

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023

## **Call to Worship**

Think of a moment when someone that you least expected to see suddenly stands before you.

A moment when something you'd lost is found again and you can scarcely believe your eyes.

Think of a moment when your fear was suddenly proved unfounded and you were surprised by joy.

This morning is such a moment.

We resign ourselves to the worst, and suddenly life turns around.

So come this Easter morning, to be shaken from your conviction that nothing can change your situation.

Come if you look at the world and feel overwhelmed by its chaos, or disillusioned by its promises.

On this morning we remember how Mary went to anoint a corpse, and was greeted by a Saviour.

Come to worship prepared to see your life and the world through new eyes.

For Christ is risen, **he is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

~ written by Ann Siddall, and posted on the Stillpoint Spirituality Centre website. <https://stillpointsa.org.au/>

## **Prayer of Adoration**

God of resurrecting power,

we are caught up in the joy of Easter and

your love fills us with expectation.

Death will never overcome the life,

and the powers of chaos will never overcome your loving intentions for the cosmos.

Just as Jesus spoke to Mary in the garden that first Easter day,

you call each of us by name because you love us.

So we praise you for the hope you have given us,

your powerful love and your promise of new life in Christ.

So may we live our love for you gladly, today and every day,

as we sing with our hearts full of praise:

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## Hymn

### *Jesus Christ is risen today*

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1. Jesus Christ is risen today,  
hallelujah!  
our triumphant holy day,  
hallelujah!  
who did once upon the cross,  
hallelujah!  
suffer to redeem our loss,  
hallelujah!
2. Hymns of praise then let us sing  
hallelujah!  
unto Christ our heavenly King,  
hallelujah!  
who endured the cross and grave,  
hallelujah!  
sinners to redeem and save,  
hallelujah!
3. But the pains which he endured  
hallelujah!  
our salvation have procured;  
hallelujah!  
now above the sky he's King,  
hallelujah!  
where the angels ever sing,  
hallelujah!
4. Sing we to our God above,  
hallelujah!  
praise eternal as his love;  
hallelujah!  
praise him, all ye heavenly host,  
hallelujah!  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
hallelujah!

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## Prayer of Confession

**God of tender mercy,  
we confess that faith doesn't come easy every Easter.  
When we face loss in our own lives, sorrow can weigh us down.  
Our challenges can feel like a stone too heavy to roll away.  
Forgive us, O God. Let the hope of new life in Christ assure us  
that the power of your love that raised Jesus will never let us go. Amen.**

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## Assurance of Forgiveness

Christ is Risen! The stone is rolled away, the tomb found empty.  
Mary calls out, "I have seen the Lord!"  
We have seen Christ, too,  
in every helping hand, in every heartfelt gift,  
in every choice to restore life in this world.  
We are called to this new life, a life of forgiveness and reconciliation.  
You are forgiven; accept your forgiveness  
and know that God loves you and desires great joy for your life.  
Walk forward on this journey of faith, knowing your brothers and sisters are with you.

— written by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, and posted on her Rev-o-lution blog. <http://rev-o-lution.org/>

## An Easter Psalm of Praise

Psalm 118:12, 14-24      Sandra Dewsberry  
Matthew 28:1-10          Fred Dewsberry  
Acts 10:39-43            Kathy Hebert  
Colossians 3:1-4          Judy Persian

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### Message Mixed Emotions

You would think that today of all days it would be easy to stand here and have something to say, to have a great story to help us bring this historic moment into our realm of understanding. Yet, I can think of no story to compare to the resurrection. It stands alone. Each of the gospel writers have their take on the events. Like the witnesses they are, each has a perspective. They don't have to match exactly. What eye witness story or even second-hand story ever comes out exactly the same unless rehearsed? It is part of the mystery, awe, wonder, and joy of the Easter story. If everyone's story had been exactly the same, we would have more reason to doubt it happened. The variations actually make it credible.

This Easter we hear the narrative from Matthew's viewpoint on the events. What he remembered of what took place and how the story was relayed to him. This account is powerful on so many levels. It starts out simply enough. Two Mary's heading off to pay a visit to the tomb. They went there to grieve, to cry, to share stories about the experiences they had with Jesus. To recount the glory days and share the sadness of a life lost and dreams shattered.

Not too many of us have been spared the grief of having a person in our lives die, a person who we cared for deeply. You lose your breath; the tears never seem to dry up. One moment you are fine, the next you are wondering if that hole in the center of your being is going to swallow you up. Another time you are sharing stories and laughing about the antics and then another day you are angry because you are alone.

