

“Sunday words” and a worship service for Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021.....

Good morning! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Those are the traditional words of greeting on Easter Sunday for those of us who follow the Christian tradition. And, indeed, it does feel as if WE have risen, or at least are beginning to rise, from a long, dark, challenging year of hunkering down and avoiding contact with those who are not members of our “family bubbles.” We went into this hunkering down time right after our Sunday service on March 15, 2020. I don’t know about you, but I’ve been thinking since last night that it feels like this past year just stopped in its place. We lost a year. Too many families have lost loved ones over this past year. I’m sure this morning, this Easter Day, is a sad day for those families, as there is someone missing at the table for Easter dinner today.... maybe a grandparent or two, a husband or wife, or both, a child, grown or perhaps not so grown, a friend, or two, or more.... I think of those families and my heart hurts for them....

I read a brief meditative piece on line early this morning in which the writer said, “Each of us tells ourselves a story about life all the time. You are what you think.” What do *you* think this Easter Day? What *story about your life* do you want to tell this day? This could be a day of new beginnings and renewed hope that we are just starting to turn a corner away from this awful virus and onto a new street of appreciation, of acceptance of ourselves as well as of others with all our messiness, as well as our finer traits. Begin again with me, will you? It’s Spring! As I write early this Easter morn, there is a solitary bird singing in the tree just beyond our deck. May we begin to sing with him again.... although we will HUM in church this morning!

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Blessings to each one this Easter morning....
Susan

p.s. I’ll copy below the worship bulletin from this morning’s service and following it, the text from Mark we’ll consider this morning, and my sermon. I will post the text and my sermon on my Facebook page, freerangepastor, and on the church’s Facebook page, the Federated Church of Thomaston....

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome

Sunday, April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Susan Stonestreet

Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.

An asterisk () indicates where you are invited to stand.
Bold print indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.*

GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

Welcome and Announcements

Mimi, our fearless lay leader, is in Savannah, GA this weekend with Gerry visiting family, including her dear Uncle Doug....

Thank you to Galo, Frances and Doug for ringing our bells each night for many months now in honor and memory of all who have suffered through the covid pandemic and those who have served them....

Thank you to Karen and Jackie and all of you who have brought flowers to grace our sanctuary this morning.

Thank you to Gwen Alex for the beautiful bouquet in memory of her daughter.

Thank you to all of you who have labored along with me through this past year. We're not through this challenging time yet, but we're getting there. Today I invite you to hum our hymns not sing them, as singing is still one of the best, or worst, ways to spread germs of the covid variety or others.

We'll leave the service today by rows, beginning up front, so if you brought flowers for this morning, you can pick them up and then head downstairs and outside. Please don't gather in Leach Hall. Outside is the safest place to gather still. It will be a while yet before we can gather for coffee hour downstairs.

We'll have our offering plates available in the back of the sanctuary if you choose to make a donation or give your pledge envelopes for today on your way out.

We won't share in Holy Communion today.... perhaps by next month we can safely share in Communion.

Any other announcements?

Prelude

Call to Worship

Leader: It was dark.... I preferred to stay where I was.

People: Dawn was close. She

beckoned us to come and see what had happened!

unknown?

Leader: Should I step out into the

People: Shoul

d we step out with grief in our souls, overcoming our fears, searching for the light of a new day?

All: Yes, we step out, we see that the tomb of death has been opened and that Jesus is risen. Alleluia! Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed!

***Opening Hymn** "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" (see insert)

An Invocation....

Gracious God, we call upon you to be with us this Easter Day. Hear our humming of the hymns we know well. Receive our prayers. Strengthen us this day for all the days to come. We begin again in the name of the One, and the many, you have sent to show us the way to new life in you this day. Amen.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving on the Day of Easter (read in unison)

**O God, we thank you for this earth, our home;
for the wide sky and the blessed sun,
for the salt sea and the running water,
for the everlasting hills and the never-resting winds,
for trees and the common grass underfoot.
We thank you for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds,
and see the splendor of the summer fields,
and taste of the autumn fruits,
and rejoice in the feel of snow,
and smell the breath of the spring.
Grant us hearts wide open to all this beauty;
and save our souls from being so blind that we pass unseeing
when even the common thornbush is aflame with your glory,
O God our creator, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.**

(by Walter Rauschenbusch, 1861-1918, American theologian & Baptist pastor)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Special Music

Scripture Reading Mark 16:1-8

***Gloria Patri**

Message "...they went to the tomb...." Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** "Up from the Grave He Arose" (see insert)

RESPONDING IN FAITH

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other

Jackie has asked us for prayers for Kyle Cloudier.... I would ask for prayers for a good friend of mine, Carol, who lives in Pennsylvania and has Parkinson's Disease.

Pastoral Prayer followed by The Lord's Prayer.....

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts

as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Offertory

***Doxology** No. 95 Blue

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “The Day of Resurrection” (see insert)

Benediction & Postlude

May God bless you and keep you. May God’s face radiate upon you and flood you with grace and tender mercies. May God smile upon you always, and cover your life with peace. Amen.

