

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 31 March 2024
Easter Day B



Gathering:

TIS 370 Christ the Lord is risen today

Call to worship and opening prayer:

We Gather and We Celebrate (Written by © 2009 John van de Laar, www.sacredise.com, used by permission)

What are we to make of this day?

When graves are opened...

When the dead awaken...

When life refuses to be contained...

Then nothing is impossible!

Hope is never extinguished

and love is never conquered.

We celebrate You today, Jesus,

Because You have made it clear that death does not have the last word;

Because You have filled us again with hope and faith;

Because You have given us a vision of new possibilities, new realities, and new ways of being.

Open our minds to believe what we cannot explain;

Open our hearts to hope for what we cannot see;

Open our lives to live and to love in the midst of death and despair;

Let resurrection happen again in us today.

Amen

TIS 720 Halle, halle, halle lu jah (sing twice)

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge those who were here before us, the first inhabitants of this place.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

Prayer of confession:

We Acknowledge Our Need (Written by © 2009 John van de Laar, www.sacredise.com, used by permission)

God, resurrection is not what we expect in our world.

On the face of things, life seems to be under threat...

our earth is grieving,

our families are fracturing,

our nations are at war,

and the light of our hope is growing dim.

We need the stone to be rolled away again.

Forgive us and all who have failed to honour
and preserve life in all its diversity and glory.

Forgive us and all who have allowed relationships
to become less important than riches or recognition.

Forgive us and all who continue to exalt our needs and desires over those of others,
and who are prepared to kill to prove it.

Forgive us and all who have grown blind
to all the signs of resurrection that beckon us still.

***We need the stone to be rolled away again.
We need life to break out within us again.
We need love to consume us again.
Resurrect us today, O Lord,
and make us agents of Your life wherever dying and grief hold sway.
For Jesus' sake.
Amen.***

From: Psalm 118 (excerpt) ©2001 Nathan Nettleton Laughingbird.net

Thank you for answering our prayers, LORD;
for coming to our rescue and putting us right.
From a rejected stone found in a rubbish pile
you cut and polished a priceless jewel.
This is obviously your work, LORD,
and we can hardly believe our eyes!
Today is your day, LORD, a day to honour you;
we will celebrate with joy and laughter.

TIS 720 **Halle, halle, halle lu jah (sing twice)**

Readings:

Anne Smith

Mark 16:1 – 8 (NRSV-UE)

16 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. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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." ⁸ 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.

John 20:1 – 18 (NRSV-UE)

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb, ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir,^[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[c] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am

ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.



Image T. Lyndon

TIS 706 **Bless the Lord, my soul** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYLKrFOLS-E>

Sermon

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.



Keller, Albert von, 1844-1920. Mary Magdalene at the Tomb, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=46231> [retrieved March 27, 2024]. Original source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albert_von_Keller_-_Die_T%C3%A4nzerin_Madeleine_\(Magdeleine_Guipet\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albert_von_Keller_-_Die_T%C3%A4nzerin_Madeleine_(Magdeleine_Guipet).jpg).

Burnand, Eugène, 1850-1921. Disciples John and Peter on their way to the tomb on Easter morning, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55038> [retrieved March 27, 2024]. Original source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BurnandJeanPierre.jpg>.

Uhde, Fritz von, 1848-1911. Touch Me Not, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58160> [retrieved March 27, 2024]. Original source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fritz_von_Uhde_-_Noli_me_tangere_\(1894\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fritz_von_Uhde_-_Noli_me_tangere_(1894).jpg).

Today's gospel offers us two responses to the resurrection of Jesus.

The first response to the resurrection comes from Mark's gospel. It is shock.

There is a revelation from God, and the disciples who experience it, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, need time and space to process their experience.

The second response comes from John's gospel, and it appears to be a slow revelation. The disciples who encountered the resurrection make sense of their encounter as they journey through life and their faith and belief in Jesus as the risen one, deepens and they gain some understanding over time.



Mark's account is stark.

The last thing the disciples expected to see was the large stone that closed the tomb, rolled back, and Jesus' body missing and an angel sitting inside the tomb, who speaks to them.

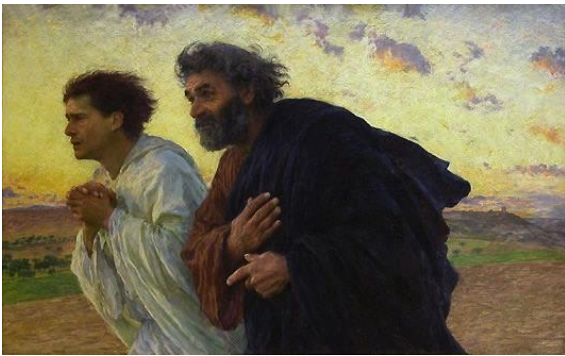
They were terrified, a holy fear gripped them.

Imagine how you would feel if an angel appeared in front of you. Would you feel terrified if that angel spoke to you?

The angel spoke to the women and gave them an important message, to share with the other disciples.

The women were so overcome with fear, they fled.

