

Morialta Uniting Church April 12th 2020



John 1: 1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Prayer:

God of all life, we give thanks for the signs of your care and creativity that surrounds us and blesses us. May our hearts be filled with thanks and praise and songs of joy in our participation. This is the day to roll away the stone of fear - to throw off death's clothes, and go into the future where we are called to be true disciples of the risen Jesus. We know there will be times when we choose to stay within the confines of self and family and small community – rather than accepting your challenge to work for a just and caring world – where all have food and shelter and can know a future. We stay paralysed before our fears. We are held fast by events – both current and long past – and we remain silent holding your truth within us.

Forgive us for remaining at the tomb, and lead us out into your world, ready to share your risen life.
From now on, whenever we walk in strange places, we shall find your footprints there; whenever we meet with unknown faces,
we shall see your image there;
whenever we face nameless terror,
we shall hear your 'Fear not' there;
whenever we stumble into unexpected joy,
we shall feel your heartbeat there.
Wherever we go we start from here.

Song: TiS 370 Christ the Lord is risen today

Christ the Lord is risen today: Hallelujah!
Let the whole creation say: Hallelujah!
Raise your joys and triumphs high: Hallelujah!
Sing now, heaven, and earth reply: Hallelujah!

Love's redeeming work is done;
fought the fight, the battle won;
vain the stone, the watch, the seal:
Christ has burst the gates of hell.

Lives again our glorious king;
where, O death, is now your sting?
Once he died our souls to save;
where your victory, O grave?

Soar we now where Christ has led,
following our exalted Head;
made like him, like him we rise:
ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of land

We acknowledge that this Land is home to generations of the Kaurua people, the traditional owners of this area. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community and we pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We also give thanks for those who have gone before us in this place, whose care and commitment allows us to use this space.

And so we finally come to what may be thought of – in some senses at least – as the most important Sunday of the year. If resurrection is just about a miraculous event that happened to Jesus long ago, or if it's only about something that happens to some people at the end of time, then it has little real value, no matter how fascinating it may be. But, of course, resurrection is about far more than this. It's the promise of God's life available to us both now and forever. And it the call for us to follow Christ by becoming life-givers and agents of resurrection in our families, communities and our world. What a glorious and miraculous challenge! May the empty tomb be more than an event for us as we worship this year, and may our worship lead us into a real and transforming encounter with God's irrepressible life! *(John van de Laar)*

Song: Alleluia Aotearoa # 146 we are an Easter people

We are an Easter people,
ours is an Easter faith,
the yeast is rising in the bread,
our wine has vintage taste.
Christ is risen, Christ is risen,
risen in our lives.

We are an Easter people,
ours is an Easter faith,
our tears are freed to flow and heal
our shattered hopes and hearts.
Christ is risen, Christ is risen,
risen in our lives.

We are an easter people,
ours is an Easter faith
our fears have died,
we rise to dream, to love, to dance, to live,
Christ is risen, Christ is risen,
Risen in our lives.

Scripture John 20: 1-18

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. ² 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." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look^[a] into the tomb; ¹² 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. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,^[b] "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ 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.'" ¹⁸ 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.

Sermon

John VanDer Lar commenting on Easter Sunday, says "It's easy to make the resurrection an intellectual exercise that focuses on details, doubts and questions of evidence. Equally it is easy to make the resurrection little more than a touch stone of belief – of intellectual agreement – that qualifies us to call ourselves Christians. But, as the readings today show, the resurrection is far less about what goes on in our minds than it is about what goes on in our lives".

How then do we approach Easter Sunday and resurrection and new life in the midst of a global pandemic when sickness and death, pain and fear, isolation and social distancing is on the front page, in our face, in our community and our families.

It's hard to get excited about Easter 2020. Where is the bursting of life, rising hope, the good news that turns Friday into Good Friday and Sunday Resurrection Sunday?

Covid-19 challenges us physically and socially. It also challenges our faith and spirituality when orthodox faith believes in resurrection, when faith's core value is new life out of the old.

How, as believers, are we to open our lives to this resurrection life of Christ, to allow God's life to break in and free us from all the little deaths that seek to control our lives?

As people who have experienced life, faith life, new life, born again life of Nicodemus,

living water life of the woman at the well, insight life of the blind man, and new life of Lazarus, we are called, by the Risen Christ, to be those who bring that life into all the corners and parts of our world where death is at work.

