

Worship Resources - *The Rest of the Story*

YouTube Service: <https://youtu.be/rVCoL8xeses>

Easter Sunday, Year B,

4th April, 2021

Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSV / Mark 16:1-8 NRSV

Prelude *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*

Annie Center

Welcoming Guests/Announcements

Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed. I'd like to welcome you to Easter worship with Olympic View Community Church. It's been over a year since we've been gathered together in-person. It is truly a blessing to see each and every one of you. While we still aren't out of the woods yet from a pandemic perspective, it's hopeful that we are able to gather again, with the sensible precautions of masks and social distancing. And while we year to sing together again, and hug and shake hands, we can still greet each other from a distance and share words of peace and greeting, as is our beloved practice. Let's share the peace and joy of this blessed morning with each other with safe space.

Pass the Peace

Since we aren't yet able to risk singing together, with not all of us being vaccinated yet, let's enjoy the triumphant glory of our opening video hymn.

Opening Music [Video] *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* 280

Please stand as you are able, and join me in the Call to Worship and responsive Invocation printed in the bulletin and on screen.

Call to Worship (Responsive from Psalm 118:1-2, 23-24)

One: O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: Let the people say,

All: God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: This is God's doing;

All: It is marvelous in our sight!

One: This is the day that the Lord has made,

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

One: For Christ is Risen;

All: Christ is Risen Indeed!

Invocation (responsive)

One: God of grace and power, we come rejoicing in Christ's empty tomb.

We come trusting in the good news that tells us Christ is with us.

For the Risen Christ is living proof that You care about our lives, O God.

The Risen Christ offers to us glimpses of hope, even in our tears.

As the tomb is not quiet. It speaks. It proclaims! It is a promise of eternal life!

All: Thank you, gracious and almighty God. Amen.

Our first scripture reading this morning from Isaiah speaks of the future promise of renewal God offers to the faithful and the foreshadowing of the salvation to come. Here these words of the prophet.

First Testament Reading - Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSV

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations;

he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Story on the Steps (when children are present) **Harriet Koscho**

Hymn [Video] *Low, in the Grave He Lay* 273

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Please continue to keep George and Betty DeBon in your prayers. I went to visit them this week and they were both in good spirits. George had taken a downturn the day prior, and the prognosis wasn't good. But he had a complete turnaround and was bright eyed and ornery as ever when I visited. They both still have needs for healing, strength, and comfort as they continue treatment and therapy, and as their family looks for a more permanent residence for them after rehab.

I'd also like to share the blessing that I am scheduled for my first dose of vaccine tomorrow, and ask for prayers that it goes well with minimal reaction.

What other joys and concerns do you have to lift up? Please just stand and speak your concerns. We're small enough to do this without the risk of sharing a mic around....

Let's bring these items and others we may hold in our hearts to God, closing our prayer time with the Lord's prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Risen Lord, hear our cry for help – for those surrounded by the shroud of death for those covered by the mantle of dying for those hemmed-in by illness, visible or veiled hear our cry for help...for those weighed down with worries for those carrying the burden of distress for those overwhelmed by isolation hear our cry for help... for those who are weary for those who are tattered and worn for those who collapse from exhaustion hear our cry for help...

Risen Lord, hear our cry of thanksgiving – for the graciousness with which you hear for the patience with which you listen for the grace with which you care hear our cry of thanksgiving...for the ways you accompany us through deep valleys for the ways you lead us to still meadows for the ways you provide all we need hear our cry of thanksgiving...for transforming death in resurrection life for blessing and breaking ordinary bread for opening our eyes to recognize you hear our cry of thanksgiving...

Risen Lord, hear our cry for communities of faith – that we retain memory of being together that we embrace unity in the reality of distance that we foresee a future side-by-side, hand-in-hand hear our cry for communities of faith...that we sense purpose beyond ourselves that we perceive the needs of creation that we stretch ourselves to respond hear our cry for communities of faith...that our ways be formed

by Your Way that our lives be shaped by Your Life that our love be Your Love hear our cry for communities our faith...

