

Olivet Christian Church Worship
Sunday, April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

Call to Worship

In this time, we recognize the wilderness in the world.

In this time, we trust that God is near and we hold on to hope.

In this time, we trust that love is stronger than hate and that death will not have the last word.

So in this time, we celebrate.

In this time, we sing.

In this time, we proclaim, "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Let us worship Holy God!

How did you do it?

Beating hearts long to know!

What was it like? How did you feel? Did it hurt?

But our biggest question is—why come back for us?

We admit, it is hard to wrap our minds around a love like yours—

A love that never runs out.

A love that never gives up.

A love that knows the darkness and has wilderness scars

And chooses us anyway.

So today we run to you,

Just as those disciples ran to that empty tomb.

We run to you,

And we bring with us our hopes and our dreams,

Our prayers and our insecurities.

We bring with us gratitude for sacred spaces set apart,

For living room sanctuaries;

For cups of coffee and family recipes;

Gratitude for musicians that sound like angel choruses, even from afar.

For sunrises that remind us that new life is dawning,

And for the names of our loved ones on the tips of our tongues.

Pastoral Prayer

God of the grave,

God of fresh air,

God of another tomorrow—

Today is a day unlike any day.

For, in the midst of the darkness of the tomb,

Your goodness has found us

Like light finds the horizon,

Like moths find the light,

Like water finds the ocean.

Today is a day unlike any other day

Because the alleluias ring clear,

Hope echoes louder than fear,

And the wilderness seems to be kept at bay.

However, we also run to you with concern
For those who still feel lost in the desert,
For those who are still weeping in the garden,
For those who cannot escape the darkness of
Good Friday to see Easter Sunday.
We ask that you would wrap your arms
around them.
Transform their wilderness with
Flowers in the desert,
Streams of justice,
And horizons of hope.
And bottle us up with light,
So that we have grace for the Good Friday
days,
Patience for wilderness wanderings,
And enough light to share.

God of the grave,
God of fresh air,
God of another tomorrow—
Fill us with your Spirit.
We are here. Amen.

Scripture: *Matthew 27:62—28:10*

⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶ So they went with

the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Message

Rev. Hannah Ryan

Did you happen to notice how Matthew’s Easter story begins? With fear driving the story? First, with the chief priests and their pal Pilot, frightened of violence, frightened of a shift in status quo, so frightened that they make sure to secure Jesus’ tomb, guards keeping watch over that which is already dead.

Then, when the scene shifts to the tomb itself, the guards who witness the earthquake-lightening-angel show fall to the ground “like dead men.” And the steadfast women who have come to see the tomb—Mary Magdalene and another one of those Marys, remembered with affection by Matthew as “the other Mary”—they manage to remain upright. But perhaps they must stifle a little scream when the angel turns to them and says, “Oh, don’t be afraid.” (You only tell someone not to be afraid when they are afraid, after all.) And Jesus will tell them the exact same thing in a minute when he interrupts their scurry back to the disciple guys who are still curled up in bed. He will say, “Oh, don’t be afraid.” And, so, Matthew says that they left the tomb quickly with *fear and great joy*. And ran to tell the disciples.

Notice how Matthew does not seem to be bothered at all that fear and great joy don’t exactly go together. Unless they do. And perhaps you get that. Perhaps you understand what it’s like to be afraid to let yourself be truly happy. Maybe you know that good things can be fleeting; that joy is a fragile state; that there’s a bittersweet quality to it.

Because it’s the hardest thing—hope. And I’m not talking in that wishful sense of hoping like, I hope I don’t hit traffic on my way to work, or I hope I get an A, or I hope this stain comes out—those things that would make us momentarily happy that we have been taught to file under the name “hope.” There’s no fear in that. No fear, and therefore, I would argue, no great joy, either. Because hope

requires both things—the possibility of great joy and the real fear that it won’t come.

No, the hope that we’re hoping for is a hope that makes your knees go weak; hope that knocks the wind out of you; hope that makes you a little bit sick to your stomach; hope that you can barely even allow yourself to hope.

