

April 12, 2020 – EASTER SUNDAY

With Reverend Heather Gilmour
“Signs of Resurrection”

CENTERING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP:

If you have a candle - real, battery-operated or imaginary - please get it ready to light.

If we were worshipping all together,
the 6 Lenten candles would be gone
and our beautiful Christ Candle would be the only candle seen.



LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

Now we light our Christ Candle for Easter Sunday morning.
Jesus life and ministry, his death and resurrection
and the story and the experience of Easter
teach of the immense dimensions of God’s grace.
A grace that enfolds with comfort and healing
Peace and promise, hope and nurture
Life and death.

As we acknowledge and imagine all of that
We also remember –
There is always more.

(Light your candle)

Hallelujah ! thanks be to God !

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God,
Easter is a season of new life and so we give thanks for our new life in Christ Jesus.
Bring us once again into your presence through your indwelling Spirit that comforts and
sustains us throughout our lives

(time of silent prayer)

Loving God,
May we find the quiet center of your love today as we renew our love through our worship of
you.
Amen

SCRIPTURE - LUKE 24:1-11

Jesus Has Risen

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

MESSAGE: "Signs of Resurrection" in hopes of bringing the story of Jesus' resurrection right into our present challenges.

This message has been prepared by Rev. Heather Gilmour for the Faith United Milton congregation on April 12, 2020, and shared with Palermo United. ©2020 Rev. Heather Gilmour. Provided here with permission.

Tell me, dear friends, how do you greet Easter Day this year? Our world has been rocked with fear around the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that with each step we take, the earth beneath our feet shifts and shakes and makes it so difficult to get our bearings.

It certainly is not Easter as usual: no sunrise worship to greet the new day, no packed churches, no brass and tympani to herald good news, no Easter egg hunts for the children, no ham dinners with all the family gathered around. No, there is nothing "normal" about this Easter day.

I suspect that for those first followers of Jesus, too, as the first day of the week dawned, there was nothing normal about that day, either. The events of the last few days had left them shocked and shaken. In spite of that, Luke tells us, as the first rays of light emerged through the darkness, several women came to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. They, like us, had experienced a crisis of their own. So they did what they could. They came to where he was to try and make sense out of it all.

Theologian Eugen Drewernann writes: "There are only two essential subjects in human life: love and death, and there is no greater fear than that of the dawning of Easter morning, the fear that death has the power to conquer love." The women groping their way to the tomb knew that fear. You and I know that fear, especially in this age of COVID-19.

We seem to be in a holding pattern these days as things change constantly and as we self-isolate from more and more activities. It feels more like a Holy Saturday, a time between the times, than an Easter Sunday world. Like those early disciples, we are not sure how to live in this world anymore. And yet, like the first women to the tomb on that first Easter day, we long

to try and find a hope to hold onto in the midst of this difficult and dangerous pandemic. We come looking for signs of resurrection.

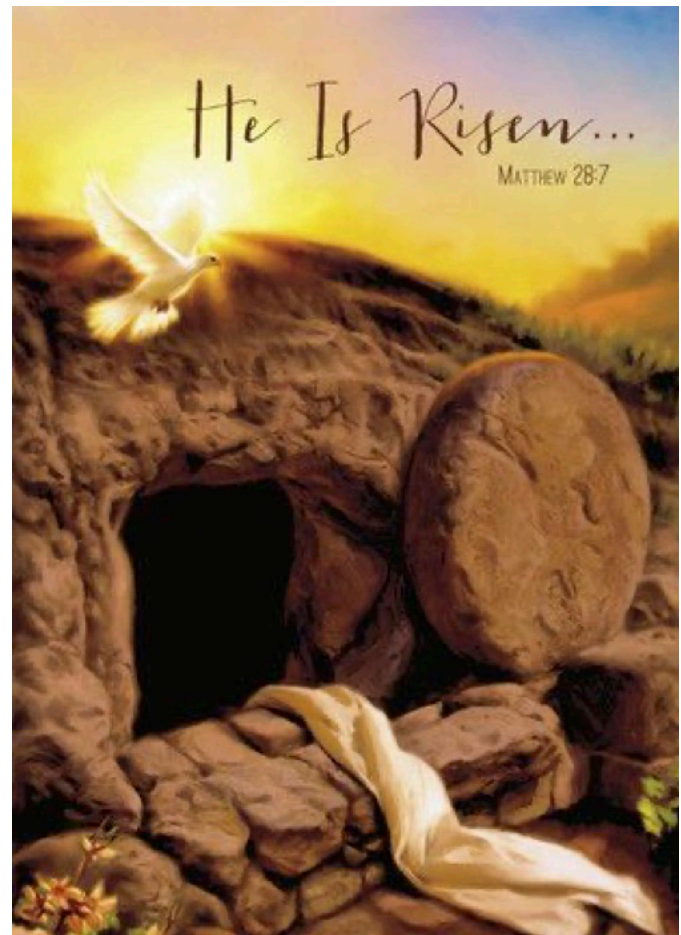
Richard Rohr, a contemplative friar, is helpful when he says: “The cross rightly understood, always reveals various kinds of resurrection.” There is a twist on the story! But it makes sense in the world we are living in right now. He goes on to say: “A crucified God is the dramatic symbol of the one suffering that God fully enters into with us.” Perhaps it is this suffering God who walks with us through the shadowed valley into the dawn a new day!