And hear us as we pray together the prayer you taught us so long ago,

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kin-dom 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 those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Our gospel reading this morning shares the story of the first Easter from Mark's perspective. As we listen to these closing words from that gospel, let's think about the unique conclusion he draws for us.

Gospel Reading Mark 16:1-8 NRSV

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.

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

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.

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."

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.

Message ***The Rest of the Story***

Christ has risen, Christ has risen indeed! That is the message we are left with as Mark's gospel comes to a close in today's lesson. Jesus has risen and conquered death. The gloom of Good Friday has given way to the promise of Easter morn. But unlike the other gospels, Mark kind of leaves us hanging, doesn't it? In Matthew, Luke, and John, the story continues. We have Jesus appearing to the disciples on multiple occasions, with more details and guidance from the disciples beloved Rabbi. But in Mark, the women at the tomb are informed that he has risen, and they are instructed to tell the others, and that's it, end of story. There's no doubting Thomas' tale, there's no gathering in Galilee and glorious ascension. Boom, Christ is risen, head back to Galilee. Done. Mic drop and walk off stage.

So why does Mark's gospel leaving us hanging this way? Well, it helps to look a little at the background of the gospels. While I'm not going to delve too deeply into biblical scholarship this morning, it's universally accepted among scholars that Mark is the oldest of the four gospels. It's also pretty well accepted that the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all have at their core an older base document that each expanded on in their own way. However, Mark seems to have stuck pretty much in flavor to that original document. It's the briefest, most concise of those gospels. Mark gets right to the point about the divine nature of Jesus as the "Son of Man" in the first chapter, and keeps that focus to the bitter end.

Using that focus, it has been speculated that the author of Mark was focused on an audience of Christians that was primarily Jewish in makeup, but probably not in Jerusalem, more likely in Galilee or Syria. He doesn't focus so much on Jesus as God, but as the Son of Man from the Jewish prophetic writings, both human and divine. Mark's lack of emphasis of a Second Coming also makes it clear that the target audience was somewhere outside of Jerusalem. That crowd, under the leadership of James, was very focused on an imminent, cataclysmic return of Christ. After all, they were really under the gun.

By the time these scriptures were written, Jerusalem was being brutally suppressed by the Roman military might. Both Jews and Christians were being killed in great numbers, culminating in the destruction of the Temple and much of the city in 70 AD. They were desperate for divine intervention and their theology reflects that. But not so much in Mark. Mark talks much more about kin-dom of God that draws near. Mark's kin-dom is felt in the here and now, not in some future event. There is certainly an expectation of Christ's return in Mark, but it's not as emphasized as in the other gospels.

So why does Mark leave us hanging without a detailed conclusion to the story? Well, from a literary point of view, one has options when ending a story that one is telling. One

option is to offer a neat conclusion, where all details are accounted for and there are no loose ends. Another is to leave an open ended narrative, where the reader is left to finish the story from their own point of view and incorporate their own experiences.

The latter choice can certainly speak more powerfully to the individual reader. It draws the reader into the story from their own perspective, and allows them to creatively imagine what the conclusion could be. The writer often leaves clues about what that conclusion may entail, but puts it in the reader's hands to figure out the details from their own perspective.

Mark makes clear that the story of Jesus does not end with his death; God has done something entirely new and unheard of to this point. The crucified criminal is now the chosen, risen one of God, raised to new life, not simply more of the same life. In this perspective there is a sense of completion, but it's an open-ended kind of closure. But we still aren't given the details of what happens next. Jesus has risen and continues on, but what does that mean, and particularly, what does that mean for our lives? We're left to dig, to struggle with the questions to understand what this Jesus is all about, what it all means. But this ending does give us some guidance. We're told with the women at the tomb that we are to return to Galilee to meet him. Galilee, the backward part of Palestine filled with the marginalized, the outcasts, the downtrodden. That place where nothing good ever comes out of.

