

Worship Service “Starting Over”

Easter Sunday, Year A

9th April, 2023

Jeremiah 31:1-8 NRSV /John 20:1-18 NIV

Prelude (Video)

[*Praise to the Lord*](#)

played by Annie Center

Music by Lobe Den Herren, arrangement by Sharon Wilson

Opening Music (Video) [*He Lives! \(I Serve A Risen Saviour\)*](#)

Blue Rock Mennonite Youth - posted to YouTube by SE Samonte

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace (Videos) [*We Gather Together*](#) *played by Annie Center*

Netherland Folk Song, arrangement by Sharon Wilson

[*Now Thank We All Our God*](#)

Music by Johann Crüger, arrangement by Sharon Wilson 7197414,
Music: 2021 Reawaken Hymns (Verwaltet von Reawaken Hymns LLC),
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 2026124

Opening Hymn [Video] [*Low in the Grave He Lay*](#)

273

Call to Worship

One: The stone was rolled away.

All: **Christ is Risen!**

One: The tomb was found empty.

All: **Christ is Risen!**

One: The angel said, “Do not be afraid.”

All: **Christ is Risen!**

One: No matter where we are, we proclaim now and always,

All: **Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!**

Invocation

Good News God, In the midst of deep sorrow and grief your angels appeared to the faithful women of Jesus’ company, bringing them news more awe-inspiring than they could imagine – Christ is Risen! Surely your angels can interrupt our lives, too, breaking into our losses and sorrows and offering a message of tremendous joy to change our lives.

Come this Easter morning, we pray,
and fill us with the joy of the women disciples,
the first witnesses to your resurrection,
that our lives may also be renewed in hope and glory.
Let us roll back the stone of the grave
and sing Alleluia once again!
In Christ we pray, Amen.

Words of the Prophet - Jeremiah 31:1-8 NRSV

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,

the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.

For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God."

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel."

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

Hymn (Video) [*Christ the Lord is Risen Today*](#) **280**
played by Annie Center

A Time of Prayer
Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Living God, who came to this world and entered human pain, come and be in every painful place in our lives, be in every painful place in our world.

Living God, who in the secret darkness rose from the grave, come and be in the secret, dark places in our lives, be in every secret, dark place in our world.

Living God, who sent the women to proclaim the resurrection to the frightened, imprisoned apostles, come and empower us in every frightened place in our confined lives, empower all in every frightened, imprisoned place in our world.

Living God, Risen Son, Easter God, come and make us your living Church, Your risen Church, Your Easter Church, in every place in our world.

Special Music (Video) [*The Deserted Garden*](#)

Annie Center and Rachel Matthews - written by Florence Price

Gospel Reading: **John 20:1-18 NIV**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,

as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Message - *Starting Over*

Radical change is rarely a welcome event, is it? I would venture to say that most of the time, we rarely seek to turn our lives completely upside down. We like knowing what to expect and having our lives be stable and predictable. Yet sometimes, things just go south in a hurry, and we're left feeling confused and lost. Sometimes it's because of choices we have made, whether good or ill, but often external factors beyond our control can change our future suddenly and unexpectedly. Whether it's an unexpected loss of someone we love, our financial support, or something that threatens our health, it's never pleasant to find ourselves scrambling to try to accept our new reality, and find ways to adjust to our new way of being.

With the times of quarantine and pandemic still relatively fresh in our minds, this isn't such an unfamiliar experience. Regardless of what turns our world around, after the initial shock wears off, we often find ourselves either looking for hope in our new situation, or seeking to find some reason to explain why this happened to us.

However, our scripture stories today make clear that this certainly isn't unique to our own reality. Radical change and upheaval is a very human situation. In our story from Jeremiah, the Jewish people found themselves in exile in a foreign land, many miles away from the home they dearly loved, with everything they had built and depended upon for generations destroyed and gone, even the temple their God called home.

Fast forward 500 years or so, and we have the story of the disciples after the horrific events of that first Holy Week. Their whole world had come crashing down in the space of a week. They went from the jubilation of Palm Sunday and the hope of an imminent messianic age, to the grief and desperation of the cross less than a week later. All hope seemed lost. Everything that they had been counting on, putting all their trust and hope in, seemed snatched away in an instant. Nothing made sense anymore, How could they have been so wrong?

What do all the events they witnessed mean now? And more importantly, how do they go forward now? Their leader was just judged to be a heretic and an enemy of the state. The same fate could be awaiting any of them, as his followers or co-conspirators. So for their own safety, they hid themselves away in locked rooms, and tried to figure out what went wrong, and how they could go forward and survive. Would they ever be able to step into broad daylight again?

