

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us
this Easter Sunday.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,
wherever you are

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,
to remind us of God's presence with us,
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .
There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own
browser.

I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements
underneath.

GATHERING MUSIC

"Christ the Lord Has Risen" by Reawaken

<https://youtu.be/THF9l18GEVc?si=nLyrw3lT-unrkdUO>

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is a church with
full real life standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the
United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that

"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be
included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in
life.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder
in the back.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website

firstuccsl.org

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,

as a community,

join our hearts together,

to connect to God and to each other.

So this time is the essence of what we do here together.

If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,

and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at
this time.

As people share their prayers in text

please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.
Those voiced here today.
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.
Those for which we have no words.
We lift them all to you, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.
Amen.

"I am Sending you Light" Melanie DeMore
<https://youtu.be/cIsZuoNFtXg?si=nfnrRBF0cyeS2twS>

INTRODUCTION

It's hard to feel like it's Easter when you're still in the tomb.
I've been feeling like our world, not just the US,
has been living through an extended season of Lent for ages.
Not just living through but crawling.
We've had our Palm Sunday marches, several of them actually.
We've had voices calling out the powers and principalities of our age,
shouting "You hypocrites!"
as Jesus called out the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem in Matthew's gospel, and others who have been trying to turn over the tables of those who, in their greed, have been preying on the most vulnerable among us.
This Lenten story has continued as it must
and we have found ourselves in Good Friday and witnessing our crucifixions. There here was Renee Good and Alex Pretti, of course,
but also those who have died in ICE custody, more than 46 by last count, and the approximately 163 people on boats that have been sunk by the US military in "Operation Southern Spear,"
and the 13 US servicemembers and the approximately 3500 Iranian civilians who have died so far in the war of choice the US started in the Middle East.
So many people crucified on crosses of greed, and arrogance, and hatred, and downright stupidity.
All of this swirling around, trying to suffocate and entomb us.
And yet it's Easter now.
It says so right here in my calendar.
So we're just supposed to celebrate Easter, like everything is alright?
Cue the trumpets and the triumphal march down the center aisle?
Now don't get me wrong,
I usually love me some brass on Easter Sunday.
That just didn't feel true to me today.
And as I reread the gospel text to today, I was reminded that it's also not biblical.
So I want to look at the familiar Easter story from the Gospel according to John that happens Easter morning to listen for the Good News we can hold onto today.

We'll hear the story in two pieces.
First, John chapter 20, verses 1 through 10.

JOHN 20:1-10 (NRSVUE)

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.

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."

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.

The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head,

not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

"Glimpses of Resurrection"

Let us pray ...

Easter begins in the dark.

In John's account, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb by herself, early, so early it was still dark.

So dark the first rays of the sun hadn't yet even broached the horizon.

Maybe she carried an oil lamp to light her way,
and by its small light she could see

that the stone had been removed from the tomb leaving this yawning black hole,
and she could peer inside and see the body of Jesus was gone.

This strikes me as really important.

It's Easter morning, yes,

but the resurrection of Jesus had already happened.

We don't know when it occurred.

We don't know how.

No video surveillance cameras caught the event on tape to be posted all over the web.

All we're told is that when Mary got there, the tomb was already open and empty.
The resurrection had already happened.

She just didn't know it yet.

After all, even with the open and empty tomb she still didn't see the miracle.

Remember, the first cry in this story isn't "He is Risen!"

it's "He's been stolen!"

One of the things that stood out for me when I read this familiar story again this

week

was what Peter and John did, or didn't do.

Mary Magdalene ran to get them, they raced to the tomb,
saw the empty tomb and then the text said Peter "believed."

Believed what?

Not that Jesus had been raised from the dead, because immediately after that the text says he didn't get it.

I think he what he believed was that the body was indeed missing.

But then he and John just went home, to wherever they were staying.

They left, while Mary remained at the tomb, weeping, and undoubtedly praying.

Praying for a miracle, which at that point was probably only to find Jesus's body.

But maybe, just maybe, she stayed because she remembered the last time

she stood outside a tomb in the Gospel of John was at the tomb of Lazarus,
who was brought back from the dead.

