

Worship for March 31, 2024
Easter Sunday

Welcome and Announcements

Minute for Mission One Great Hour of Sharing

*Call to Worship

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

*Hymn 232 Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

Prayer for Easter

O Christ, in your resurrection,

The heavens and earth rejoice,

Alleluia!

By your resurrection you broke open the gates of hell
and destroyed sin and death.

Keep us victorious over sin.

By your resurrection, you raised the dead,
and brought us from death to life.

Guide us in the way of eternal life.

By your resurrection you confounded your guards and executioners,
and filled your disciples with joy.

Give us joy in your service.

By your resurrection you proclaimed good news to the women and apostles,
and brought salvation to the whole world.

Direct our lives as your new creation.

God of mercy,

we no longer look for Jesus among the dead.

for he is alive and has become the Lord of life.

**From the waters of death, you raise us with him
and renew the gift of life within us.**

**Increase in our minds and hearts
the risen life we share with Christ,
and help us grow as your people
toward the fullness of eternal life with you.**

**Where we have strayed from your example, forgive us and restore us to right relationship
with you and those with whom we live, love, work, and play,**

**through Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,**

One God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me as I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our ending, has come to save us from our sins and turn us toward the grace and mercy of God.

Friends believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

First Reading Luke 24:1-12

Choral Anthem He Arose

Time for Young Disciples

Gospel Reading John 20:1-18

The Morning Message

I heard the little “bing!” that announced I had a message on my phone. It was an SOS from dear friend. We met doing presbytery work and formed a fast and strong bond.

“Help! The pastor’s sick, I’m writing a sermon, the session has met and approved me to officiate Communion. But, I need a Book of Common Worship and can’t find one anywhere in the church. I’ve never been on the other side of the Communion Table and I don’t know the right words to say!”

The irony of this moment was rich. My friend is one of the most articulate people I know. She is gifted in many ways and communication is her strong suit. She has had more experience at public speaking than I’ll ever have.

I’ve taken this call before and immediately sent her a link to the on-line resource. But, when I hadn’t heard from her in about thirty minutes, I sent a text.

All was well. She just made a fast trip to the church to look for recorded service music they might use in worship. The organist had just been diagnosed with strep.

Holy Week marks the defining moments of the Christian faith. We have good news to tell. But, there have been moments in recent days, it felt like the good news was getting kicked in the teeth. Now, I learned a long time ago that this happens sometimes when we enter holy seasons. We encounter a negative energy that gets in the way.

So, I said as much to my friend and reminded myself as well as her that our task is a simple one. We just need to stick to Mary’s script: “I have seen the Lord!”

To say, “I have seen the Lord!” is to point out resurrection in the midst of ruin, new life when all that seems visible is death; love in the face of hate; decency and goodness when that which is vitriolic and vile and vicious finds only more and more followers.

Because, in the end, resurrection is not only the promise of life after death, which, is huge, but, it is also that the life-giving love of God will always move the stones away. Tombs are just that—containers for the dead. And there are enough tombs around us, dark dwelling places that fuel corruption and deception, racism, sexism, rejection, suspicion, fear.

A few years ago, we celebrated Easter in our homes because a deadly virus prevented almost all social interaction. It may have felt as though you were trapped in a tomb. Thanks to the efforts of many, many people and institutions and the public working together toward the goals of life and health and well-being, that stone is being rolled away.

But, we have been changed. Rolling the stone away may reveal places that need further work. Those of you in education are aware of the impact Covid has had on students and families. I have heard some teachers say it may take years to catch up. It’s hard to see God’s work in this type of situation, but, it is possible.

Sarah Bessey is a young contemporary author and preacher. She speaks with clarity, frank honesty, and with a spirit of humility. She says out loud what most of us think but can’t quite say: that some days we are unwavering believers. But, sometimes we have doubts.

Bessey writes, “And Jesus is-still, now, always—the resurrection and the life. And on the days when I believe this, I am certain we will also be resurrected and death will not have the final word and all tears will be wiped away and there will be no more night, no more hunger, no more wounding, no more loss, no more good-byes.

On the days when I believe this, I believe death is a dawn and never the last word.

On the days when I believe this, I know the miracle is that God knows the dark and it is never the last word.

On the days when I believe this, I believe that ongoing hope of resurrection changes how we engage in our lives as they stand right now as we love and know and walk with God who brings life out of death, order out of chaos, healing out of sickness, wholeness out of brokenness.

On the days when I believe this, I know God isn’t finished with this story yet.

But, there are days when I don’t believe it.

And on those, I have this: God With Us, Emmanuel.

This Easter, it may be all some of us have. Maybe life has been so turbulent or disappointing, or scary, or sick that we can't quite get to resurrection and life yet, but, in that place of exile, we can rest alongside *God with us*, which is our country of grace for today."

For months I asked for prayer for my cousin, with whom I was very close our whole lives long. She was first hospitalized a year ago and was in and out of the hospital, ICU, step-down, rehab hospital and skilled nursing, back to ICU for a final attempt to turn her condition around. She told us she was spiritually ready to go, but, she wanted to live. She and her husband had raised two fine sons and they had two little grandsons to watch grow up. So, the extraordinary measures were applied, but, eventually, it became clear that she would not survive.

Many of you have been there. Even for Christians, it is a painful place. But, her family gathered their faith and love and courage and we gathered around and we talked to her and prayed. And, then her sister, Kim, came to the head of the bed and stroking her hair, she began to sing softly, then her daughter-in-law, Krystle, joined her in song, and then her life-long friend, Missy, joined them. I could not utter a sound from my throat. And that was the way it should be, as I witnessed them sing Melody into heaven. Into the eternal country of grace.

And in the stillness that followed, someone said, "Imagine what she is seeing now."

And we know, as Scripture gives witness, she has seen the Lord.

And, friends, we all have that to look forward to. Amen.

* Hymn 240 Alleluia! Alleluia! Give Thanks

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings including One Great Hour of Sharing

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Hymn 250 Hymn of Promise

*Blessing

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!

*Postlude