

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Come and see; come and rejoice.
All: **We have come seeking Jesus of Nazareth.
We want to know the One who comforts and heals.**
One: Jesus promises to meet you along life's way.
All: **Darkness has lifted, and light has come to us;
goodness reigns, and tombs have no power to destroy.**
One: Christ is risen; what a joyous moment!
He is risen!
All: **He is risen indeed!**

***OPENING HYMN** "Thine Is the Glory" GtG 238

1. **Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.**
Refrain:
**Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.**
2. **Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting.**
Refrain:
**Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.**
3. **No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life!
Life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.**

Refrain:

**Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

One: Gracious God, we have heard the good news:
how on the third day, Christ rose again.
All: Still we look for the living among the dead.
One: You rolled away the stone from the tomb.
All: Still we look for the living among the dead.
One: You sent messengers to proclaim the gospel.
All: Still we look for the living among the dead.
One: You were faithful to your promise;
you have done wonderful things!
All: Still we look for the living among the dead.
[silent confession]
One: Forgive us, Lord, we pray.
Teach us to trust your promise
and to believe the good news of salvation:
All: Christ is alive; Jesus is risen from the dead. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Christ is life and has become our salvation.
All: We shall not die, but shall live and recount the deeds of God.
One: Do not fear, then, to follow where Christ leads, to feel the suffering of
others and your own pain, to reach out in witness and service.
**All: We are acceptable to God, whose faithfulness continues and whose
love never ends.**
One: Receive the healing Christ offers, and pass it on.
All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

***RESPONSE OF PRAISE** “We Are Forgiven” GtG 447

**We are forgiven. We are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God.**

(Repeat)

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THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Living God, by your Holy Spirit,
open our eyes to see the new light of this day;
open our lips to tell of the empty tomb;
open our hearts to believe the good news;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 20:11-18 (*New Revised Standard Version+*)

Our scripture reading for today actually picks up right where we left off last week. The first Easter morning, Mary has discovered that Jesus' tomb is empty. Having informed Peter and another disciple, they come and confirm it for themselves, and then "return to the place where they were staying." And Mary is left by herself at the empty tomb.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² 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. ¹³ 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 put him." ¹⁴ As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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.'" ¹⁸ 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.

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Some of you may remember that the lead-in from last week suggested we would talk about Thomas today.

But as I read through the twentieth chapter of John this week, I was struck by a question that felt like it leapt up and grabbed me, and wouldn't let go.

So Thomas will have to wait for another week. Then again Thomas may be used to waiting.

We're back on the first day of the week, that first Easter morn.

Mary has visited the tomb and found it empty. She tells Peter and the other disciple about what she found, and they come running -- literally -- to see for themselves. They do see for themselves, but they

as yet...did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. (20:9)

So they (together with Mary) see but do not yet understand.

Peter and the other disciple leave.

Mary though has remained at the tomb, weeping (which is where we find her at the start of our passage for today). As she does, she looks once again into the tomb and sees two angels -- divine messengers -- who ask her why she is crying. She explains that she does not know where they have taken her Lord, i.e., Jesus. Probably she assumes someone has robbed the grave, and wonders where they may have taken his body.

She turns around and comes face to face with Jesus, but does not recognize him -- once again she sees, but does not understand.

So Jesus addresses her and asks a question -- a question that strikes like a lightning bolt, for Mary, and for us:

“Whom are you looking for?”

Now we might think that the answer is quite obvious. Mary is looking for Jesus (well, he’s right there in front of her!).

But is she really looking for Jesus? Or is she really looking for a body, albeit Jesus’ dead body?

I had a colleague last week say it this way: she was looking for death. That’s what she expected to find. That’s what she was looking for. Death.

Is that all we are looking for? Is that all we expect to find?

Simply the latest body count, the latest tally of those diagnosed with this confounded virus.

Simply the tumble of the stock market and the number of applications for unemployment.

The dead. The dour. The hopeless.