For me, the story of cross and empty tomb speak to me of God’s presence with us, especially in all those moments of deep despair and suffering. What this Jesus tells us is that God suffers with us and does not leave us alone. It tells me that God’s love is so encompassing that there is no darkness or difficulty or danger that we could experience is beyond the love of God and the presence of God with us.

If truth were told, we are waiting for resurrection. We are waiting for a sign of hope. But sometimes, it seems, the dawn of Easter comes slowly, and we have to live in the uncertainty of a “holy Saturday” for a while, a time between the times.

The women came to the tomb just as the first rays of light were shattering the darkness. They came expecting to find a stone tightly blocking the entrance where his body lay. As they approached the tomb in the grey-gold dawn, they saw something they had not expected. The stone had been rolled away. Because they didn’t find his body, they didn’t know what to think, Luke tells us. Then two men appeared to let them know that Jesus was alive! It took a while for them to grasp that death had not won, that death could not imprison the life that would never, ever die; that death simply could not conquer love. In the early dawn’s light, the women were given signs of the resurrection, even though it would take them some time to process this good news. We’re told in another gospel account that they left the tomb still with fear in their hearts, but also with great joy. And when they reported what they had seen to the other disciples they all thought it was nonsense and they wouldn’t believe!

Perhaps that is also true for many people this Easter Sunday. And yet, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, there are signs of resurrection all around us. A poem was sent to us from a friend that helped me to recognize these signs of new life and abiding love even in our present reality. It is a great reminder that new life and unending love are aching to break through in



our world even now. Some of these signs are: people singing to each other on balconies, across empty squares; neighbours calling on neighbours to check how they are doing; folks praying for one another, knowing that we are all in this together; spring bulbs pushing up through wet earth; buds on trees swelling daily; birds singing hope in their springtime songs.

The resurrection of Jesus is, as Alan Jones states, nothing less than the re-ordering of all things. Maybe it is awaking us to a new reality: that we are all children of God and dependent on God for our very lives: that what really matters are those we love; that nothing we could experience is alien to God: that whatever life hands us, God is with us and we are never alone. This year, it may be even more apparent that resurrection is nothing less than the rebirth of love. Death does not have the final word. Love and life do. And that makes all the difference in the world. On Easter morning, we cannot escape the gospel. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, the good news of the resurrection is already in the world. Jesus is already here, in his risen power, pouring his love upon us, giving us life in abundance. Even if the resurrection seems slow in coming, wait for it. It will surely come.

The gospel writers are not so much concerned about telling us what literally happened that first Easter morning as they are pointing to a reality which always exists, but that we, with our eyes full of tears, and hearts full of despair cannot always grasp. Yet, the one thing the gospel accounts do have in common is that the women and the disciples, these beloved ones of the crucified Jesus, experience, in their brokenness, a presence that is so alive, they are able to proclaim to the world, "He is risen!"

It's enough to take my breath away this Easter morning. Because he lives, we dare to proclaim the amazing good news that there is no power in the world that will ever be able to destroy love, nor overcome life in Christ. It is love that greets us this Easter day, and it is love which is the only thing that matters, the only thing that endures forever.

"Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Thanks be to God !

HYMN: JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN TODAY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h9mGLh5WvI>

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

O God, at this time of fear and uncertainty, we do not always know how to pray as we ought; but we trust that your Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. We turn to you with our heart hungers and our deep need for your comfort and your healing grace. We use these words to try and shape the unsettling feelings we can't help but feel at a time like this.

We long to freely sing our hallelujahs on this Easter Day. And yet, we look around and see so many people who are suffering and who are afraid. We long to have Jesus and his Spirit of life and love come to us in resurrection's power to quiet our fears and comfort our hearts. Gather us under your healing wings. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Our hearts are moved to pray for others for whom this is such an anxious time. For those who courageously care for the sick and dying; for those who are grieving the death of someone dear; for those who are alone and lonely; for those who worry about their finances; for those who have no shelter; for those who struggle with despair and depression. (a moment of

silence to remember and pray for those for whom we are concerned) O God, have mercy and may your angels draw near to all who suffer and bring hope and new life.

We would be your Easter people, Holy God. May our lives bear witness to your love and compassion, your comfort and peace to all those we meet along life's path. May we have faith enough, and courage enough to follow Jesus' way — to pour out our love to all who are locked in fear, to show compassion for all who suffer, to do what we can to help our world overcome this epidemic. Let the life that is so powerful in the risen Christ be in us also, for the sake of the world you so love.

We offer all these prayers to you in the name and in the Spirit of the risen Christ who taught us to pray....

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 trespasses as we forgive others
who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER - BLESSING:

Friends, go now in peace.

May the love of God embrace you;

the peace of the Risen Christ surround you;

and the comfort and protection of the Holy Spirit

bless you and all whom you love

this Easter Day and forevermore.

Amen