

**Prelude:****[Ester Funk & Annie Schulz]****Women's Group****“He is Risen” / “O How Great”****[Voices Together #351]***He is risen, He is risen, alleluia!**Oh, how great is Christ the Lord!**On the cross he died for me.**He has pardoned all my sin.**Glory be to Jesus.**In three days he rose again.**Glory be to Jesus!***Gathering Thoughts, Call to Worship & Prayer:****[Doug Schulz]**

Glory, glory, glory! Today is all about the Easter story, which is really the central reality of the gospel message – life in God is gracious, abundant, eternal! Not to be defeated or destroyed. Always to be celebrated and enjoyed. And shared in the world as announcement of good news. The announcement? “Jesus is risen, alleluia!” Life with God in Jesus is a journey that overcomes death, always. The resurrection overturns death and defeat and despair. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Our hope and joy and peace will surely be found there. In him, the risen One. Alleluia!”

As it happened on Easter morning, so here today, women are the first to make this announcement to those who wait for their hopes to be restored and renewed. We will hear more about the Easter women's proclamation later in our Scripture reading and in Laur Steven's reflection time. Today we once again thank all planners and participants and producers of our service on this Easter day.

For our call to worship this morning, I will read a short prayer written by Carol Penner of Vineland, a prayer that makes Easter warmly personal as it celebrates the Springtime coming with nature's new life opening up joy and hope, even in these difficult days of the COVID-19 global pandemic:

Great God of heaven and earth;  
we come to sing of your mighty power this morning,  
your wisdom, your goodness, your strength flaming out.  
We come to give thanks for great gifts.  
This morning, we ask that you would resurrect us,  
opening us petal by petal, with your shining love,  
warming us into life

even in the places where we feel cold and dead.  
Shine in our hearts, Lord Jesus!  
AMEN

**Hymns: “Low in the Grave” (HWB #273 v1)**

*Low in the grave he lay, Jesus, my Savior!  
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!*

*Up from the grave he arose,  
with a mighty triumph o’er his foes!  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
and he lives forever with his saints to reign!  
He arose! He arose! Alleluia! Christ arose!*

**“O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing (HWB #274 vv 1,2&5)**

*O sons and daughters, let us sing!  
The King of heav’n, the glorious King,  
o’er death today rose triumphing.*

Refrain: *Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*That Sunday morn, at break of day,  
the faithful women went their way  
to seek the tomb where Jesus lay. [Refrain]*

*On this most holy day of days,  
to God your hearts and voices raise  
in laud, and jubilee, and praise. [Refrain]*

**Passing of the Peace & Prayers of the People**

**[Beth Woelk]**

I invite you to stand if you are able - and ‘raise’ a greeting to one another - offering gestures of friendship and love, passing the peace and sharing our joy this Easter morning with waves, winks and nods. “May the peace and joy of Christ be with you. He is Risen!”

This morning Laur will invite us into the drama of the “3 Marys” who are going to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body and who instead encounter a shocking and baffling reversal that eventually transforms their intense confusion, sorrow and fear into surprising hope, joy and purpose as they turn toward the Risen Christ.

As we come together today we too are invited to turn our hearts, minds, spirits and bodies toward the Risen One; toward hope, joy and life!

For our Prayers of the People this morning let us pray for those gathered here, those whom we love, and those around the world, who like the 3 women at the tomb, may be journeying with great disturbance, disorientation or sorrow. We also offer up the reasons for celebration and hope that we see blossoming forth in our hearts, in the lives of loved ones and in communities practicing peace and justice around the world. We pray that we all might be encouraged by the Risen One to turn toward the joy found in the Easter message.

So as we bring to mind the concerns and celebrations that we have mentioned already, I invite you to join me in a Prayer of Turning toward the Risen Christ that I have adapted for us from the writing of Joyce Rupp.

We turn to you, risen Christ and pray:

for those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, may they turn to experience greater healing and wholeness,

for those who have grown weary from constant turmoil, may they turn to encounter peace,

for those who feel disheartened, may they turn to discover a spirit of encouragement.

We turn to you, risen Christ and pray:

for those who have reason to celebrate, may they turn toward their joy,

for those who have kindness given to them, may they turn outwards extending it forward,

for those who have what they need, may they turn toward gratitude and generosity.

We turn to you, risen Christ and pray:

for those troubled in their faith, may they turn to find confidence in your great love,

for those who feel burdened, may they turn to rely on your strength,

for those who doubt a fresh start or new beginning will ever arise, may they turn toward your resurrection.

Risen Christ, we turn to you with full reliance on your resurrected presence with us here and now. We renew our trust in the ways that you restore joy, life, and purpose when it lies hidden in our entombed selves. Turn us again and again toward hope. Turn our hearts toward you in the garden of our everyday lives. Amen.