I'm sure that's an experience that stayed with her, that glimpse of resurrection.

Maybe, just maybe she stood at the threshold of grief for what they had lost
and hope for what this empty tomb could mean.

Her patience and were was repaid.

JOHN 20:11-18 (NRSVUE)

As [Mary] 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 around and saw Jesus standing there,

but she did not know that it was Jesus. 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, 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 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.'"

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.

The word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

"Glimpses of Resurrection" (con't)

I wonder what John and Peter would have seen if they had stayed.

What would they have believed then?

Easter begins in the heavy darkness of grief, of doubt, of fear.

And that heaviness doesn't let go of our soul easily.

It takes time.

Mary doesn't immediately recognize the figures in the tomb as angels or she probably would have spoken to them differently.

And she didn't recognize Jesus immediately either.

The empty tomb was a clue. But I get it.

I understand why Mary and Peter and John couldn't see it that way.

Often it only looks like resurrection in hindsight.

In the moment it looked more like, well, emptiness.

I think a lot of glimpses of resurrection are like that.

And even when we see --something,

we give them other names,

like Mary in at the tomb, assuming the resurrected Jesus was the gardener.

We find reasonable explanations - it's all very rational,

and we pride ourselves on being rational people.

Even Mary and the disciples who saw the empty tomb

clothed themselves in what today we would consider a healthy skepticism - at least at first.

Even they had trouble recognizing the signs of resurrection.

I find that thought comforting. .

Eventually, they would find their voices and begin to shout and sing of resurrection,

but not that first day.

There is a wonderful saying from the Jewish tradition, often said on the Sabbath that includes the line,

"Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles."

We don't recognize what we are seeing.

Easter begins in the dark and it takes time to unfold,

and patience and practice to notice the signs of resurrection.

We may have to wait by the empty tomb for a while,

and when they come the signs of resurrection may not be what we expect.

Less like trumpets and shouts of "Hallelujah"

and more like a quiet voice calling our name.

Slower, softer, but perhaps more powerful for all that.

The promise of Easter isn't that things suddenly get better,

just that death will not have the last word.

Easter Sunday is like the first few shoots poking above the seemingly barren soil,

reminding us while it seemed that everything was dead,

powerful forces of life have been at work underground,

even if we couldn't see them.

And our faith calls us to pay as much attention to those glimpses of resurrection,

to those signs of new life and the Spirit at work,

to pay as much attention to the good news

as we do to the seemingly endless stream of bad news bombarding us every day.

It happened for me just the other day.

My oldest grandson is 3 and a half and is still essentially nonverbal despite a year of speech therapy.

He communicates beautifully, just not in words,

but it isolates him and is like a cloud hanging over his future.

But a couple of days he looked at me and for the first time called me by name.

It was like the sun breaking through the clouds, if only for a moment,

and an experience of pure connection and joy.

I wonder if Mary felt like that, when she heard her name.

My grandson still has a long way to go, and much is still uncertain, but it was a glimpse of new life that I experienced deep in my heart.

Resurrection. Hope. Joy.

For me Easter is mostly about experience.

The gospels powerfully describe how the disciples experienced Jesus's resurrection, despite their doubts-they saw, heard, felt his presence.

They got glimpses of resurrection all over,

on the road, at the beach, in the breaking of bread with friends.

From that experience came belief and hope.

In these times when clouds of corruption and war surround us to block out the sun, and the powers and principalities of our age seek to keep us stuck in Good Friday,

we can hold onto the glimpses of resurrection,

the moments of grace we have experienced,

and they can give us hope.

I wonder what glimpses of resurrection, of new life brewing beneath the surface, you see in your life and in the wider world?

Signs that despite how bleak things look, the Spirit is at work.

God is with us.

Signs like neighbor helping neighbor,

like those who resist in so many ways:

court filings, independent journalism, art, music, frog costumes,

and the simple expressions of joy.

In these times, joy is resistance, and,

as many of you have heard me say before,

joy can hold it all,

the dark and the light, the pain the happiness.

