

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
Easter Sunday – March 31, 2024

Call to Worship

This is the day:
**when tears are wiped away;
shattered hearts are mended;
fears are replaced with joy.**

This is the day the Lord:
**rolls away the stone of fear;
throws off death's clothes;
goes ahead of us into God's future.**

This is the day the Lord has made:
**death has no fear for us;
sin has lost its power over us;
God opens the tombs of our hearts
to fill us with life.**

This is the day - Easter Day!
Christ is Risen! Hallelujah!

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Hymn

Jesus Christ is risen today

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| <p>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!</p> <p>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!</p> | <p>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!</p> <p>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!</p> |
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of Resurrecting power,
you lift our hearts with joy when we see the tomb is empty.
God of Resurrecting hope,
you fill us with excitement when we hear that Christ is risen.
God of Resurrecting love,
you embrace us with courage when we trust in the power of new life
that you promise in the Risen Christ.
We offer you all glory, honour and praise with hearts overflowing in Jesus' name.

**God of Resurrecting joy,
we confess it's not easy to sustain Easter hope. We let discouragement, fear
and frustration to settle in and we let anger and anxiety turn our hearts away
from you. Resentment and disappointment cling to us and we forget your
great mercy and love. Forgive us.
Restore within us the joy and hope you promise us
in Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.**

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Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ –
And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us,
Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.
Believe the good news of the gospel.
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven
and set free for new life by God's resurrecting grace.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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." This is my message for you.' ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

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Message Fear of the Unknown

Twice in the last year when at special events in Toronto I was told that I am a story teller. The first was a minister who has known me for years, and as we were heading toward a dining room for dinner, she overheard me say to someone next to me that I do not have the gift to tell a story well. My friend whipped around and said, "Joyce, you are a story teller. I have always known you to be able to tell a story."

Then last fall I went to a preaching conference and decided to challenge myself by signing up for an addition workshop where I would preach one of my sermons for colleagues and a couple of conference speakers and be critiqued and hopefully affirmed. My surprise came when a conference speaker, who I really wanted to have give me feedback because of her storytelling ability said, "Joyce, you are a story teller!" Have you ever thought of honing that gift. Of course, the answer was no as I never thought of myself as a story teller. A rambler, yes. Someone who like to preamble every thought with five other thoughts, for sure. But a story teller, no.

Now the only reason I share this is that I don't think I would be someone that God would send to anyone to deliver a straight up message. Certainly not the kind of message that the angel in the Easter story did, as it was written in the Gospel of Matthew. That angel was more like the delivery man who shows up and throws a package on the front step and leaves. No fuss, just get the job done.

This angel was there to get a job done and get the message out. Turns out it was a rather terrifying entrance. There they are, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, at the tomb of Jesus. And no, we don't have more information on the "other Mary." Regardless, crucifixion and death have done their worst. It is final. Done and done. The life is gone from Jesus. There is nothing to do but grieve the fact that Jesus is not going to be a part of their lives anymore. Death has been victorious.

The tomb is closed up tight. Sealed with a large stone, too big for anyone to roll away easily. But just in case, guards have been put into place to make sure no one tries any monkey business lest anyone gets any big ideas and they somehow get the rock rolled away and the tomb open, then removing the body so that some story can be made up about how Jesus has risen.

Imagine this scene, and think how you may have responded. See if you identify with any of the characters. There are Mary and Mary, as we already noted, grieving and forlorn. As they are surely pondering the events of the last days, suddenly there is a great earthquake! No warning. Ground shaking. And what was happening but an angel of the Lord was descending from heaven. What does the angel do, but right in front of them rolls away the stone that the guards were to make sure no one tampered with. With that kind of strength, this is no angel to mess with. The appearance of the angel is like lightning. Consider a lightening storm and the brilliance of lightening piercing through a dark stormy sky. What awe does that inspire in you? For many it also strikes fear as lightning is unpredictable and powerful.

The angel's clothing was white as snow. For those of us in Canada, we don't have to think back more than a few days to remember the beauty of the newly fallen snow. A lot of snow! It sparkles in the sunlight and reflects back any light in the darkness.

All of this is too much for the guards. The fear they felt in that moment shook them to their core to the point where they passed out. But the angel was not concerned about their well-being. This angel was on a mission. Get to the tomb...roll away the stone... and deliver a message, "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.' This is my message for you." (vv5-7)

For those of you who have been to worship here all through Lent you know that our theme has been about the times when Jesus said some version of "Do not be afraid." He said it to Peter when Peter realized that he was in the presence of Jesus on the beach after a great catch of fish. Jesus spoke these words to the disciples in the midst of a storm and to a father whose daughter had died but Jesus brought back to life. The words were spoken after Peter, James, and John witnessed Jesus' transfiguration and heard the voice of God coming from a cloud. And then it was a passage about hell where Jesus says to fear God, but reminds us that we were created in love and for love, so we need not fear hell as long as we remember and fear the one who created us and loves us, who desires life for us.

Today we first hear these words, "Do not be afraid" from the lips of an angel, but as the story progresses and the women leave on their mission to share the angel's message with the disciples you will note that now mixed with their fear is also great joy. That is of importance. That is significant. Life is not cut and dry, one way or another, this or that. It is almost always both/and.