The confined. The confounded. The restricted.

“Whom are WE looking for?”

In the midst of our lives that have enough pain and destruction, suffering and disappointment; in the midst of a pandemic no one saw coming; at this time in our lives,

“Whom are WE looking for?”

-Looking for someone to provide a quick fix, to give an easy answer.

-Looking for someone to promise a return to ‘normal’, the known and familiar.

-Looking for someone wielding a magic wand to wave and make it all go away.

“Whom are we looking for?”

Are we looking for an Easter Santa?

-who fills our Easter baskets with sweets and treats and tells us that ‘everything will be alright’.

Are we looking for a master magician?
-who can cast a spell over us and protect us from speeding bullets and make us impervious to the pain and agony of human life and even human relationships.
Are we looking for a wondrous genie?
-who is ours and ours alone, in a bottle under our command, ready and obedient to our beck and call, to our deepest desires and grandest wishes.

“Whom are you looking for?” Mary is asked.

But I wonder: it seems that behind the story as it is told, a different question is actually at work.

From the perspective of the question “Whom are you looking for?” we presume Mary knows what she is looking for; and the result of that is she will find only what she is looking for, only what she expects to find.

But from the perspective of a different question -- “Whom will she find?” -- that question opens up the possibilities to what she does not expect. “Whom will she find?” -- or better still, “Whom will she be found by?” -- allows God to break into her life with resurrection.

It may not be what she expects. It may not be what she we could have imagined. But it may be precisely what she needs.

For she is found by one who calls her by name, and in calling her by name acknowledges that he knows her for who she really is...and loves her just the same.

Like the story earlier in the gospel of John of the woman caught in adultery and brought to Jesus for judgment. But he would not judge her. He would only forgive her and love her into a new path, a new life.

He calls us by name: for he knows us for who we really are (after all, he was on the cross because of us) -- he knows us in our fear and retribution, knows us in our pain and loneliness, knows us in our short-comings and failures, knows us in our weaknesses and vulnerabilities -- and he loves us just the same. Not to excuse our excuses, not to overlook our overbearing manner, but to re-claim us and renew us and love us into a new path, a new life.

Mary is found by one who stands with her in her pain and confusion.

She is weeping, grieving her loss. And there he is. Even though she may not recognize him, he stands with her in her pain.

Like he stood before the tomb of Lazarus, his friend. And Jesus wept.

He knows our pain, he knows our grief; he understands. And he stands with us. We are not alone. We can be comforted and encouraged by his presence with us, even in the darkest of hours. For we do not go through this, or any, dark hour all on our own, left to our own meager and inadequate devices. No. We go through this time with one who knows the pain and knows the disappointment, and will walk us through to the other side.

Mary is found by one who reminds her... No. She is found by one whose very presence affirms for her, and us, that death is not the final answer.

The one she expected to be dead is not. The one she expected to be gone stands right there before her.

Death is not the final answer for her and her life.

Or for us and ours, regardless of the circumstance or situation.

Now this does not mean that death will no longer stalk us, that pain will not visit us, that grief will not seize us. (Was Jesus spared these? No!) But it does mean that those things are not our final destiny, either in this life or the next. And so death, pain, grief need not be the defining factor of how we live our life, and how we give our life for others.

God has shattered the grip of death and refuted the power of all that deals in death. God has spoken the final word for this world, for us. And that word is life.

And we see that affirmation in the one who stands before Mary, and stands even now before us.

This is the one we call *Rabbouni*, which means Teacher.

Will we let him be our Teacher? Will we let him guide us and instruct us in a new way of life and a new way of dealing with tough, scary situations: with hope and courage and love?

This is the one we call Lord.

Now, I am becoming more and more aware that the title 'Lord' can be problematic. Those for whom slavery, of various kinds, is an all-too-real part of their heritage and even present-day experience -- for them 'Lord' can be problematic, conjuring up images of a mean, oppressive, over-bearing lord of the manor, or the plantation.

