

Home Worship Service, Easter 2, April 19, 2020

Living Psalm 118—Easter Sunday

Psalms in the form of words and art, reborn in the specific contexts of our world, privileging the voices of historically marginalized communities and those acting in solidarity with them.

Do you see it on the horizon as the sun rises in the opening sky?

God is present. Give overflowing thanks for God's goodness.
God's love is steadfast and will endure forever.

In the shadows of this pandemic, God is my strength and my energy; in these long days at home, God has become my salvation.
In our houses and apartments,
glad songs of victory and dances of hope continue.

God is determined to help us through this!

I still wonder: What if I die? What if I live?
On that side of heaven, our stories become alive.
On this side of heaven, we share the presence of God.
Yes, it feels like God is punishing us severely, but this is not so.
God will not give our souls over to death.
God will not forsake us in this life; Holy Comfort fills our souls.

Until the day comes when physical doors are open, we remain home. Before I cross the threshold to the outside world, I give thanks to God.

As gates and doors reopen, may we proclaim them open for everyone.
For God is our salvation and our answer in times of trouble. Through love, God's gate opens for all.
Such liberation is marvelous in our eyes.

From cellars and rooftops, from kitchens and bathrooms, let us proclaim: This is the day that our Creator has made!
Let us seek joy and hope! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Living Psalm 118 for Easter Sunday was written by The Rev. Michelle Torigian Senior Pastor, St Paul UCC in Belleville, IL.

Opening Music. Christ is Risen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2ZGOCC4UkE&feature=youtu.be>
[words by Brian Wren, tune Ode to Joy]. Sung by Plymouth First Church, Lincoln , Nebraska

Christ is risen! Shout hosanna!
Celebrate this day of days!
Christ is risen! Hush in wonder:
all creation is amazed.
In the desert all-surrounding,
see, a spreading tree has grown.
Healing leaves of grace abounding
bring a taste of love unknown.

Christ is risen! Raise your spirits
from the caverns of despair.
Walk with gladness in the morning.
See what love can do and dare.
Drink the wine of resurrection,
not a servant, but a friend.
Jesus is our strong companion.
Joy and peace shall never end.

Christ is risen! Earth and heaven
nevermore shall be the same.
Break the bread of new creation
where the world is still in pain.
Tell its grim, demonic chorus:
"Christ is risen! Get you gone!"
God the First and Last is with us.
Sing Hosanna everyone!

Prayer

**Holy God, nothing is beyond your power to transform! In a grey dawn, you coax songs of Alleluia! From the tombs of despair, we take refuge in, you call us to wake up and work. We praise you for this amazing day!
Come, Risen Christ, in newness and hope on this Eastertide morning. Amen.**

Readings Easter 2 Gospel John 20:19-29.

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Temple authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were filled with joy when they saw Jesus ²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe'

Poem

“This Morning”

by Mary Oliver. Read by Judy Nelson

This morning the redbirds' eggs
Have hatched and already the chicks
Are chirping for food. They don't
Know where it's coming from, they
Just keep shouting, “ More! More!”
As to anything else , they haven't
Had a single thought. Their eyes
Haven't yet opened, they know nothing
About the sky that's waiting. Or
The thousands, the millions of trees.
They don't even know they have wings.

And just like that, like a simple
Neighbourhood event, a miracle is
Taking place.

Reflection

This year of all years, we know how Jesus' friends felt.

We know what it is to be behind closed doors/. Maybe , depending whether you live, you don't bother to lock them often. But closed nonetheless. Closed to all visitors .Opened by you only when you have a good enough reason to go out.

And all your friends and many of your relatives are behind closed doors .
You can't go in.

And public buildings are locked up -libraries, coffee shops , churches.
And much of our shopping happens curbside or by delivery-
Or if we enter a building, only with extreme caution

It's entirely rational to be afraid of getting COV-Id 19 or passing it on.
We've seen what happens when people don't take the right precautions , especially in special care facilities. A good friend of my stepmother's works in her Newfoundland care facility- he described all the precautions they are taking- Precautions he is very concerned to follow down to the letter.
And that's good. We want the caregivers of our seniors to be afraid of this virus, and not miss a step.