**Scripture:**

**Acts 10:34-43**

**[Beth Woelk]**

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37 That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 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. 39 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; 40 but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41 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. 42 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. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**Hymn:**

**“Christ the Lord is Risen Today”**

**[HWB #280 vv 1-3]**

*Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!  
All creation joins to say: Alleluia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia!  
Sing, O heav'ns, and earth reply: Alleluia!*

*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!*

*Lives again our glorious king, Alleluia!  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!  
Dying once, he all doth save, Alleluia!  
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!*

**Scripture:**

**Mark 16:1-8**

**[Pam Pauls]**

16 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were

alarmed. 6 But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**Women’s Group: “That Easter Morn at Break of Day” [VT #342]**

*That Easter morn, at break of day, a faithful woman went her way  
to seek the tomb where Jesus lay. Alleluia!*

*When Mary’s heart was filled with gloom and she stood weeping  
near the tomb, a stranger spoke, she knew not whom. Alleluia!*

*“Why do you weep?” his question came. “Whose is the body  
you would claim?” And then, at last, he spoke her name. Alleluia!*

*No longer weeping, anguish-bent, but with rejoicing Mary went,  
by Christ as first apostle sent. Alleluia!*

**Reflection: “A Dramatic Reversal: A New Beginning” [Laur Steven]**

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Now let’s whisper it together, in the most dramatic Covid whisper we can muster: One, two, three “Hallelujah! Christ is Risen!” Our theme for this Easter season is “Good News is Springing Up!” Everywhere we look this time of year we see new life beginning. What was frozen, snow-covered earth a few weeks ago is now pushing up crocuses! Robins are back, ships are in the canal, the warm sun is calling us to bask on our patios, my new grandson Walter was born on March 29th...as my 3 year old grandson Jasper says, “It’s magic!” And it sure feels like that. But the wondrous aspect is that it isn’t magic! It’s the heart of reality. It’s the dramatic reversal of direction within the whole creation. Out of death comes life. And that is good news to shout from the rooftops!

I want to focus today on how the dramatic reversal at the heart of the Easter story was used to shout the Good News to illiterate medieval English Christians. In the early centuries of the Christian church dramatic performances were seen as pagan practice, a holdover from classical Greek and Roman drama, with its pantheon of Gods, and was felt to be a temptation for the senses, best to be avoided. After the fall of Rome, the only part of church life that retained a dramatic component was the sacraments—such as baptism, communion, and marriage. But in the 10<sup>th</sup> century something happened in England. Under the guidance of Bishop Ethelwold of Winchester the monastery system was reformed and brought renewed order to the centre of religious life after a slow decline through clerical corruption

and damage due to Danish attacks. Ethelwold's desire to involve the English illiterate laity more directly in the Latin services led him gradually to expand liturgical drama from simply the sacraments by acting out significant biblical scenes. The first and most significant of these scenes is called the "Quem Quaeritis" play, named for its first words, Quem Quaeritis: "Whom do you seek?"

The brief scene is a distillation of the various gospel recountings of the women who found the empty tomb on Easter morning. What Bishop Ethelwold wanted *all* his people to appreciate, not simply the Latin-trained clergy, monks, and nuns, and what we *still* receive from the "Quem Quaeritis," is the heart of the Easter story and the heart of the Good News.

Now, I want you to use your imaginations. If we weren't under Covid protocols I'd have recruited some actors, created some props, adjusted the lighting, and presented the scene to you. But the upside of our present situation is that you have to get more intently involved. Here we go.

Imagine the church is in shadows. From the right aisle three women in sombre dress approach the front of the church. They walk slowly, carrying their spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They climb the steps near the piano and turn toward the tomb, situated behind the organ. As the light comes up gradually on the tomb, the women stop in amazement and confusion. The stone has been rolled back. And then from the tomb an angel appears, dressed all in white. The women cower back, and fall to their knees.

The angel asks them:

Whom do you seek in the tomb, O followers of Christ?

They respond:

Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, O angel.

The angel responds, as the lights come up to full:

He is not here! He has risen, as He foretold.

Go, announce that He has arisen from the grave!

As the angel disappears into the tomb again, the women grasp each other and whisper in amazement, then turn and retrace their steps down the aisle, their faces expressing both terror and wonder. And the scene ends.

I said this scene presents the heart of the Easter story and the heart of the Good News. There is a three part thematic structure: First, seekers on a journey; second, their focus on death rather than life; and third, the wondrous reversal that directs them back into life with Good News to share. But the scene also engages us profoundly because it enacts the beating heart of drama: characters moving in a direction that encounters obstacles and complications which lead to a character-changing reversal and recognition of reality.

First then the theme of seeking or journeying. The angel confronts the women with the question: “Whom do you seek in the tomb, O followers of Christ?”. The tone of the question implies that the tomb is the last place they should want to seek for their Christ. If you’re a Christ follower, why are you looking in this place of death? The path for the women in our scene is their covenant belief that God has sent the Messiah, the Christ, to liberate His people and usher in His kingdom, the new heaven and new earth. The women are seekers, journeyers, following a trajectory of belief. But in their understanding their upward trajectory of hope for an impending transformation of the world was dashed off track, reversed, by the arrest, imprisonment, and crucifixion of Jesus. They plummet into a terrified darkness. But they don’t really understand the story they are part of, do they? Like the woman who used expensive ointment to wash the feet of Jesus, and thus was in Jesus’s words [in Matt. 26:12] preparing him “for burial”, and like the kings bringing the embalming spices frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus, the women bring spices to anoint the body of their king, who has died. Though their trip to the tomb happens on Easter morning for us, for them it wasn’t Easter until after they heard the angel and the truth of the Christ broke through. Before that it was a solemn undertaking for their dead leader, the man Jesus of Nazareth. For us, the story is a heroic comedy, where despite formidable obstacles the hero wins through in the end; for them a heroic comedy had reversed into a sadistic tragedy in which the brute force of the Roman world had won.