And Easter is about joy.

Something I have found in my own spiritual journey is that the more one looks for glimpses of resurrection,

for moments of grace as when Mary heard her name,

the more we look and recognize and recollect such moments that we have experienced in our lives,

the more we see.

And once we see, we cannot unsee, so then we have a choice -

we can acknowledge and accept the new life happening before our eyes,

and the responsibility that comes with it.

Responsibility to respond to the invitation in those glimpses,

the invitation to hope, to act in the ways we can to support the Spirit's work, and to keep on looking.

Or we can turn away, rationalize what we saw, pretend it didn't happen.

Perhaps this is one reason why we miss signs of resurrection.

Sometimes it seems easier to just sit in the tomb, it's familiar.

And it takes real courage to step out and greet the dawn.

I wonder if Jesus felt that way?

But Jesus accepted resurrection and all that came with it. And calls us to resurrection as well.

In John's Gospel, Jesus leaves Mary with instructions to go and tell others -

it's not a minor detail - it's part of the process of resurrection in us - and in

others.

It's one way we can support the Spirit's work in our world.

Mary had an experience of resurrection with the risen Jesus in the garden of the tomb,

but she couldn't stay there.

She had to live out Jesus' resurrection, and her own, in her community.

She had to tell her story, Jesus's story,

and let the Spirit use it to change lives, and change the world.

And a funny thing, when we start telling our own stories,

sharing our experiences just as Mary went and shared with the other disciples,

the more people tell stories of their own glimpses of the holy, large and small - stories they were afraid to tell because they didn't seem reasonable or rational.

And in the sharing of our stories, we glimpse resurrection within them and ourselves.

Just because it's dark in our world doesn't mean it's not Easter.

Easter begins in the dark, in the tomb.

Look for the signs, tell your stories.

Each time that happens, in us, in those around us, in our world,

it's Easter again,

the stone is rolled away, and we can glimpse resurrection.

Christ has risen. Christ has risen indeed.

Christ has risen in you. Amen.

"I Believe" Mali Music

<https://youtu.be/1dRoz0I4ZEQ?si=9-6dIGxMwZgAW7DA>

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

This holy meal is a gift of grace Jesus gave for us,

May it be a moment of grace for you tonight.

Come to this sacred table not because you must,

But because you may.

Come with an empty place,

Let it be filled with bread.

Come with an empty cup,

Let it be filled with good drink.

Come with an open heart,

And feel God's love fill it.

Come just as you are

This is the Lord's table

And it is spread for you and for me.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:

Lord,

Wherever we are,

in the valley, on the mountain,

no matter how deserted it seems,

we are not truly alone,

because you are with us..

Bless this bread and this cup

May they be vibrant with your grace

Nourishing what is deepest in us.
And through this holy meal
May we come to know
that wherever we are
In Real Life, in Second Life,
We are connected to each other
Through our faith in you,
And that in and through this community,
we may find that your love
Is as real and tangible
As this bread and drink
We share.
Amen.

Now take the bread.
Feel it in your hand.
And let us remember another time, and another table,
when Jesus gathered in a upper room with his disciples,
his closest friends.
When he took the bread on the table for the evening meal, blessed it, broke it, and
shared it saying "This is my body, given for you. Take. Eat. And remember me."

Let us eat this bread of life together.
(pause to eat)

Now pick up your cup of drink,
Because at the end of the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine, the juice of the vine,
And said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, a new relationship in my blood.
Drink, and as often as you drink, remember me."

Let us drink this cup of blessing together.
(pause to drink)

Let us pray.
Lord of all our life,
We give thanks that you have welcomed us
To your table.
As we have been given healing and hope and nourishment
At this table,
May we share it with others,
Each of our offerings coming together
Until all are fed.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over,
our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting
for us to see the glimpses of resurrection,
all around us,

and tell the story..
Go in peace,
come again in hope.
Amen.

“Here Comes the Sun”
https://youtu.be/BCGH8eU-_lA?si=Iibmt0B3DPjpdC81

GO IN PEACE!