. Afterwards he asked the pastor, "What the heck would it take to get this congregation's attention? I'd hate to have to preach to them every Sunday."*



In Matthew's gospel Easter is an earthquake that shakes the whole world and, try as we might, we can't explain it away. Resurrection explains us. The truth of Jesus tells on the faces of the befuddled disciples who witness it. Not one of them expected – or wanted – Easter.

Easter is about God – not about the resuscitation of a dead body. It's not about the *"immortality of the soul,"* – some divine spark that endures after the end. That's Plato, not Jesus. Easter is about God – not God as an empathetic but ineffective good friend, or some inner experience – but God who creates a way when there is no way – God who raises dead Jesus to remind us that the creator is still in charge here.

On the cross, the world did all it could to Jesus. At Easter, God did all God could for the world. And the earth shook.

You don't explain that. You witness it.

The tomb is open to let us in...



The women go to the tomb not as mourners to anoint a dead body with spices, as in other gospel narratives, but with the confidence of disciples going to "see". They are not concerned about the stone, or the Jewish guards placed at the tomb to keep the disciples from stealing Jesus' body and making wild claims of resurrection. The women come out of respect – out of love – and they get shaken up as the earth moves and the stone is rolled away to let them in.

Easter rolls the stone door of the tomb away for the women and for us so that we might penetrate the mystery of death. It makes the tomb a tunnel – a tunnel into the heart of the eternal and shows us that the holy heart of God is love and life. God rolls the door of the tomb away not to let Jesus out – but to let us in – to allow us to see that Christ's promises are true.

In writing his gospel Matthew makes no attempt to resolve the tension between asserting that Jesus left the tomb through solid stone (as a spiritually raised being) and that Jesus can be physically touched. He is unconcerned with the scientific how of the resurrection – Matthew is a theologian seeking to interpret the truth that Jesus is raised and present in his church.

The stone is rolled away from the tomb to show us that death is not the end – but rather a new beginning – a beginning that proclaims the victory of life over death, and which allows us to turn our backs on the grave and face our future with faith and hope, confident that all of God's promises will indeed bear fruit.

Responding to resurrection...



A belief in Easter is a decision of the mind and the heart. It is a choice – you either choose to have faith, or you don't. But the decision you make about Easter will profoundly affect the way you live and other choices you make throughout your life. We choose to walk in an Easter light and to live by an Easter faith because we know it brings abundant life and makes intuitive sense even in the midst of death, hatred, and darkness.

When the earth heaves and the angel appears and the stone is rolled away, the soldiers shake and become like the dead. The women listen with fear and great joy – responding with immediate action – meeting and worshiping Jesus. Their worship is a new thing in Matthew's gospel – the pre-resurrection Jesus is followed but not worshiped.

Both the guards and the women hear the angel, yet some are led to worship, and some are not. It is almost as if the angel says to the women, *"Don't be afraid. You're looking for Jesus? He isn't here."* And the same words are heard by the soldiers as, *"Be afraid. Everything your world is built on is being shaken."*

No one returns from the empty tomb unchanged, yet Matthew doesn't equate the resurrection with the empty tomb. He shows it as a gift that is offered to those who seek out the risen Christ – an experience of faith rather than a verifiable historical event. Even in the story, not all those who witness the mystery of the empty tomb come to faith.

What matters most about Easter is what we do tomorrow. If we return to our homes and don't think about Easter again until next year, then we've entirely missed the point. If we don't let what we hear and see in the gospel sink into our hearts and souls and minds, we needn't have bothered to show up today. Because the good news of resurrection has meaning as we participate in it – when the message is believed, told, shared, lived. Today, we can be in awe, we can be still, we can be amazed – but tomorrow, we must be Mary, recognizing the one who is our teacher. We must be Peter or the other apostles, who begin to share with anyone who will listen. We must be disciples, announcing: *"we have seen the Lord!"*

Going ahead – not going away...



And as we go forward to proclaim the good news, we remember that Jesus promised the disciples before his death that he would go ahead of them. He goes ahead of us also – to lead us into the world – into a transformative

way of life that testifies to the power of resurrection no matter who we are. Jesus is going ahead – not going away.

The empty tomb does not signify absence but presence – Jesus is with us on the journey. Rather than going up to heaven – out of sight and out of mind – Jesus is at hand, enabling us to experience resurrection not only in the scripture or in the sanctuary but in Victoria or Vancouver or wherever we might be – on all the paths of our lives. Jesus – the living, risen Christ – goes ahead of us, opening a future for us. The stone has been rolled away – thanks be to God! Amen

➤ *At the dawning of salvation*

248

Offering and Prayer *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Today, we celebrate God's most precious gift – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we present our gifts to God this morning, may our generosity reflect God's goodness and the hope we have in Jesus, our Risen Lord.

Generous God, we recognize how much you have given us in Christ Jesus, and what that gift has cost. Bless our offerings so they may extend the hope and joy we know in you, to the world you love so dearly. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, we pray. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers (prayer response: *God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***)

God of power and possibility, you broke open the tomb that held our Lord. Now break into your church where your people are distracted by old quarrels, discouraging results, or unhelpful divisions about mission and service. Resurrect, renew and revive your church!
*God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***

God of resurrection and new life, you broke into the hearts of Jesus' fearful friends. Now break into our relationships with one another. Where they are vibrant and life-giving, nurture them. Where they are strained by old hurts and misunderstandings, or carelessly taken for granted, mend them. Resurrect, renew and revive our life together!
*God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***

God of might and mercy, you broke the schemes of those who stood in the way of your love. Now break into the governing systems of your world. Stir the minds and hearts of leaders to work for justice and equitable sharing. Where laws are corrupt, or people suffer under harsh rule, call them to account. Resurrect, renew and revive the leaders of the world!

*God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***

God of healing and hope, you broke the bonds of death which tried to shackle new life. Now break into situations of illness, pain, grief, and loss. Wherever people are sick in body, mind, or spirit – wherever someone mourns the loss of any relationship or dream, bring your healing grace. Resurrect, renew and revive our lives!

*God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***

God of Easter Renewal and Resurrection, you have broken into our lives again this day. We give you thanks for the power of your love to remake every situation that brings us challenge or choice. Break into all our moments of celebration and joy, too. Give us gratitude, the impulse to share, and a spirit of grace and understanding. Resurrect, renew and revive your people! *God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer. Amen***

➤ *Thine be the glory*

258

Scripture

Colossians 3: 1-4 [NT 201]

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Blessing

Go with Easter Joy! Fill your homes with love and laughter. Inspire the community with sharing and support. Encourage one another with enthusiasm and action. Work for justice and peace in our struggling world. Consider that with the living Christ all things are possible. May the grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Jump with joy*

406