The second theme—focusing on death rather than life—appears in their response to the angel’s query about whom they seek: “Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, O angel.” Despite the angel calling them “followers of Christ”, it is Jesus the man they cling to, which is to be expected since he was a remarkable man. Like the body of their human leader, they feel crushed under the weight of Rome. Think of the downward trajectory Holy Week has for us, from the height of the triumphal entry to the shameful ignominy of crucifixion among criminals. Though we have been singing joyous songs this morning, we didn’t on Good Friday, did we? Think of the beautiful African-American lament “Were you there”. I’ll remind you how it goes, then ask Annie to play through a stanza:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

That’s so sadly beautiful! And beautifully the verses go on to nail Jesus to a tree, pierce him in the side, lay him in a tomb, and then, unexpectedly enough that many versions omit the last stanza, have God raise him from the tomb. But though God raises Jesus, the music continues as before, with the downward trajectory. I’ll read the last two lines, and then Annie will play:

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?

Thanks Annie! I love this song; don't you? I love trembling in sadness, swaying like a reed blown in the wind, and I expect you do too. But wait! That last stanza shouldn't be sad! He is risen! Shout hallelujah! A risk we can fall into as followers of Christ—as that angel knew—is to focus on the tragic trajectory unto death. And this is even though we know of the resurrection, the transforming triumph of the Christ. The women coming to the tomb on the first Easter did not know, despite knowing Jesus personally. Their trajectory had hit rock bottom. They were anointing the body as a loving way to say goodbye.

But now we come to our third theme, the dramatic reversal that changes our direction. The three women, carrying the grave spices, know death. They know this is the end of the line for Jesus, and perhaps for the movement he led. And then the angel rocks their world: "He is not here! He has risen, as He foretold. Go, announce that He has arisen from the grave!" I like to imagine the angel's voice with a bit of an edge to it, as if he's saying "Duh! He isn't here! Like he told you many times would happen, he's risen!" I can't really imagine the response of the women to this announcement. How can you believe it? Jesus was dead. You can't just change that, can you? And then perhaps some of the light breaks into their cracked world, some of the Good News springs up. Well, maybe death can be changed. Maybe God can do what we, following Jesus, have professed he can do. Whatever they actually felt at the moment, the empty tomb and the angel's announcement turned their lives around, gave them a new beginning and a new direction. The turning point in drama, the climax, changes the circumstances for all the characters. In this case we go from tragedy to comedy, the darkness transforms into light, winter into spring. The direction from the angel is the direction the followers of Christ have henceforth taken, to go and announce that he has risen from the grave, to carry the Good News of the risen Christ's saving and transforming grace into all the world, and thus to be co-creators with God of the new world coming into being. Peter's words from Acts that we heard earlier, sum things up:

"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. God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear... 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."

Alleluia! He is risen! The Lord is doing a new thing, and we are part of it. Amen!

**Hymn of Response: "Christ is risen! Shout hosanna"**

**[HWB #272]**

*Christ is risen! Shout hosanna! Celebrate this day of days!  
Christ is risen! Hush in wonder; all creation is amazed.  
In the desert all-surrounding, see, a spreading tree has grown.  
Healing leaves of grace abounding bring a taste of love unknown.*

*Christ is risen! Raise your spirits from the caverns of despair.  
Walk with gladness in the morning. See what love can do and dare.  
Drink the wine of resurrection, not a servant, but a friend.  
Jesus is our strong companion. Joy and peace shall never end.*

*Christ is risen! Earth and heaven nevermore shall be the same.  
Break the bread of new creations where the world is still in pain.  
Tell its grim, demonic chorus: "Christ is risen! Get you gone!"  
God the First and Last is with us. Sing hosanna everyone!*

**Benediction: [adapted fr. C. Penner]**

**[Doug Schulz]**

And now, as we leave this place, remember:  
Jesus is the presence of God with us on the long road,  
the road between fear and hope,  
the road between the place where all is lost  
and the place of resurrection.  
Enjoy the company of Jesus Christ today, and always,  
for he stands among us, in risen power  
day by day, year by year, hour by hour.  
Go in peace, alive and well-looked-after  
by the goodness of the eternal grace of God.

**Sending Hymn: "Christ is alive and goes before us"  
(Women's Group)**

**[VT #565]**

*Christ is alive, and goes before us to show and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings; our God is making all things new.*

*This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember, and move on,  
time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that's gone.*

*For by the life and death of Jesus, love's mighty Spirit, now as then,  
can make for us a world of difference, as faith and hope are born again.*

*Then let us, with the Spirit's daring, step from the past, and leave behind  
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving, seeking new paths, and sure to find.*