Grief, fear, anger, disbelief; all were a part of those last few days. So early in the morning just "as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary went to see the tomb"<sup>1</sup> (v1) where Jesus had been laid and with him all their hope laid to rest as well. It was a memorial trip. It was quiet, until it wasn't.

Suddenly there was a great earthquake! Think of it. What do you do when the earth rumbles and moves beneath your feet, your footing unsecure? Do you run or stay put?

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<sup>1</sup> All scriptures taken from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

We have recently seen the devastating effects of a great earthquake in Syria and Türkiye. Entire neighborhoods and cities are crumbled. Lives lost. Even a small rumble gets one's attention. The floor shakes, dishes rattle, and you wonder what is next.

Here we have a great earthquake and it is said to have been caused by an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven. The angel came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. It is in this account that the tomb is opened in front of the women as well as the guards that had been assigned to the location to make sure the tomb was secure. The guards sent there because the chief priests and the Pharisees had gone before Pilate and asked for the detail, recalling that Jesus, who they called an impostor, had said that after three days he would rise again. They temple authorities wanted to ensure that none of Jesus' followers would go and steal the body of Jesus away.

Yet here we find ourselves in the story with guards at the ready, women present, the earth shaking and the tomb unsealed, the stone rolled away. It was enough to overwhelm the guards. They were obviously taken by surprise, and "fear of the angel shook them and they became like dead men." (v4)

Nobody wanted to have that story get out. The guards who went back to the city told the chief priests everything that had happened. The worst fear of the authorities had been realized, now "they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, 'You must say, 'his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" (vv12-13) This story would keep the truth from being known. This way no one could say that Jesus really was God's Son and, in the end, he had been raised from the dead. That would be too powerful. It would give the people too much hope. It would rock the boat. It would be like an emotional earthquake. No one would listen to the powerful rulers if it turned out that what Jesus said would happen actually did happen.

The guards too had to be protected. They had been sent there to make sure nothing would happen that would give any credence to Jesus and his predictions, and they failed. They would have to answer for that. So, for their participation in the lie, the priests and elders said to the guards, "If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." (v14)

Collusions, earthquake, stone rolled away, and yet there were the two Mary's. What of them? Why did they not run away, or fall like dead people? Was it curiosity? Did fear hold them in their place? It was likely this and more. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him.'" (vv5-7)

Did you catch the fact that the women were the first to be trusted with the message of Good News? Throughout Jesus' life women had been a part of his ministry, and now they are the ones told to check out the tomb to see for themselves that Jesus was not there. They saw the angel roll the stone away, the guards had been present so no one had come and stolen the body away. The tomb was empty, and things just as Jesus had predicted. The women were given a message to convey to the others and "So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."

Fear and great joy. Words that would aptly describe the mixed emotions of first heading to a tomb grieving, then experiencing an earthquake, seeing an angel, hearing from the angel, watching men fall over as if dead, and then heading into an empty tomb where they had expected to find a corpse. A corpse that was not there. Could those words be true?

On top of that, in Matthew the women are the first to actually see Jesus as he met them and said "Greetings," which would be more aptly translated as "Rejoice!" And rejoice they did as they "came to Jesus, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him." (v9) But their work is not done, they still need to share the Good News with the others, as Jesus sends them off saying "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Well, if the conversation was muted and filled with tears as the morning dawned, now the conversation would have been breathtaking, animated, unsure, and amazing. How do you convey all of this to others? This is a question to ask of ourselves as well. And just like the women we begin to reflect, ponder, discuss, and share.

If Jesus is not dead then one needs to review all of the teaching, preaching, healing, and actions of Jesus over the past three years of his life. If Jesus is alive then it changes everything. Nothing can ever be the same. Nothing has been the same.

Jesus' resurrection means life for all. The whippings, beating, betrayal, hopelessness, and pain that Jesus endured, the cross that Jesus carried and hung from, does not take away all of those painful earthly experiences that we have in our own living. Still, in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus we can be assured that Jesus knows our pain and walks with us in every experience of life, from the grief to the joy, from fear to forgiveness, from loss to grace. In the resurrection, God's power overcomes all that holds us down, our sinfulness, our rebellion, our inability to love fully and compassionately.