But such is not the Lord we name at Easter. He is loving, compassionate, with ultimate concern and care for us -- even willing to die for us. And still Lord: i.e., one we are to follow, not the other way 'round; not my will, but his be done. Always remembering there is no more loving and caring Lord than he.

Isaac Watts (1707) addresses this issue in his incomparable hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (and yes, we talk of the cross, even with Easter). This love of Jesus, his giving of self, the depth and length and height and breadth of his love seen in his crucifixion:

*Love so amazing, [Watts writes] so divine
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

This is the one we call Lord, even though we wrestle with very different images for the word.

This is the one we follow, even though our natural inclination be to follow fear or the latest trend.

This is the one we give ourselves to, even when all about us encourages us to cling to what is 'mine' and to hoard for ourselves.

And we can sing of giving ourselves to him -- sing with the hymn and sing with our lives -- because he is not simply any 'Lord', he is our Loving Lord, he is the Risen Lord, and he is here with us, even now, always.

Death cannot keep him from us. Neither can anything else in all creation. For,

*I have become absolutely convinced [the Apostle Paul writes] that neither death
nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens
today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power*

from below, nor anything else in God's whole world [--nothing!--] has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 8:38-39)

This we affirm, and this we seek to live, even as he stands before us and asks the question, "Whom are you looking for?"

The honest answer may be, "I don't know."

But the wonder of Easter is discovered in the question, "Whom do you find?"

Or better yet, "Whom are you found by?"

Amen.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

In life and in death we belong to God.

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying,
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With joy, we pray for all Christian assemblies
united before an empty tomb of wonder.
Help us see you, O God, in those we do not expect to encounter
and remove all fear from our hearts.
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With gratitude, we give you thanks
for all who seek you and yearn to know you.
Guide them and keep them,
open their eyes again and again to your blessings.
God in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With humility, we pray for this planet, our home.
Heal what we have scarred and broken;

renew the face of Earth from north to south, from east to west
so that your creation may speak to us of your goodness,
and that together we may share in its bounty.

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

With compassion, wipe away the tears of all who weep,
soothe away the fatigue of those who are weary.
Give us the spiritual tools we need to feed the hungry,
clothe the naked, and comfort those who are in any trouble.
Send your angels to watch over and care for the vulnerable and sick,
and watch over those who watch over others.

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

With joy, we remember those who saw our risen Lord
and witnessed to his resurrection so that we might have faith.
May their words and deeds inspire us
to sing our "Alleluia!" again and again
with our words and our deeds and our very lives.

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

Passing from darkness to light,
from bondage to freedom, from death to life,
we commend to you, gracious and ever-living God,
all for whom we pray. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

OFFERING

Invitation

With compassion for our needs,
the Risen One stands beside us, calling our names.

Let us, with that same mercy,
share our offerings to relieve the suffering of this world
and to proclaim far and wide the good news of resurrection life.

Offering

**Doxology* GtG 606

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures here below;
praise God above, you heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

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**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We praise you, O God, and give you thanks
that you have given us such joy, such grace, and such hope,
in the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Let our lives be proof of that good news.
Let all our words and actions, our love and service
bear witness to your resurrection power;
for the sake of our living Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

SENDING

***HYMN** "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!" GtG 245

1. **"Christ the Lord is risen today!" Alleluia!
All creation, join to say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, O heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!**
2. **Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise. Alleluia!**
3. **Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now your sting? Alleluia!
Jesus died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where your victory, O grave? Alleluia!**
4. **Hail the Lord of earth and heaven! Alleluia!
Praise to you by both be given, Alleluia!**

**Every knee to you shall bow, Alleluia!
Risen Christ, triumphant now. Alleluia!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Receive the good news: Christ is risen from the dead.
Tell the good news: the power of death shall no more oppress us.
Live the good news: we are free to love as he has loved us.

May God who raised Jesus from the dead bless you
and by the power of the Holy Spirit raise you with him in glory.

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