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, April 11, 2021

The 2nd Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

PRAYER LIST

Hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus....

And all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members....

And all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far.....

And add to our prayers,

from Blair a request for prayers for Lani, 42 with brain cancer and her mom, Judith....

deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank endures his cancer journey with the help of Hospice at home now....

and prayers for Coretta and her family as they mourn the loss of Coretta’s Aunt Ruth as she passed away unexpectedly in late February....

Carrie Connors and the Hedstrom family of Camden as they deal with the aftermath of a fire that took their home and 14 year old Theodore Hedstrom....

and a request from Mimi for Kendall, who is 49 and has hereditary neuropathy. It is progressing rapidly and at some point he will be in braces. Mike Sodano, who has had three-way bypass surgery this week, a friend of Mimi’s and known to many in Thomaston, “Cody,” who doesn’t live locally but needs prayers for guidance; and Ed Lee, Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula Elliot, Trish Perry, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine

Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday..... AND those you would like for me to remove from this list.

“...they went to the tomb...”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

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 [Jesus]. 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. Mk 16:1-8

Will you pray with me. Abundant and ever-present God, we come this morning to the end and the beginning of your story yet again in the Christian tradition. We know that Jesus’ *earthly* life came to an end, but it was only the beginning of his *eternal* life and his promise to walk along with each of us in our journeys. Help us to stay open to the possibilities of new roads you place before us each moment, O God. Help us to suspend our human doubts and take a hold of your beckoning hand on this Easter Day. Amen.

Jesus, “born in an obscure village, was the child of a peasant woman.

He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty years old, and then for three years or so he traveled around the country, stopping long enough to talk and to listen to people, and help where he could....

He never wrote a book, he never had a hit record, he never went to college, he never ran for public office, he never had a family, or owned a house.

He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. But when he was only thirty-three years old, the tide of

public opinion turned against him, and his friends rejected him. When he was arrested, very few wanted anything to do with him.

After the trial, he was executed by the State along with admitted thieves. Only because a generous friend offered his own cemetery plot was there any place to bury him. This all happened twenty centuries ago, and yet today he is the leading figure of the human race for Christians, and the ultimate example of love.”^[1]

Were it not for the women who went to the tomb to care for the body of their beloved friend Jesus after his death, who knows what might have happened. The man, or men, dressed in white who appeared to the women told them Jesus had been raised. According to the telling of the story in the Gospel of Mark, they were afraid and said nothing to anyone. But someone said something to someone else.... otherwise we might not be here this morning.

This is the first Sunday we have been able to gather for worship in our sanctuary since March 15th of last year because of a deadly virus that overtook the land, near and far.... and that virus is not done with us yet. So we’ve come here this morning for many reasons –

It’s just good to be back together for worship, in person, for God’s sake!

It’s just good to see people we’ve only seen on Facebook, or Facetime, or Zoom, or talked to by phone or text or e-mail for a year.

It’s just good to get out of the house and go somewhere besides the grocery store, isn’t it?

But the bottom line reason we’re here together this morning is because of this solitary figure of a man who tramped around in robe and sandals, two thousand plus years ago, listening to people, healing people, performing amazing miracles, and proclaiming to whoever would listen that there IS a God who loves us all.

Jesus teaches us this God loves us no matter what we’ve done that wasn’t so good, no matter whether we’ve asked for forgiveness for our trespasses or offered forgiveness to others for their trespasses against us. We’re here, masked, safely sitting apart from one another, humming rather singing.... because of Jesus.

There have been other solitary figures throughout history who have had a monumental impact on the world – Ghandi of India, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Desmond Tutu – to name just a few of many. But these individuals still have not left the same kind of mark on the world that Jesus has. Why is that?

It has to do with the central mystery of the Christian faith – as Christians, we believe that Jesus was resurrected after his death. He arose from the grave, as the hymn we hummed just a few minutes ago proclaims. But as much as we know this is

the major point of the Christian faith, do we really believe Jesus “arose” after his death? I mean we can’t PROVE scientifically that he arose. We simply have to have the faith to believe that he arose.... just as my favorite text from the New Testament in the Book of Hebrews proclaims, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things not visible.” (Hebrews 11:1, 3)

Faith, the *assurance* of things hoped for.... I don’t know about you, but I can’t live without hope....

the hope that all will be well someday,

the hope that this deadly virus will finally leave us alone so we can get back to some kind of “normal life,”

the hope that those we have loved and lost are not truly gone, but waiting for us somewhere, with Jesus, with God.

I live each day with hope because the idea of living without hope would not be bearable. And if there is one thing that Jesus came to teach us it’s this – radical love always wins out, whether we live or whether we die. As the author of 1 Corinthians 13 writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Every human life is sacred – in its being born, in its living, and in its dying. Jesus, our sacred ancestor who called us into the Christian family with his birth, his living, his dying, and his rising... beckons us to love one another as we are loved by God. On this Easter morning, may we be glad those women went to the tomb. May we live with hope and live out the love Jesus came to show us and never let it go.

Let the people say, “Amen!”