

Worship at Home  
April 24, 2022  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter*

***God calls us to worship:***

*(Congregational response in bold type)*

The Lord is risen!

**He is risen indeed!**

Psalm 118:14-17

**Hymn:** #248 “At the dawning of salvation”

***We offer our prayers:***

Prayer of Praise and Supplication:

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,  
we rejoice in this new day you have made.

We praise you heavenly Father  
for the abundant life with which you bless us,  
and for all the beauty that surrounds us as spring takes hold again.

We praise you Lord Jesus,  
the Christ, the Son of God,  
and the power of new life promised in your resurrection.

We praise you Holy Spirit  
at work in human history,  
to restore and redeem our hope with that power of new life.

God of steadfast love,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
we worship you and claim your gift of new life,  
even in the face of any doubt or danger within the world you love.

All praise, honour and glory be yours, O God,  
now and evermore. Amen.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**God of mercy:**

**you have called us to be thankful  
for your good gifts to us,  
but too often we have taken them for granted  
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful  
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
but too often despair has come upon us,  
and the cares of the world  
have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful  
in the wonder of your presence among us,  
but too often we become mired in the mundane  
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,  
enable us to celebrate your love for us  
with joy and thanksgiving.**

***God offers the assurance of grace:***

***We offer our lives and resources:***

*Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)*

***God speaks to us:***

Readings: Mark 16:8b-18 ( )

### A message and a ministry

With last Sunday being Easter Sunday, we're now in the 50-day Easter season, also known as "Eastertide" or, perhaps more properly: "Paschaltide" for its connection with the Jewish Passover. The season lasts from Easter Sunday to the Ascension at the 40-day mark (May 26<sup>th</sup>) and on to Pentecost 10 days later.

The liturgical significance of Eastertide is that it is a time of rejoicing and hope as we meditate on the Good News of Easter: That Jesus, who was crucified, was raised from the dead – and all that is implied therein.

Throughout this season, we'll look at the Gospel readings that deal with Jesus' resurrection and his appearances to the disciples. Last Sunday we read Luke's account of the Resurrection. Today we'll read Mark's account. We'll spend the following three weeks in the last two chapters of the Gospel of John which will lead us to the Ascension on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. On the final week before Pentecost, we'll look at the closing verses of Matthew's gospel. Fifty days spent with the Gospel writers bearing witness to the days Jesus spent after his resurrection and before his ascension to the throne room of heaven and earth.

READ MARK 16:1-20.

In true Markan fashion, Mark 16 is a very condensed record of the 40 days from Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday through to his ascension. There are even hints of Pentecost which fell 10 days later.

It begins with the resurrection story: with the women going to the tomb to anoint the body then telling the disciples of what they had seen.

Then, the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples. First to two disciples on the Emmaus Road and then to the 11 apostles as they were sitting at the table. In each instance, with the exception of Mary Magdalene and the women, the disciples don't believe. Even with the testimony of eye witnesses, they don't believe.

- vv. 11 "But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by [Mary Magdalene], they would not believe it."

- vv. 13 “And [the Emmaus Road disciples] went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.”
- vv. 14 “Later [Jesus] appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.”

It is almost too great to be believed.

That Jesus rose from the dead stretches the limits of our human imagination almost beyond capacity.

And yet, there he is.

He appeared to the eleven themselves: “Here I am, I did rise from the dead, my ministry has not been in vain, and yours is just beginning.”

We’ll learn over the next number of weeks that in each gospel’s account of Jesus’ appearances with his disciples, he commissioned them (and, by extension, his church in every age) to continue his ministry in his name and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Each commissioning is slightly different. Thus, by taking them all together, we can build a fairly full structure for our own congregational idea of ministry.

In Mark’s account, there are three components to the Great Commission:

- (a) the commissioning of the apostles/disciples/church (vv. 15),
- (b) a description of the results of the church’s ministry (vv. 16-18),
- (c) a promise of the means by which the ministry will be accomplished (v. 20).

Commission, results, means.

- (a) The *commission* (vv. 15) is to “go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” and to baptize in Christ’s name.

While some are called to travel and preach, and others are called to regularly preach in local pulpits, all Christians are called to proclaim the good news in their own corner of creation to whomever we meet who is in need of the message of grace, mercy, and peace.

Mark's account of the Great Commission is curious in that there is the suggestion that the proclamation of good news is universal in scope – meant for all members of our Father's world: whether human, animal, or plant:

*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.<sup>1</sup>*

The Greek word that's rendered here as "world" is *kosmos*. It relates to the entirety of the ordered system of creation and the inhabitants thereof. This means that whether you are operating a crane, or picking up toys, or sailing in the middle of the ocean, or walking through a forest, or heading to the moon, disciples of Jesus are commissioned by the resurrected Christ, and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news wherever in the *kosmos* we find ourselves.