Galilee was the place and context where everything began for Jesus and the disciples. Galilee was the beginning without clear boundaries. The future was open at the beginning, and it's open now. This concept of new beginnings without the boundaries we are used to is one of the deep truths that Mark has for us. The God who did a new thing in Jesus is the one who is working a future, here and now, for his disciples. The lack of a detailed ending to the story reflects the trust that it is God who is at work.

God is not done, God didn't exit stage left with the crucifixion. God is not done with this world and God's community in it. Is God ever done? Not if the goal is God's kin-dom coming to fruition here on Earth. Mark's gospel does make clear that God was at work in Jesus, is still working through Jesus, and any completion of the story will come through that ongoing work.

The future is God's; God does things from the future that burst into our present. That's the hope of the resurrection: God working in the present moment from the vantage point of the future. Death did not defeat Jesus and it won't defeat us. We have the same future with God that is assured and testified to here in the present, through the glory of Easter Sunday.

But that still leaves us with an open-ended story. How does the story end? As the readers, that's for us to determine. How do our perspectives and experiences imagine the details of the final chapter? Where do we find our Galilee's, those formative places where our own journeys began and how do we find our way back to that place which had no clear boundaries, that place that was full of possibilities.

Our God, after all, is not one who observes the boundaries we erect for ourselves. "It can't be done" are foreign words to the God of Creation and Resurrection, as are phrases like "it's not in the budget" and "we can't." There's a reason Jesus said to "suffer the little children to pass" and "unless we become like children." Children are in the Galilee parts of their lives. They look at the world as God does, with endless possibilities, not through lenses that only see limitations. They still have hope, hope that we often lose as we allow ourselves to be molded by the world around us, losing our sight of the hope and promise we felt in the beginning, in our own Galilees.

But whether we choose to go to Galilee as disciples of Jesus or stay mired in self-imposed limitation, God keeps bringing God's kin-dom closer, keeps seeking like-minded Galileans to join in God's work in bringing that future to the here and now.

So how will you finish the tale? Will you seek and join the God of endless possibilities, bringing hope to a world that sees none, or will you let it end with the crucifixion and the empty tomb? Will we look within and focus on the dwindling numbers and shrinking finances we see, or will we look around us and seek the possibilities God has for us, regardless of how improbable or usual? For we are not just readers, but active characters in God's ongoing manuscript. And that...is the rest of the story. Amen.

Call to Serve

On this day, we remember that Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb with the intent to anoint the crucified body of Jesus; and astonished, she finds an empty tomb where Jesus once laid. Now what? God's angels and the Risen Christ meet Mary Magdalene in her sorrow, and speak hope into her heart.

For the Resurrection narrative reveals that love is alive and moves among us! The Risen Christ helps us to remember that despair is not the end of our journey. The Risen Christ also speaks of God's ever-present love, and gives the church resurrection hope. In that, as an Easter people, we manifest God's never-ending love in the world by the giving of our time, talents, and financial resources. For it is with Christ's limitless and restorative love, that we humbly and graciously offer back to God a portion of what God has given us.

As we listen to the following special music from our own treasure, Annie Center, let's reflect on what work God is calling us to, as individuals and as a faith community, and how do we play our parts in the ongoing story of resurrection.

A Time for Reflection/Special Music *It Was Finished On The Cross*

Annie Center

Join with me in our responsive Prayer of Thanksgiving.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving (responsive)

One: God of love, We offer our gifts of time, spiritual gifts, and financial gifts as a sign of our love for you and the world. We ask a special blessing on these gifts where you meet us in our suffering, and raise us up, so that all may come to know of your abiding love.

All: **O God, we give these gifts as you have given them unto us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.**

HYMN [Video]

He Lives

Please stand as you are able for the final blessing. As we depart today, please be mindful of keeping proper distance between yourselves and others.

Benediction

Christ is Risen; Christ is Risen Indeed! If Christ can break forth from the tomb, there is nothing that can hold you back. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are set free to love one another in this world. Share the good news of the resurrection, of new life in Christ, now and forevermore. Amen and Amen!

Postlude

The Strife Is O'er, The Battle Done

Annie Center