It was normal for them to feel this holy fear and awe. That is the nature of God who surprises us, unsettles our hearts, upsets our beliefs, opens our hearts, and eyes, reveals divine mysteries to us, offers us new life, joy, and resurrection. God can be both terrifying and awesome.



John's gospel offers us an equally surprising account of the resurrection. The disciples, Peter and the beloved disciple are so surprised by Mary's news of the tomb being empty and someone stealing the body of Jesus, they run to the tomb.

When they arrive it is Peter who enters the tomb first. He sees the burial cloths and we don't know what his response is, but it seems he only saw the cloths. A lack of understanding is mentioned.

It is different when the beloved disciple enters. He saw the burial cloths and the cloth that was wrapped around Jesus' head, neatly

folded and he believes. Perhaps the beloved disciple represents all disciples who do not need to see the risen body of Jesus, to believe.



Mary thought someone had stolen Jesus' body. She said this to Peter and the beloved disciple, to the angel and even to Jesus, such was her grief that blinded her to the truth and to the divine.

Common sense tells us that if someone took the body, they wouldn't leave the burial cloths behind and take the trouble to fold up the cloth that was around Jesus' head.

Grief Mary prevents Mary from processing things, and she is blinded to what's happening around her, not seeing an angel or Jesus.

We may wonder, why didn't Peter and the beloved disciple, see the angel and Jesus. Why only Mary?

When Mary finally hears her name called by Jesus, she recognises him and calls him teacher. Her faith has not yet shifted or deepened. Then something happens.

Jesus reveals who he is to Mary.

Jesus tells her not to cling to him. Perhaps he is not flesh anymore, but Spirit or light. Like Mary, we do not know much at this stage.

Something happens somewhere on Mary's journey from her encounter with the risen Jesus back to where the disciples were gathered. Perhaps she came to believe, because when she arrives, she says: *I have seen the Lord.*

Mary has grown in her faith where instead of believing Jesus is a teacher, she now knows he is the Lord, God with us, divine.

She boldly delivers Jesus' message to the disciples.

All of us grow in faith as we journey. We do so in our own time, as we come to know the true identity of Jesus, where we believe in him.

There may be encounters with God along the way. They may be terrifying because our mind struggles to grasp at what cannot be explained or reasoned or understood. That is why we feel awe and holy fear. Encountering God can be terrifying and awesome, where the Spirit rises up within us.

The disciples' response is to what doesn't fit in with notions of what we call reality, something we can define, see, name and hold. We can understand the women's first response is to flee in terror to a place where they say nothing. Awe silences us.

A man who recently became a Christian described feeling the ache of the Holy Spirit in his gut. Just like Paul describes in Romans 8:26.

Some of us may have had an experience of God that is similar to that described in Mark's gospel. An experience that left us feeling awe and a need to be still in a quiet place, so we can process our experience and make sense of being surprised by God. Such a glimpse of God can be enough to sustain us for a lifetime.

Most of us may have an experience that's a little like John described in his gospel, a slow growth and deepening of faith as we journey through life. Perhaps some of us have both experiences.

Let's pray.

May God bless and surprise us with awe and wonder and deepen our faith as we journey through life, amen.

Choir:

Hymn 763 Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Power

Offering prayer

Lord and giver of every good thing we bring to you our lives and gifts for your kingdom all for transformation through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

Prayers of the people

If The Tomb Cannot Hold you (@ John van de Laar, www.sacredise.com, used by permission)

Lord, You have accomplished so much in this one incredible act.

If the tomb cannot hold You,

if death cannot keep You in its cold grasp

Then, Life has truly won out, and its effects permeate our whole world.

And so, with all our faith,

tentative and weak though it is

We pray for everyone who needs the touch of Your resurrection:

We pray for all who have forgotten how to see beyond this temporary life into eternity.

We pray for all whose lives are so consumed by death, that life seems unreal and out of reach.

We pray for those who mistakenly believe that they can find life by destroying the lives of others.

We pray for those who feel that their right to life has been stolen away.

We pray for those who grieve over the life of a loved one,

now ended in this space and time.
And we pray for every human soul,
ourselves included,
that Your Spirit of Life would break into our experience
and change it into something of eternal value.

You are invited to offer your prayers out loud in a word or a sentence.

Accept our prayers, as we bring them to you in faith and with thanksgiving.
In Jesus' Name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

TIS 390 Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

Blessing and commissioning:

From: How are we to respond? (excerpt) © John van de Laar, www.sacredise.com, used by permission

We have no frame of reference for this – no logical explanation
to make resurrection a normal everyday occurrence
And yet, that's exactly what it is now –
ever since You refused to remain a victim of the grave.
And suddenly we can see it – resurrection is everywhere!
You truly are alive – and Your life breaks out
in surprising ways and unexpected places even in our own hearts and lives.

*So go in this Spirit, to be bringers of life in the midst of pain,
Being bearers of hope in the midst of despair
And reveal a new way in the face of dead ends.*

(by Rev Peter)

TIS 779 May the feet of God tMt video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=40>

