**“Edging into Easter”**

**Scripture with Reflections Based on John 20:1–16, 18a**

**and an Order for Easter Communion**

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**Production Notes and Suggestions**

*This service was designed to begin with the first reading and reflection before the opening hymn to mirror the sense of uncertainty in John’s opening scene. You may decide to set it within your own Order of Service differently. However, try to save the most joyful of Easter hymns until after the last section. “Edging into Easter” is intended to lead us from uncertainty to discovery to joyful hope, so place the hymns with that order in mind.*

*It will be most effective if one reader reads the sections of scripture and someone else reads the reflections. It features the Acclamation found in hymn #523 of the Book of Praise as a sung response to each section of the reflection, unannounced after each unison prayer. If singing the response doesn’t fit your context, alter the prayer to have people speak it together.*

First Reading**: John 20:1–2 (NRSV)**

## Reflection: Edging into Easter – Part One

In the opening scene, it is still dark.

The gospel writers do not rush us into Easter.

Mary Magdalene sees that the stone blocking Jesus’ tomb has been rolled away.

Something has happened. This she knows for sure.

But what it is, she cannot yet say.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Easter opens with a puzzle.

With Jesus’ friends & followers, we must edge our way toward the truth.

Truth is something precious.

God will pull back the curtains on truth for us

but often we must wait for truth to emerge.

The most important truth for our lives begins in mystery.

On Easter morning while it is still dark,

we wait for the truth of our future to become clear.

**All: God of mystery, we have made it here on Easter morning, seeking to find you.**

**We *know* the Easter story, yet we do not always *understand* what is happening.**

**When your truth is not yet clear to us, give us courage to keep seeking that truth.**

**So may our hearts learn to sing your Easter promise:**

**Hymn #523:** Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

*(If you are adding other Scriptures for the day, or a time with children, insert them in the order here. If you need another hymn before the next section, try hymn #256 – Now the green blade rises.)*

**Second Reading: John 20:3–10**

**Reflection: Edging into Easter – Part Two**

Just like a pair of athletes on the same team,

Peter and John compete with each other to find out the truth first.

At least we assume it’s John with Peter.

This storyteller does like puzzles.

This “other” disciple runs the fastest.

He wins the race—

as if it’s a race for disciples to show our loyalty to Jesus.

But he cannot find the courage to do anything more than peek into the empty tomb.

Do we blame him?

Few of us look into a grave eagerly.

Then Peter arrives, a little out of breath, and edges past John.

Is he impatient?

Determined not to lose his courage?

Eager to show up his friend?

Peter enters the tomb; sees the bandages rolled up, tossed aside.

Then John has to squeeze in beside him.

He doesn’t want Peter to know something he doesn’t know.

“And he saw and believed;

for as yet they did not understand that Jesus must rise from the dead.”

The puzzle continues.

What *did* John *believe* if they did not understand that Jesus would rise from the dead?

What we *believe* and what we *understand*

are not exactly the same thing when it comes to Easter.

There will always be a tension between what we believe and what we can understand.

What we believe, we take on trust because we cannot fully explain it.

We cannot fully explain Easter morning.

So there will always be a mystery to draw us to the empty tomb one more time.

And we have to take it on trust that the world, our world, was changed that day.

We have to take it on trust that God’s love is afoot in our lives once again.

**All:** **God of mystery, we confess that faith doesn’t come easy every Easter.**

**We know the Easter story, but we do not understand *how* things happened**

**as that day dawned. Help us trust the faith of those who first believed.**

**Ease our doubts and fill our hearts with faith that blossoms in hope as we sing:**

**Hymn #523:** Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

**Third Reading: John 20:11–16, 18a**

**Reflection: Edging into Easter – Part Three**

The picture of Mary weeping in the garden is very moving.

All of us who have been touched by grief can feel what she’s going through—

the sorrow, the confusion, the feeling of despair.

She sees Jesus and she doesn’t even recognize him.

So often grief *is* disorienting.

We can’t remember things; a familiar name just disappears from our lips.

In her grief and uncertainty, Mary starts to argue with the gardener.

Her grief edges into anger that the body of her beloved Jesus has disappeared.

“Sir, tell me where you’ve laid him. I will take him away.”

She’s saying, “He belongs to me. I want him back.”

Mary’s grief and loss echo at the heart of John’s Easter story.

She speaks of our grief and loss,

and of our anxiety,

which can edge into anger when we’re at a loss for words.

When we’re sad or anxious, when it’s hard to see any joy on the horizon,

we can only edge into Easter.

In one sense, this year we are edging into Easter.

The weeks and months of pandemic drag on.

Threats from new variants are alarming

and we can’t be sure just what hope we can put in vaccines.

Some feel anxious because further lockdowns cause their own kinds of loss and grief.

None of us is sure what next Easter will look like.

But in truth, we never know exactly what comes next.

And so we have to take it on trust that Easter will come again,

with its puzzles and its promise.

We have to take it on trust that our future is in God’s hands.

We have to take on trust that the love which changed the world that first Easter

will continue to shape and reshape our world.

For just at the most anxious moment in the story, Jesus speaks.