Yet even in the midst of all this chaos and uncertainty, they were also grieving: grieving for the loss of their beloved teacher and friend, grieving for a way of life that was lost forever. In that grief, Mary Magdalene goes to express her love by going to care for his body in the manner that family would have done at that time. Yet she only seems to encounter more heartbreak, more upheaval. His body is gone, and worse yet, they've desecrated it by unwrapping him as well. Why would anybody do this? Were they trying to spur a conspiracy theory? She goes and seeks help from the other disciples, yet they seem to find a different meaning in this scene. One even seems to find hope in the wrappings left behind. However, they leave as quickly as they came, and she's still here trying to make sense of all of this, trying to get answers that would fit into her understanding of how the world works. So she focuses on her crisis of that moment, finding her dear friend's missing body. In fact, she is so focused on her current dilemma that she doesn't even recognize that same man when he speaks to her.

I can only imagine the flood of emotions when she recognizes him: joy, elation, but also confusion, and disbelief. What does this all mean? I saw him die. Maybe it didn't happen like I thought. Maybe we can get the gang back together and get out of scary Jerusalem, back on the road where everything was good.

After all, that's part of dealing with monumental change and loss. We long to go back to the way things were, of somehow undoing what has happened. But we can never truly go back when reality radically changes.

Jesus makes clear that is not a possibility. He tells her not to hold onto him, that he hasn't ascended to God yet. The implication of that to her being that he will be leaving her presence physically, that the days on the road together are truly in the past. Yet in that same statement is the beginnings of new hope, of new possibilities. He was ascending to "his father and her father, to his God and her God." There's the implication that she too, could share in being a child of God as well, that she too had hope beyond the desperation of the world she found herself in.

Maybe that other disciple found hope and belief in the funeral shrouds left behind because Jesus no longer needed them. He was no longer bound by the rules, restrictions and expectations of this world. Like Moses, he no longer needed a veil between himself and the Divine. Maybe this was the opportunity for a new beginning, a new way of being that offered a better hope than she would ever expect from her life in this world. Maybe there were new possibilities that she never considered. Maybe there was hope to be found not bound by this world.

It's certainly a story that has particular resonance for us now, doesn't it?. Many of us see what is happening around us as the world seemingly being turned upside down, a world in which it seems that much of stability in our culture and society that we relied upon has been pulled out from under us.

Are we, like Mary, finding ourselves despondent and confused as to why everything has suddenly gone awry? It can sometimes seem like hope is a distant memory, yet the hope Mary found in that new beginning on Easter morning is the same hope we can still seek today: hope that the story this world tells is not the only option; hope that there is more than just the reality we find ourselves in; hope that there is always a new beginning to be found.

There is another way. A way in which we step into our reality as children of God. A way that sees the world through God's eyes, the way God created it to be. A way that finds hope in the midst of darkness and despair, because that is the core of the story of resurrection, no matter what the situation is, it is never the end of the story.

But that doesn't imply that the life of faith is any easy one. We walk through a broken world, one that works on different rules, and different priorities. Seeking to understand the Divine is the mystery of faith. As Mary experienced, it entails doubt and uncertainty. But it also offers hope, and a path forward, a direction in which to head.

The question for us today is, can we live into the hope the resurrection of Easter Sunday offers? Can we find the new beginning it offers us today? We have a choice. We can wallow in the hopelessness of the now this world has for us, or we can seek the promise of the world as it can be, as it should be, knowing that however it plays out, the story doesn't end there. We can get wrapped up in the anxiety and stress of feeling helpless, or we can seek hope and be helpful. We can blame the world and those in it, and try to make a broken system work, or we can seek to reclaim and change the world back to its created perfection.

As a congregation, we can hold on to the comfortable, familiar past that is no more, or we can step into the potential of new life in a new reality. We really do have a choice. No matter what the situation is, even suffering and death, there is always the promise of resurrection, of beginning anew.

As this Easter Sunday fades into memory, I hope and pray we all keep the hope that it offers always in the forefront of our minds, and that we emerge into that new beginning together, as children of the God who made Easter the beginning of the story, not the end. Amen.

Call to Serve

We are witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God, and now we turn in thanksgiving to share the good news of forgiveness and grace to all the world.

Let our gifts of our time, talent, resources, and prayer be a living testimony to those who most need the healing grace of Christ this morning, cornerstones of faith and joy for the entire world.

As we listen to the following special music...let's reflect on how we can live into the new beginning of Easter morning in the coming weeks and months, just as we are, and open to what we can be.

A Time for Reflection/Special Music (Video) [Serenade](#)

Annie Center/Rachel Matthews, written by Franz Schubert

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, you have become our light and our salvation – let these gifts open the gates of joy to all who hunger and thirst for your holy presence on this and every day.

May they bear the gifts of Alleluia which we hold so dear, and give away with great joy. We pray in the name of our Risen Savior, Jesus the Christ! Amen.

Hymn [Video] [For Christ and the Church](#) 416

played by Annie Center

Benediction

God whispers in our hearts, “Do not be afraid.” All things will be made new. All things will begin again. Hold on to the new life in Christ, and know that love and life are yours, now and always. Go share the good news of Christ’s resurrection. Amen.

Postlude (Video) [Count Your Blessings](#) played by Annie Center

Music by Edwin Excell, arrangement by Sharon Wilson