

Welcome / Announcements

Land Acknowledgement

***We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – lived here before settlers of European descent claimed ownership of it and displaced those for whom this land was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.***

□ ***He is Lord (repeat)***

**252**

Call to Worship

We gather with joy, for Easter brings us new life.

**The Risen Christ is with us wherever we go.**

Love breaks all bonds and unites us in hope.

**Christ has defeated death. Let us rejoice and be glad!**

Come and worship with hearts full of praise.

**O God, receive our grateful Hallelujahs!**

□ ***At the dawning of salvation***

**248**

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

Ever-present God, we rejoice this day in the amazing truth of Easter. You have acted – you have come to us; you are with us. Death has been overcome. Christ is risen!

Help us to recognize and be responsive to the presence of the risen Jesus among us. Resurrect and transform us, we pray, so that we can be healed, energized and guided by your Spirit's power. May our being and serving give you glory. Accept our praise and worship as an expression of our gratitude for such wondrous gifts of grace.

We confess that we do not always respond to the freedom you offer. Sometimes we hang onto our guilt and regret, seeing ourselves as unworthy. Sometimes we reject the way of life that Jesus brought us and turn to our own agendas, plans and hopes – preferring the weight of self-glory over the yoke of Christ.

You, O God have called your Church to be a witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forgive us for the times that we shirk our responsibility. Lord, open us to the fullness of your Word and grant that we may know new life and hope in the spirit of the resurrection.

We pray this version of the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught...

**Our Mother (or Father/Parent/Source) who is in heaven and within us, we call upon your names. Your wisdom come. Your will be done, in all the spaces in which you dwell. Give us each day sustenance and perseverance. Remind us of our limits as we give grace to the limits of others. Separate us from the temptation of empire but deliver us into community. For you are the dwelling place within us, the empowerment around us, and the celebration among us, now and forever. Amen**

God sweeps into our human scene, through Jesus Christ. There is grace, mercy and renewed strength for all who earnestly seek the new life Christ brings. Let us rejoice together because God forgives. We are freed from the burden of our sin. Thanks be to God.

□ *Your word, O God, awoke the uncreated*

508

Prayer for Understanding

**God of Word and Wisdom, the Risen Christ opened the minds of his friends to understand the Scriptures. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds to receive your truth and love which can fill our hearts and change our lives. Amen**

Scripture **Acts 3:12-19** [NT 120]

(After Peter healed a crippled man and the people responded with astonishment.)

*When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"*

*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.*

*And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.*

*Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,*

**Luke 24:36b-48** [NT 91]

...Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, *"Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."*

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, *"Have you anything here to eat?"*

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."*

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

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

### Message

On Monday last week something amazing happened – something special and awesome if you were in the right location – which, sadly, in Victoria we were not. The total solar eclipse moved across North America, passing over Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The moon's shadow swept across North America, treating millions to a breathtaking view of a total solar eclipse. As the moon passed in front of the sun, it revealed the sun's wispy white outer atmosphere – the corona. The sky darkened as if it were dawn or dusk. Not so much for us – it was cloudy, and we were pretty far from the main path of the event, but for others it was totally awesome!

I looked for some pictures and they are beautiful – they capture a moment happening far, far away, yet it feels so close. Imagine being there in person. I saw photos of huge crowds taking in the event – experiencing it in 3D. For them the eclipse didn't just appear in the sky – they felt it all around. The light slowly dimming – suddenly engulfed in darkness from every angle – the brilliant corona emerging in the sky. Spectacular!

Although people know what's coming, its arrival can still be overwhelming. Apparently, some people's hearts race or their eyes well up with tears as they try to absorb the whole experience in those few minutes: the corona, the planets peeking out around the eclipse, the temperature drop, cheers of excitement from the surrounding community around, even changes in animal behaviors.

Total solar eclipses are a reminder that humans are also animals that feel the strangeness of cosmic events that may lead to unusual behaviours. The sudden change to darkness, and the just as sudden restoration of light, can feel eerie and special. The world returns to normal around you, but those minutes of totality were anything but. Awe – that is the overwhelming response.

And according to an article that Brian Titus shared from BBC News this kind of awe-inspiring cosmological event can have a powerful influence on our psychology. Apparently in May 585 BC, in what is now present-day Anatolia in Turkey, the Medes – an ancient people from modern-day Iran – and the Lydians – a kingdom from the south of modern-day Turkey – had been fighting for six years. The Greek historian Herodotus, said that the war showed little sign of ending, with neither side making significant progress. However, "just as the battle was growing warm, day was of sudden changed into night," Herodotus wrote. "The Medes and Lydians, when they observed the change, ceased fighting, and were alike anxious to have terms of peace agreed on." It took a solar eclipse to end the bloodshed and bring peace.

A series of celestial coincidences are needed for a total solar eclipse to occur and witnessing such an astonishing event could, according to the research, inspire us all to find greater humility and care for others. The thesis is that awe – a sense of wonder and amazement triggered by a perception of vastness that leaves us feeling small in comparison – can challenge our world view, encouraging less focus on our self and opening us up to a more collaborative, altruistic way of being. The result of awe can be life changing.

Something that inspired awe happened on Monday, April 8, 2024 – the eclipse. Perhaps it was life changing for some. Something that inspired awe happened on a Sunday morning more than two millennia ago – the empty tomb and risen Christ. It happened again on Sunday, March 31, 2024 – it happens every time we gather and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Resurrection is awesome – it is an experience of wonder and amazement triggered by a perception of vastness that leaves us feeling small but not insignificant – and it is truly life changing.