Resurrection is the promise of life after death. As professor Rolf Jacobson writes, "In a very real way, we die in our sins every single day. Our lives are dead and worthless through our constant sin and rebellion. However, in the act of continual forgiveness

granted us through God's grace, we are reborn new, forgiven, resurrected humans. This is an actual resurrection. Our sins kill us, but God's forgiveness makes us alive again."<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult for us to think of ourselves as sinful and rebellious, yet how many times a day do we hurt others through our words, actions, or lack of words and action. Most of us think of ourselves as doing our best, that we are pretty good people. Yet the minute we think, in our pride and ambition, in our privilege and prosperity, that others get what they deserve or that even we are getting what we deserve, well then sin has arrived in our lives.

Believing in the resurrection is to believe that God's love for us, for all people, has no limits. That you are worthy of love, of joy, of hope, of grace and not only that but that all people are worthy to receive those gifts. Think on that. All one needs to do is consider those who are in prison, those who are addicted, those who start wars, those who cause pain, the person on the lowest rung of your ladder, and be in awe and awareness that everyone is loved by God. Everyone can be forgiven and is offered life in Christ.

That is more than we can comprehend at times. We are people of the resurrection, people called to be God's love in word and deed. People who share the Good News of Jesus and the gift of life offered to every person. Every person. Thank God their worthiness and our worthiness, doesn't enter into the equation. We are all children of God, loved and forgiven.

Each day we can live into the resurrection knowing God the Creator brings us new life, forgives and redeems every one of us.

Take hold of this forgiveness,  
and live your life in the Spirit and resurrection of Jesus!

### **Prayers of the People**

God of power and possibility,  
you broke open the tomb that held our Lord. Now break into your church where your people are distracted by old quarrels, discouraging results, or unhelpful divisions about mission and service. Resurrect, renew and revive your church!

God of resurrection and new life,  
you broke into the hearts of Jesus' fearful friends. Now break into our relationships with one another. Where they are vibrant and life-giving, nurture them. Where they are strained by old hurts and misunderstandings, or carelessly taken for granted, mend them. Resurrect, renew and revive our life together!

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008.P147.

God of might and mercy,  
you broke the schemes of those who stood in the way of your love. Now break into the governing systems of your world. Stir the minds and hearts of leaders to work for justice and equitable sharing. Where laws are corrupt, or people suffer under harsh rule, call them to account. Resurrect, renew and revive the leaders of the world!

God of healing and hope,  
you broke the bonds of death which tried to shackle new life. Now break into situations of illness, pain, grief, and loss. Wherever people are sick in body, mind, or spirit, wherever someone mourns the loss of any relationship or dream, bring your healing grace. Resurrect, renew and revive our lives!

God of Easter Renewal and Resurrection,  
you have broken into our lives again this day. We give you thanks for the power of your love to remake every situation that brings us challenge or choice. Break into all our moments of celebration and joy, too. Give us gratitude, the impulse to share, and a spirit of grace and understanding. Resurrect, renew and revive your people!

Now we pray in one voice the words that Jesus gave us:

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## 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.**

## Invitation to the offering

On Easter Day, we celebrate God's most precious gift to us in Christ's dying and his rising.

As we present our gifts to God, may our generosity reflect God's goodness, and the hope we have in Christ Jesus, our Risen Lord.

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If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

1. Now let the vault of heaven resound  
in praise of love that doth abound,  
'Christ hath triumphed, hallelujah!  
sing, choirs of angels, loud and clear,  
repeat their song of glory here,  
'Christ hath triumphed, Christ hath triumphed!"  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
2. Eternal is the gift he brings;  
wherefore our heart with rapture sings,  
'Christ hath triumphed, Jesus liveth!'  
now doth he come and give us life;  
now doth his presence still all strife  
through his triumph; Jesus reigneth!  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
3. Oh fill us, Lord, with dauntless love;  
set heart and will on things above,  
that we conquer through thy triumph;  
grant grace sufficient for life's day,  
that by our life we ever say,  
'Christ hath triumphed, and he liveth!'  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
4. Adoring praises now we bring,  
and with the heavenly blessed sing,  
'Christ hath triumphed, hallelujah!'  
Be to the Father and our Lord,  
to Spirit blest, most holy God,  
thine the glory never ending!  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

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**Benediction**

As Christ burst forth from the tomb,  
may new life burst forth from us  
and show itself in acts of love and healing to a hurting world.  
And may the same Christ,  
who lives forever and is the source of our new life,  
keep your hearts rejoicing  
and grant you peace this day and always. Amen.

~ posted on Joanna Harader on her **Spacious Faith** blog. <http://spaciousfaith.com/>