

*Common Worship in Separate Places
For the people of Elmwood Avenue Presbyterian Church
London, Ontario
and their friends*

*Easter
10:30 a.m.
12 April 2020*

To cross the threshold into worship, light a candle and keep a moment of silence.

Opening Words

L: Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.

P: The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of grace and glory, you cause the sun to rise and chase away the shadows of night. We praise you, for on this day you raised Jesus Christ from death to life. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may be made alive with his power and peace, and may grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Holy one, you abound in mercy. We confess our fear and failure. We live in violence; we abuse the earth you gave us to care for; we lust for things that perish in the grasping; we call evil good and good evil. Forgive our sin, banish our fear, and renew our lives through the victory of him who was dead, but lives.

Lord, have mercy upon us;

Christ, have mercy upon us;

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Sovereign God, the whole universe is within your reach and care, and you order all things by your hand. Through our baptism you claimed us as your people, and you call us to be disciples of our Risen Lord. As you provide for our bodies, so preserve our souls. Keep before us the vision of our Redeemer, that we may see, follow, and give him glory, with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." May the almighty and merciful God grant us true pardon and bring us to life everlasting.

P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.

Prayer for Illumination

Holy One, roll away the stone from the entrance to our hearts, that we may hear your truth and know your joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 118: 14-25 *(A song of victory for God's saving work.)*

The Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:

'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
the right hand of the Lord is exalted;
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'

I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.

The Lord has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

(Said together) **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. *Amen***

The Gospel Reading for the Day

St John 20: 11-18 (*The Risen Lord encounters Mary Magdalene.*)

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to 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."'

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.

L: This is the Gospel of our Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Gospel Reading.

St John 20:11 *Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.*

The men had gone home, scratching their heads about an empty tomb. But Mary Magdalene lingered. She lingered because she loved Jesus more than she could say. Tears spoke for her instead.

Perhaps she'd come to the tomb to be near him one last time. Perhaps she'd come to anoint his wounds with oil and spice. Perhaps she'd come for reasons even she didn't know. For grief thickens our thinking, turning it to porridge. Sorrow hijacks our power to decide the simplest of things. What to eat, what to wear? What does it matter now? She lingered because she had more weeping to do.

And yet, however much grief dulls our reason, it sharpens our perception of sadness in *all* things. "There are tears in things, and mortality touches the mind," said the Roman poet, Virgil. Attending a funeral on a rainy day, we're moved to think, "Ah,

even nature weeps today..." The falling of leaves in autumn, a decaying log on the forest floor, the setting of the sun each night – "All things die," they tell us. Nature feels what we feel.

There's a little poem by Mary Coleridge that captures Mary Magdalene's moment. (It was beautifully set to music by C.V. Stanford.)

*When Mary thro' the garden went,
Her eyes, for weeping long, were dim.
The grass beneath her footsteps bent,
The solemn lilies, white and slim,
These also stood and wept for him.*

There *are* tears in things. Mary lingered because she couldn't move on. What future is there now?

How could she have known *why* the tomb was empty? She assumed his body had been stolen, but this assumption blinded her as much as tears do. She didn't recognise him. She thought he was a gardener.

Perhaps we, too, see Jesus 'here, there and everywhere', but fail to recognise him. He once told a parable about that. It was about people feeding the hungry and thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner.

"You did it for me," he says.

"Really? When did we see *you*?" they ask.

"When you did it for the least of these, you did it for me."

To serve someone, to serve a community, a society, with deeds of justice and mercy (and to let yourself *be* served) – this *is* serving the risen Jesus. To believe in the resurrection, says Rowan Williams, "isn't just believing an odd fact from 2000 years ago. It's trusting there's a kind of life, a kind of love, trust and joy that is the very essence of Jesus' identity *which is now coming to life in you*."

"Tell my brothers. Go and proclaim," he tells Mary. "Go and live this new life," in other words. "But do not hold on to me," he says. I think he means this: "You must not cling to the old life. You mustn't linger here and make a shrine of my empty tomb. You must leave the garden as Adam and Eve did. You must face the future and live the life made possible by *my* life and death and resurrection."

The last verse of Mary Coleridge's poem gets it just right.

*When Mary thro' the garden went,
She sought within the garden ground,
One for whom her heart was rent,
One who for her sake was bound,
One who sought, and she was found.*

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal and ever-living God, you have brought us to this Day of Resurrection. Because Christ lives, we now look for the life that is abundant and eternal. Glory, praise, and honour are yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ. We long to sing in your sanctuary again, to praise you with organ and trumpet, in voice and heart. Keep your Church in the peace of Jesus Christ. Challenge and uphold us in the truth of Jesus Christ. When we fall, raise us up, that we may learn to be your joyful, faithful people.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the world, caught in the net of suffering caused by the COVID-19 virus. Hear the cries of all your children of every faith and no faith. To every troubled soul and each infected body, grant mercy, refreshment, and relief.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

O God, eternal and true, remember in your mercy those who find faith difficult. Ease their burden. Remember all who live with temptation or despair. Remember those who are especially sensitive to the agony of life. Let them know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are reaching for perfection through that same love from which they took their beginning.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for those filled with anger, sadness, and worry. Give peace to those torn from within by tension and from without by conflict. Tame the unruly forces that seize us, weaken our love, and erode our trust in each other. Bring us to your truth and keep us by your side, that we may receive and accept ourselves as the good, glad, and forgiven people of your love.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who long to work and be active again, whose lives have been made idle by the COVID-19 crisis. Help us find a way to keep each other fed, housed and cared for. Do not let our economy be brutal and our politics unjust.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the governments of the world. Teach them your justice, tempered by mercy. Keep them from the arrogance that especially tempts those who inhabit high office. Soften their hearts and make them yield to your justice and love.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

Almighty God, we remember before you those who have died, with whom we shared many happy Easters, who now rest in your peace and worship before your throne. Bring us with them to those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, which you have prepared for those who love you...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature: grant that we may share the risen life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, our Saviour Jesus Christ our Lord.

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, the power and the glory, for ever. *Amen*

Benediction

(Said together) **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. *Amen***