To face the ongoing question of how resurrection can be experienced for our diseased planet, how resurrection can come to those who live in dire poverty, or who have been trafficked as sex slaves or those without homes and live in camps and detention centres and on our streets.

One thing is certain, God's resurrection life will only come to those people as we – the people of the resurrection – carry it into the world, as did Mary when she left the garden tomb and announced to the disciples that she had seen the risen Jesus.

It is crucial that Easter Sunday is not allowed to become just an intellectual, academic exercise, up here in the head.

The strange thing about resurrection is that death is not so much opposed or destroyed, but transformed and absorbed into life. God suffers in Jesus, his pain and death, human pain and human death and takes on all that we are and all that we are not, and absorbs that and transforms, no..... resurrects it into something new

And so, as we celebrate resurrection this Sunday, we are also called to live resurrection in our own lives. resurrection in ways that bring life - in death, among death, lives of hope, love, compassion, kindness, to challenge injustices, and evils, to face death – physically and socially and say “you do not have the last say!”

This Easter, this time in our history, in our contemporary lives, where are the signs of resurrection life. Sure they are hard to spot. But I believe they are there. They are there in how we, the body of Christ act in the world.

That Easter dawn was a surprise to all. No one expected anything but death and suffering and fear.

It's easy for resurrection to be an intellectual exercise, but much harder to live it, for it to be something that goes on in our lives, each day.

We are in this story of new life and surprises as we are like Mary called to go back into the world of chaos, pain and fear, to the place that hasn't changed, to go back with the message, a story, a way of life, a living proclamation, that what we face, internally, externally, physically and socially is not the end.

It is not the final chapter. Why? Because God is never the end, but always about beginning and renewal, of restoration, of redemption.

God is active in resurrecting. God is active in love and hope and peace and kindness. God is life. God is about taking something and turning it completely on its head, saying, go, live, tell, share, love. Because that is what I've been telling you for so long.

In all the darkness of Easter, all the suffering, pain and fear, in the face of death and decay, of opposition and violence, in all the doubt, in all the betrayal, in all the lies and in all the disbelief, something new sprouts, something new emerges.

Something that says you cannot keep God, you cannot keep love, buried in a tomb, because the way of love, the very Word of God will break out- like a virus – and start changing our way – one by one, and we may never be the same again!

Don't believe me, believe in the one who said, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the way, and come, follow me, come follow my way.

Mary came to the tomb in fear and trembling, sad and full of grief. Mary knew death, fear, aloneness, separation, isolation and distance.

Mary left that garden tomb as a messenger of good news.

To live a resurrection life is to live the way of resurrection.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!

News and notices. How are you going?

Remember to contact each other, find new ways to stay in connection, support those who are finding things tough. We take this time to acknowledge the offerings that have been made that support the work of God's church in this place and beyond

Prayers for others

Brooding God, who hovers over the waters,
Remain with us, for we are stranded on tiny islands of fear.
Draw a circle around our solitude,
hold us back from bringing danger to ourselves and others.
And where touch can no longer reach,
let love spin light across dark waters,
a thread of sweetness for small songs we might sing.

God who speaks the word 'Beloved'
Keep watch on those who give voice to care,
Who speak trenchant truths,
explaining, instructing and chiding without blame.
Let us hear the warmth and strength in voices that stir response
and nourish hope in thoughtful action.
Give us ears to listen without fear.

Risen Jesus – we bring to you our concern and compassion for all those who share with us in this time of uncertainty and isolation.

We remember especially those who are sorrowing because of untimely or sudden death – those who care for the sick, the dying and the bereaved: nurses and doctors and health workers, aid workers, priests and pastors, counsellors, friends and family and funeral directors.

Risen Jesus set us free to join you in the life of the world.

We stay paralysed before our fears. We are held fast by events – both current and long past – and we remain silent holding your truth within us.

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Soar we now where Christ has led,
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ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

WORDS OF MISSION and COMMISSION

We shall not seek God among the dead.
We shall be bearers of hope among the living.
We shall carry the stories of our hurts and losses
that we may tell the story of healing and resurrection.

Live then, in the promise of Resurrection Life!
Live according to the story of the One:
Creator, Redeemer and Spirit,
Knowing that the scattered community of God is placed in the world, for the sake of the world.

Glory to God and Peace to All.
ALLELUIA AMEN.