And it's good if the rest of us to fear this virus Otherwise we might start taking risks. After all, it's hard to live this way. It's lonely. It's stressful. It's unnatural.

Jesus' friends were very reasonable in their fear to. -When your leader has just been put to death by the authorities, it's smart to lie low ,in case anyone out there connects the dots.

Unlike us , they could gather together in one room. They were an anxious little community but nonetheless a community. We know the consolation of gathering with friends when we are grieving - and indeed a sadness these days is that we wouldn't be able to do that.

But there is comfort in this story- for them and for us!

As they gather in community, something extraordinary happens. Who can explain it? No one can and no one does. There among them is Jesus - alive!

Locked doors don't stop him from getting in.

Who can explain this? Not I.

But this wasn't exactly the same Jesus they'd seen before.
Otherwise he would not be materializing behind a locked door.

The point is- one way or another they experience him still with them-
Death did not end their connection with him- his presence with them.

Now, whatever that experience was, we weren't part of that-
Neither was Thomas,

I am fine with Thomas doubting.

I would have too. Especially now when we know some science.

We do not have to believe in a God who intervenes in the laws of nature.

I don't. Because why wouldn't God intervene much more often ?

Why wouldn't God protect us from corona virus- so we could go to church whenever we wanted or so no
vulnerable person would ever get sick?

It seems God works through the health system doing its job and us cooperating,

Not through intervening in the lives of a selected few.

So, if you identify with Thomas- I'd say- go ahead -Doubt. Question.

Jesus can handle it. God can handle it.

AS the story goes, Thomas went on to be an apostle in far away places- perhaps he was at his best with
others who had questions too.

So what happened for Thomas? Somehow, he encountered a Jesus who had really suffered, had really
died. And that's real, isn't it?

Easter does not wipe out Good Friday.

New life- however we picture it- does not make light of suffering and pain and death. After all, even if we
trust that death leads us into the loving arms of God,

We still weep for the dead- and we still have compassion for the ill and dying.

Thomas gets that suffering is real, death is real- wounded and broken bodies are real. And somehow he
holds that in tension with a belief that Jesus can still be present within the beloved community.

For me that's a big piece of it- it isn't just me and the risen Christ, or you and the risen Christ- It's Jesus
coming alive in community, when two or three are gathered. And so, Jesus' ways, Jesus' teachings go
on in our midst.

Now, until a few weeks ago- we might have said- well, yes, that happens when we gather in worship or
we visit each other or do kind things for our neighbour or build community , in many ways.

And yes- all of the above-

But also we can gather, we can connect, even when separated by closed doors.

I saw this for myself.

Thursday I had to take my cat to the vet, as you know. The vet was behind closed doors and I was
behind closed doors in my car/And the doors remained closed.

I could not go in and spend those last minutes with Fig as she made her transition.

I sat in my car and sent Love through the closed doors.

I can only trust that Love made it in and reached my poor little girl.

But here's the miracle-Love got in through my closed doors that day. There was something powerful when I saw on Facebook many kind words- And even more so when I looked at the many reactions- scores of people had posted the face of someone weeping- And there were many hearts too- signifying Love.

I felt surrounded by a community of those mourning with me.

We may not be in the same room - But Love can still get in, by email, by phone call and even the much reviled Facebook. And to my mind , that's just as good as Jesus getting in through locked doors. Perhaps that is Jesus. Who knows?

As you sit behind closed doors, missing those who are also behind closed doors,
Know that your Love can get out through those doors and in the doors of those who need some love ,
And that others- even right now, this minute- might be sending love through your doors/ As I am - when I write this for you. .

Miracles come in many forms-

The beginning life and the wonders to come for those redbirds-

And for all the beings surrounding us-

Such as that little baby Lily, born a year ago, whose first birthday pictures cheered some of us the other day-

And miracles come whenever open hearts have more power than closed doors,

Love has more power than fear, more power than loneliness.

May it be so for you and me, even in these days, especially in these days!

Amen.