Mary.

He calls her name.

How do you hear it?

*(Note to the Reader: Try to say the name differently each time!)*

 *(Mary – a little disappointed in tone)* Mary, don’t you recognize me?

*(Mary – quite tender in tone)* Mary, don’t be so sad. I’m here with you.

*(Mary – with a little challenge in the tone)* Come on, Mary, it’s me, Jesus.

We could hear that name said in a dozen different ways,

depending how we have edged into this Easter morning.

Hear that name spoken as a gift—

a gift of Jesus’ love for Mary,

a gift of their deep friendship.

For friendship embraces all those anxious moments we are facing just now.

Friendship will bring tenderness and challenge into our lives

to call out the best in us.

The Risen Christ edges into our lives in friendship

to receive us as we are in our grief and uncertainty, in our hope and commitment,

to call out the best in us.

To assure us we can take it on trust that Christ *is* risen

And that we can face our future unafraid.

It is in the hands of the Risen Lord.

So now imagine yourself in that garden.

Listen as Jesus speaks your name…

How will he say it?

With a smile? In tenderness? With a challenge?

Jesus speaks our names to reassure us, to encourage us, to dare us to be his witnesses.

Hear him speak your name today in friendship

as we proclaim with Mary:

I have seen the Lord!

**All:** **God of mystery, we *know* the Easter story and we are *glad* to be caught up in its joy. You call each of us by name because you love us.**

**So may we live our love for you gladly as we sing with Easter joy:**

**Hymn #523:** Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

**An Order of Service for Easter Sunday Communion**

**Invitation to the Offering**

On this Easter day, we come to the table to remember our future with our Risen Lord.

We remember Jesus declared that people will come

from east and west and north and south to sit at table in God’s kingdom.

Remember—the Risen Christ has spread this joyful feast for you.

The gifts we bring to his table are for all those who love him

and for all who want to love him more.

Taste and see that God is good.

**Suggested Communion Hymn #243:** Jesus Christ is risen today

**The Story of the Table**

When we gather at this table, we remember how this meal began,

how it has promised hope and new life to Jesus’ friends from one generation to the next.

Often, when we gather, we remember bread and wine shared around a table

one solemn, holy night.

Today we remember another day, the first Easter day,

when Jesus appeared to friends along a road.

But they were too sad and tired to recognize him.

So he came to the table with them,

he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

*Then* their eyes were opened;

*then* they recognised him.

As we break this bread and share this cup in the name of our Risen Lord,

may our eyes be opened to recognize Jesus present with us—here and now.

And as Jesus offered thanks for the gifts of the earth,

let us also bless God for what we are about receive.

**The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

*(Numbers for sung responses are provided. These may be spoken if preferred. Provide the written text for the service.)*

With hearts lifted high, O God, we offer our gifts to you on this joyful Easter Day,

for we have seen your grace and power,

rolling away the stone of sorrow and despair,

bursting from the tomb in the gift of new life.

And so we join our voices with all creatures high and low,

with all the saints who have gone before us,

and with those who sit beside us and all around us,

to raise the song of your unending goodness and greatness:

**The Sanctus #623:** Holy, holy, holy

O Christ, our Risen Lord, receive our praise and joy this day.

Your resurrection promises that there are new possibilities for us and our weary world.

Even when we falter in discouragement at the daily news,

even if we hesitate at the good news that your great love has come back to embrace us,

you do not abandon us.

You call us by name to assure us of your love

and invite us to join you now as your friends.

You have spread this table for us with gifts of bread and wine

so that we may taste your love and grace, meant to bless and heal us.

And so we proclaim our faith and our hope as we sing:

**The Acclamation #523:** Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Spirit of Life, rising in us and around us this Easter Day,

breathe upon us now and upon this bread and wine.

So may they become for us Christ’s body and life blood,

to nourish us with the gift of new life in Christ.

As this bread and wine become a part of us,

may we become a part of you, Lord Jesus,

and your work of healing this hurting world.

Help us trust that all things will work together for good

through the power of love that raised you from the dead,

the power of the great love we share in your name.

So we are bold to pray for our daily bread as you taught us:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**The Fraction & Elevation**

Jesus took bread, broke it and said,

This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me.

He also took the cup of wine and said,

This cup is the new relationship with God

made possible because of my death. Drink from it, all of you.

**Sharing the Elements**

The One who was sealed in the tomb has been raised from death for our sake

and is present with us in the Bread of Life.

The Christ whose wounded hands bear the marks of our sorrow and pain

now reaches out to us in the Cup of Joy.

**Prayer after Communion**

Lord Jesus Christ,

you have nourished us with bread broken and wine poured out

to strengthen us for our journey.

And you have put your Spirit into our hands to take your peace with us wherever we go.

You rise in us in spite of all that challenges us

within our own lives and in the world you love.

You rise in us to mend our broken hearts and put us back together again

so that we can befriend the world,

and make peace for all God’s people in your name.

Send us out as your witnesses to share your peace and your grace

with hope and humility

for your sake. Amen.

**Suggested Hymn #410:** Joyful, joyful we adore you