That’s the kind of hope that flared up at the tomb that first Easter Sunday when Mary and the other Mary considered for the first time that it might actually be true—that God might actually have overcome the darkness of noonday Friday, might actually have defeated death, might actually have raised their beloved Jesus to new life.

The angel told them simply, “Oh, he’s not here, for he has been raised as he said.” And the women, who had managed to stay bravely on their feet when the soldiers collapsed to the ground, now felt their hearts thudding as if they might pound right out of their chests.

“He is not here. He has been raised as he said.” It’s an announcement that makes all the difference in the world. An announcement that draws us to proclaim it again and again and again, so that our fearful, joyful hope is kept alive by the testimony of scripture and the testimony of our sisters and, eventually, also our brothers in faith. “He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

It means at least two things that we would do well to remember every single day of our fearful, joyful lives.

In the first place, it means that Jesus was right. He's been raised as he said, the angel declared. In other words, what has happened there at the tomb, the life that follows death is exactly what Jesus said would happen. So you can believe; you can trust him. The things he said, even the really impossible things, have turned out to be true.

Don't be afraid. He's not here. He has been raised as he said.

You know, he also said that if we hunger and thirst for justice, we will find satisfaction. That if we face down imperial powers and oppressive forces, we will find ourselves in sync with what God wants. It seems impossible. But listen: He is not here. He has been raised, as he said.

He also said things like, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are the poor and the hungry and the grieving and the merciful. Everything they need, they will get." This is a hard season to believe that, when we are aware of the rising unemployment rates, aware of how many people are having to do without, aware of the worldwide grief and trauma. But listen: He is not here. He has been raised, as he said.

He also said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me, for those who want to save their life will lose it and those

who want to lose their life for my sake will find it." Can you really imagine letting go of your own concern for your own salvation? It's really hard to imagine over the jumble of noise about how hard we should be working to make something of ourselves every single day. But listen: He is not here. He has been raised, as he said.

And, as it turns out, Jesus was right about that, and so, we can reason, right about everything else.

And here's the second thing we'd do well to remember: He is not here. He *has* been raised. It's a passive construction; not something Jesus accomplished by himself or for himself by trying really hard and being really good. What happened to Jesus on the third day was not up to him; it was done for him, to him, in him.

And folks, this is very good news for us. And also, like that hope thing, makes us a little uneasy.

It is good news because it is not a requirement of the well-lived life that I hold the reigns of my life in my hands all the time. But it's queasy-making because things happen to me, circumstances over which I have no control, stuff I cannot manage or change—and I may just have to let go of some of that perceived control and depend on somebody else to raise me up, to let me off the hook, forgive me, cover me with grace.

But the angel said, "He's not here. He has been raised as he said." Jesus modeled that letting go. Jesus, who had commanded wind and waves. Jesus, who had shouted down demons. Jesus, who himself had brought life

to the dead. Jesus, in the end, laid it all down—not just his life, but all his control over what happened.

“He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

This is what the angel said to the women and it remains our Easter proclamation to this day.

To those who approach faith with an unsettling mixture of fear and joy, we say, “He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

To those who mourn the passing of life’s possibilities because things are not turning out the way you planned, we say, “He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

To those who yearn for security and keep finding that, despite our best or worst efforts, the world is indeed a very insecure place, we say, “He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

To those who are suffering under circumstances they cannot control but desperately want to, we say, “He is not here. He has been raised as he said.”

And that is what we say on Easter and every day. Forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Let us go into our week, into the moments ahead, with renewed hope,
Trusting in the transforming love of God.
God does not leave things as they are;
With God, all things are made new.
All creation responds to God’s presence;
The world is alive with possibility.
We open ourselves to this truth;
With Christ, we trust our whole lives to this power.

Nothing is beyond the reach of God;
Neither evil, nor hardship, nor death.
Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed!

May the peace, hope, power, compassion of
our Risen Christ fill you with abounding hope
and New Life!
Peace. Shalom. Amen.