Pastor and teacher David Lose, writes about it this way,

Isn't that a wonderful reminder that fear and joy are not opposites but, as with doubt and faith, can be experienced at the same time and, indeed, might be inseparable? Fear...seems quite frequently "in the air" these days and for all kinds of reasons. Jesus' resurrection does not spell an end to fear for those who follow him, but rather makes it possible to experience joy amid what might otherwise be crippling fear. Resurrection, that is, doesn't simply answer or end problems, but rather creates something new, and Christian faith does not remove us from the hardships, limitations, and challenges of this life, but creates for us possibilities that simply would not be available had God not intervened, first in the raising of Jesus and again by entering into our own lives.¹

¹ Lose, David. [Easter A: Proclaiming an On-Going Easter | ...In the Meantime \(davidlose.net\)](https://davidlose.net)

Accessed March 28, 2024

The fear around this story is about the unknown. They come to the tomb where what happens after death is unknown other than the finality of it all. Then the women experience this unexplainable event with the angel and are sent into an unknown future. What does all of this mean? If Jesus really is alive, resurrection is truth, then, what now? What does the future hold?

Still the women went, with fear and great joy. Then went into the unknown of it all and on the way, Jesus met them. He spoke a word of greeting, they touched him. He was real, he was alive. Life after death was and is really a thing! They worship him and then Jesus said to them “Do not be afraid.”

And what have they to be afraid of?

Pretty much everything. They have seen death and they have seen resurrection. Both of those things can make one fearful. Not only that, they are women who have been given a mission. According to Matthew they were the first to witness Jesus. Women, the first to know and the first to be sent out to spread the good news of the Gospel.

And what is that Good News?

It is that death does not have the final answer. Resurrection comes through death and brings new life. Not only that, but Christ goes ahead of us into the world, goes before us into our unknowns. You see Easter is just a beginning. Easter is not an ending point, but rather a beginning that calls people into life! Death is real but it does not have the final say whether that be life after our physical death or life that comes from being transformed in this life.

Many of us are coming to this day with some or a lot of uncertainties and unknowns. We may come with fear and with trepidation around our lives and circumstances, our futures. I would hazard to guess that all of us are looking at the world with its turmoil, wars, refugees, power and politics, rising cost of living and have some fear for the future of our world. Some are walking with loved ones who are ill or facing death, and there are those who are grieving the death of a loved one or the loss of security in one form or another. There seem to be much one can be afraid of.

Once again quoting David Lose he writes, “Christ’s resurrection does not wash those realities away, it makes it possible to experience joy in the midst of them as God continues to create something new.”²

So we move into this day, into the days to come, with fear and with joy, with hope and courage in the midst of uncertainty and unknowns. We take our faith and share our hope in Christ and our certainty of God’s love for all, and share it with the world. Like the women, we are called to let others know that Christ is risen.

² Ibid.

May you go into this day, into your future, with joy knowing that Jesus Christ is risen today and that changes everything!

Prayers of the People

God of new beginnings,
break into your Church with resurrecting power.
Where congregations are challenged to rethink outreach in changing times,
inspire new approaches and renew commitment for today's ministry.
Where gathering resources and finding new leaders present challenges,
renew our trust in your faithfulness
and our hope that remembers the empty tomb.

God of new possibilities,
break into our relationships with resurrecting power.
Where they are vibrant and life-giving, nurture and sustain them.
Where there are memories of hurt or current misunderstanding,
refresh them with forgiveness and reconciliation.
Where they are neglected or taken for granted,
open our eyes to the great gift we offer each other.

God of new opportunity,
break into the governance of your world with resurrecting power.
Stir the minds and hearts of leaders
to work for justice and the equitable sharing of resources.
Where violence and conflict threaten the innocent and the earth itself,
raise up advocates for peace and negotiators to call combatants to account.
Bring wisdom, compassion and cooperation to all in authority.

God of new life,
break into situations of illness, pain, grief, and loss with resurrecting power.
Where there is sickness of body, mind, or spirit, bring healing and hope.
Where people mourn the loss of someone dear or their dreams of a better tomorrow,
bring comfort and courage to go on.

God of New Creation,
break into the circumstances, places, and lives
that we name in the silence of our hearts...

God of Easter Day,
break into our moments of celebration and joy.
Give us gratitude, the impulse to share,
and a spirit of grace and understanding.
Resurrect, renew, and revive our spirits.

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

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

Easter Day celebrates God's most precious gift to us in Christ's dying and his rising. As we present our gifts this morning, may our generosity reflect God's goodness to us, and the hope we have in Christ Jesus, our Risen Lord.

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Should you wish to support this ministry and/or 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>

Hymn

Jesus is risen from the grave

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1. Jesus is risen from the grave;
Jesus is risen from the grave;
Jesus is risen from the grave. Hallelujah!
2. Jesus was seen by Mary;
Jesus was seen by Mary;
Jesus was seen by Mary. Hallelujah!
3. Peter will soon be smiling;
Peter will soon be smiling;
Peter will soon be smiling. Hallelujah!
4. Thomas will stop his doubting;
Thomas will stop his doubting;
Thomas will stop his doubting. Hallelujah!
5. Jesus will meet his people;
Jesus will meet his people;
Jesus will meet his people. Hallelujah!
6. Jesus is here in bread and wine;
Jesus is here in bread and wine;
Jesus is here in bread and wine. Hallelujah!
7. Jesus will live forever;
Jesus will live forever;
Jesus will live forever. Hallelujah!

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Benediction

Go now, with wonder at the empty tomb to amaze you,
with Mary's joy in the garden to lift your hearts,
and the disciples' hope at news Jesus has risen to encourage you.

And may God's resurrecting love open the future for you,
empowered by the Spirit,
and embraced by Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

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