Brian reflected on it this way in his email... *(I) was intrigued by the human reactions to "awe" and the perspective this brings to what it means to have an "awesome" God, especially if a community of faith experiences this together – in worship, or anything else they do that is part of their corporate life...*

As we hear in Luke's gospel, the corporate life of the disciples has recently been shattered and they are stumbling around trying to figure out what to do next. They have yet to truly recognize the resurrection – to appreciate the awesomeness of it, so we find them today talking about what the travelers on the road to Emmaus have to say – that they met Jesus on the way – that he revealed scripture to them and ate with them and that he was not dead but alive! Those witnesses to the resurrection had

experienced awe and were sharing the good news with their friends who are now trying to make sense of it – to reason out what it all means.

It is a version of last week's text but instead of the gripping fear keeping the disciples from action and belief in the Thomas story, this week they are portrayed as mostly confused. Maybe startled and terrified when in the midst of their conversation – POOF! Jesus stands among them – greeting them with God's peace – wow!

Is this a ghost – some kind of apparition come to torment them as they wrestle with recent events and hear the astounding news about the incident on the Emmaus Road that Cleopas and his friend experienced? Is this vision of Jesus popping up everywhere – all over town?

Jesus describes what's happening in his questions: "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" The disciples go from discussing the eyewitness account of the two travelers to internally trying to reason out what they are encountering in that very moment. Suddenly, on top of the witness of their friends, they have Jesus standing right in front of them, showing them his scars, telling them to touch him so that they will know he is not a ghost.

Jesus addresses their immediate doubts and fears through reassuring words: "Peace be with you" – through an invitation to look on the wounds – to touch the wounds and to give him something to eat. This is no ghost or apparition! They are beside themselves with... what? Joy? Relief? Awe?

I wonder how I would have reacted. At what point would I have become convinced? How much 'proof' do I need? When would "awe" have kicked in for me and allowed me to be changed by the surety of the resurrection?

One remarkable thing about this passage is that none of the disciples says a word – a sure sign I wasn't among them. Jesus does all the talking and when they have been reassured of and by his physical presence, their minds are open to receive the peace and new world view he is offering. Jesus reveals the scripture witnesses to his death and resurrection and empowers the disciples – empowers us – to go out into the world, sharing God's good news of repentance, forgiveness, and new life. Our awesome God opens our eyes and minds and hearts to see the world with a renewed sense of possibility and joy.

If the result of awe is life changing, and we experience the awe of the resurrection with those who encounter the risen Christ in scripture today, how is our life changed?

Resurrection life brings peace – it calms, clarifies, unites, and empowers even as it challenges and turns our world upside down. It also brings awe – it amazes, unnerves, and recalibrates our sense of reality. Perhaps a sense of God's peace is the only way we can accept the radical message of resurrection. But what does peace mean in a death-filled world in which the bad news often outweighs the good? A world in which

leaders, in the spirit of Pilate, often embrace the ways of death? What does the peace of resurrection mean when we see the bombs falling in Gaza and mourn the ongoing war in Ukraine? When people near and far suffer from food-insecurity and the ravages of climate change impacted weather events? How does the awe of resurrection help us to see others in a new light – to see ourselves as part of the web of humanity? In this age of polarization and social division, can the awe of resurrection help us to find common ground and bring people together in shared hope?

I pray that it can – that it will – that we will be filled with awe and moved to new life.  
Amen

□ *O day of peace that dimly shines*

732

#### Offering and Prayer

Our lives overflow with blessing and goodness in Christ and in creation. Out of the bounty with which God has blessed us, let us present to God our offering with gratitude that overflows.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

306

**God our Maker, you have filled the world with so much. We offer our gifts to you, knowing they are part of your abundance. Bless them and use them to bring hope and new life in Christ's name to a world that so badly needs these gifts.  
Amen**

## Pastoral Prayers

Holy One – Source of Easter power and hope – you have walked with your faithful people through many generations – people facing challenge and uncertainty – people seeking your purpose and promise. We still face challenges and uncertainty, even with Easter in our hearts. Walk with us and with those for whom we pray this day, so that your resurrecting power may lead us in lives of faithfulness.

We pray for children and young people who must think about the future in uncertain times, facing threats old and new. Give them hope rooted in the knowledge that their lives matter to you. Show them how to make a difference in the world, whatever threats they face as they grow.

We pray for people for whom age or experience, illness or disability, create barriers to full participation in your world. Surround each one in pain or despair with your comfort and renew in each one a sense of dignity and purpose. Show them how much they matter to you and to us.

We pray for all those facing grief and any kind of loss. Give them strength and comfort. We pray for communities challenged by forces beyond their control: natural disaster and environmental threats – conflict and violence – economic hardship. Give courage to those facing these challenges, and wisdom to those who lead, so that wellbeing may be restored and hope for the future prevail.

As signs of spring emerge, we pray for your creation – for creatures losing habitat and unique species at risk – for oceans clogged with plastic, and the earth aching for moisture as the climate warms. Help us to honour you, Divine Creator, by caring for the earth and its fragile balances in the ways we live and the priorities we set. In these ways, too, we would be your disciples and so we ask that you would hear our prayers and in your mercy, answer. Amen

□ *I danced in the morning / Lord of the dance* 250

## Blessing

Long ago, faithful women proclaimed the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and the world was changed forever. May we keep faith with them – may we dance with joy as they did – may our witness be as bold – may our love be as deep – may our faith be as true. And may the help of the saving Christ, the wisdom of the Living God, and the support of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

□ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*