Music VU 186 Now the Green Blade Rises <https://youtu.be/g-5Bi2jM40E>
with soloist Laura Wright

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain,
Love lives again , that with the dead has been.
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain,
Thinking that he would never rise again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen,
Love is come again , like wheat that springs up green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for three days in the grave had lain,
Quick from the dead my living Lord is seen,
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to earth again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been,
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Invitation to Offering

Easter teaches us that generous love is at the heart of God's work. Joyfully we are able to give knowing that our gifts will help others to see the blessed miracle of God's creative joy. Even though we worship at a distance from each other, our church ministries continue in various new ways. We invite your support on that on-going ministry

[Please see Coop and website <https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/generosity-in-unprecedented-times/> for ways you can continue to support your church to the best of your ability. Or contact your treasurer. We thank all who are continuing to contribute at this trying time]

Offertory Prayer Loving God, can a generous prayer be lifted up to you this Eastertide? Can our gifts, given with love, be further transformed like echoes of grace, delighting all who receive their blessings? May it be so, through the surprising power of your Holy Spirit, and may our lives speak of a loving God, full of Easter surprises. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People [by Jane]

God of new possibilities, we remember how Jesus was newly alive in the hearts and minds of his friends, How your Spirit spoke through them of the good news they had seen and heard.

Today we still seek signs of new life,

Like Thomas we have many questions, and many doubts.

But we too long to find hope and good news, even in places of struggle, places of suffering,

Even amid all that troubles us in our lives and in our world.

And we pray that as we find new ways to live and be in these times, we will become a stronger community, with deeper, closer connections near and far.

God of new possibilities, we offer our prayers for those places where possibilities seem few or none. hope is hard to find-

Where many live in fear-

Where many are especially at risk in this pandemic time-

Not only the frail elderly and the homeless and the indigenous communities in Canada,

But also those at close quarters in refugee or migrant camps or in densely populated, low-income areas around the world,

Those who cannot self-isolate, who have no safe place to stay home.

Those who work in risky settings, often separated from their loved ones-

And those who have lost their jobs or fear losing their businesses, And families even in our own area who cannot keep up with online education,

And we pray always for our earth, our water, our air, so much in need of healing and renewal. .

God of new possibilities, we pray for those among us and those known to us who are living with illness, facing medical treatments, and their families and loved ones-

Especially in these times when a hospital visit may be especially stressful,

Or when loved ones cannot visit in hospital or care homes.

May your undying hope and compassion touch them and all who are ill and all who are feeling lonely at this time.

We hold in Love and Light all those who are in our hearts today.

May new light shine into the shadowed places of our lives,

The light you gave, the light that shines through each one of us .

These and all our prayers we offer in the name of Jesus, who taught his friends to pray together: Our Father..

Coming Events, Joys and Concerns

For announcements see yesterday's Coop or at <https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/events/> plus there will be a Zoom coffee time Friday at 10 a.m. - same link will work.

Final Music

Because you live, O Christ <https://youtu.be/8ydFggCOAvs>

Sung by The parish choir of the Church of the Redeemer

Tune: "Vruechten", 1685 Text: Shirley Erena Murray, 1987

1) Because you live, O Christ, the garden of the world has come to flower,
The shadows of the tomb are flooded with your resurrection power.
The stone has rolled away and death cannot imprison!
O sing this Easter Day, for Jesus Christ has risen,
Has risen, has risen, has ris-en!

2) Because you live, O Christ, the spirit bird of hope is freed for flying,
Our cages of despair no longer keep us closed and life-denying.
The stone has rolled away...

3) Because you live, O Christ, the rainbow of your peace will span creation,
The colors of your love will draw all humankind to adoration.
The stone has rolled away..

Blessing

Recognize Jesus in hidden places, in the solitude of these days, in the unexpected connections we make with one another and our world. And know this: Within every kernel of doubt, there is a spark of life and hope. In those times when our faith falters, when we cannot recognize the presence of the Holy among us, God takes our faith and transforms it, patiently showing us the many ways Christ walks among us. Look around you: as close as your own beating heart, and in the eyes of your nearest neighbour, grace abounds at the heart of all life.

You are all God's children, loved without condition, go in that peace. **Amen.**

Prayers this week

[except where otherwise indicated] by Rev. Susan Blain , United Church of Christ