The Greek word that's rendered here as "creation" is *ktisis*. It refers to all creatures who dwell in the ordered system of creation. Humans, birds of the air, beasts of the field, fish of the seas, and insects.

To whom is the gospel to be proclaimed?

To everyone and everything everywhere you go.

Which raises an interesting question: What might it look like to proclaim the gospel of Jesus' death, resurrection, and Lordship to the sun and the moon, to the trees and the streams, to the lakes and the fields, to the birds as well as to humans?

(b) However the gospel is proclaimed, Mark then recorded a description of the results of this ministry:

The *result* of Christian ministry is, in a word, salvation.

In verses 17-18 he described the signs that will accompany and validate the good news message: restoration, wholeness, vitality, and life among those who believe. These signs prove the message. They prove the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven; and the reality of the resurrection; and the reality, goodness, and ability of God. He listed things like people being freed from demons, speaking in new tongues, healed from any form of sickness or illness, and even picking up snakes and drinking poison without being harmed! All of these results have records in the book of Acts (except the drinking of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:15

poison – although there are non-biblical records of Christians who, under persecution, were forced to drink poison and yet lived.) What’s more, there are people who experience these signs even today!

Now, before you ignore Mark’s words as things that happen among the Pentecostals – or, my words about proclaiming the gospel to the natural world as a flight of neo-pagan fancy, remember that these signs of healing and restoration accompanied the preaching of the gospel long before Pentecostalism or new-age spirituality was imagined. The Roman Catholic church has a tradition of naming as Saints individual Christians through whose ministry people were miraculously healed, resuscitated, and delivered from all manner of demons. Hospitals and healing centers have as their origin strong Christian components. In Europe many of the early hospitals and healers were Christians striving to bring healing in the name of Christ. In Ethiopia there are churches who, many years ago, heard the commission to proclaim the good news to the whole of creation, and fought against deforestation and have now preserved tracts of forests as ecological oases in the midst of the desert! These signs are not the privilege of the so-called charismatic Christians, they are the privilege of anyone who bears the name of Christ and believes that Jesus is who the Bible says he is and that God is real, good, and actually able and willing to affect healing and restoration in real-time!

So, we have the commission and the results.

(c) Salvation, which is the suit-case term to describe the healing and restoration that are the results of redemption and the characteristics of the resurrection that’s yet to come, is not possible through human strength alone. So, we come to the *means* of ministry: Jesus himself:

*they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, **while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.***<sup>2</sup>

Our message to the world is redemption by God’s grace through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, who is the Messiah, the Son of God. Our ministry is, in his name,

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 16:20

to lay hands on the sick – whether they be human, plant, water, animal, terrestrial, or cosmic – and speak words of healing matched by tangible signs of God’s grace.

Our message and our ministry will see results because the Lord is the one working with us and confirming the message with the signs that accompany it.

In each of the gospels Jesus made this promise, although in slightly different ways.

Mark leaves us with an unspoken question: If our message and ministry are empty of signs of healing and restoration, is the gospel wrong? Is our sure and certain hope in the resurrection to eternal life a fantasy? Or, have *we* stepped out of the circle of God’s steadfast love?

There is a qualifying statement in verse 18:

*These signs will accompany those who **believe**.*

Do you believe that God’s irrational grace displayed on the cross is sufficient to reconcile us with our Creator, and to bring about salvation in the full sense of the word?

Do you believe that Jesus was physically, bodily resurrected from the dead, and yet, changed? While he died Sin incarnate, he rose in purified glory. In his resurrection he foreshadowed what awaits all of God’s good creation when Christ returns and heaven and earth are wed. Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead?

Do you believe that the Lord continues to work through his disciples, confirming their message by the signs that accompany?

Do you believe?

Jesus has made a promise.

He has commissioned his church to preach and minister in his name for the healing of bodies, minds, spirits, and all of creation.

Do you believe his promise?

Amen.

**Hymn:** #747 “There is a balm in Gilead”

***We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession***

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

We thank you, God, for the many ways you provide for our needs:  
for air and water, for food and shelter, for 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 and all its creatures and relationships.  
Show us how to cherish the gifts you have given  
and protect them for future generations.

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

We thank you, God, 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 and pain within the family circle.

*Keep a brief silence*

God, we also thank you for friendship:  
for friends who have supported us through months of pandemic restrictions  
and for those who bring us joy and wise counsel.  
Help us extend the gift of friendship  
to those who are experiencing isolation, loneliness or grief.

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

We thank you, 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.

*Here, you may name any situations currently in the news.*

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



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

We thank you, 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 us as we regroup after the months of pandemic  
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.

*Here you could add specific mission projects the congregation supports  
locally, nationally or internationally.*

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

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

O God, thank you for the gift of your Son,  
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,  
as together we offer the prayer Jesus taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### ***God sends us with God's blessing:***

**Hymn:** #763 "To show by touch and word"

**Blessing:**