

Easter Worship

By the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie



Welcome:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

All: He is Risen Indeed!

Leader: It is good to join together to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord.

Hymn: #243 Jesus Christ is Risen Today

Opening Prayer:

Leader 1: Lord God, early in the morning, when the world was young,
You made life in all its beauty and terror; you gave birth to all we
know.

Hallowed be Your name.

All: Hallowed be Your name.

Leader 2: Early in the morning, when the world least expected it,
a newborn child crying in a cradle announced that you had come
among us that you were one of us.

Hallowed be Your name.

All: Hallowed be Your name.

Leader 1: Early in the morning, surrounded by respectable liars,
religious leaders, anxious statesmen and silent friends,
You accepted the penalty for doing good, for being God:
You shouldered and suffered the cross.

Hallowed be your name.

All: Hallowed be Your name.

Leader 2: Early in the morning, a voice in a guarded graveyard
and footsteps in the dew proved that you had risen,
that you had come back to those and for those
who had forgotten, denied and destroyed you.

Hallowed be Your name.

All: Hallowed be Your name.

Leader 1: This day, in the multi-coloured company
of Your church on earth and in heaven,
we celebrate Your creation, Your life, Your death and resurrection,
Your interest in us; so we pray

**All: Lord, bring new life, where we are worn and tired;
new love, where we have turned hard-hearted;
forgiveness, where we feel hurt and where we have wounded;
and the joy and freedom of Your Holy Spirit, where we are prisoners
of ourselves.**

Silence

Leader 2: To all and to each, on their community and on their friends,
where regret is real,
Jesus pronounces His pardon and grants us the right to begin again.
Thanks be to God!

All: Amen.¹

Scripture

John 20:1-18

¹Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.

⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,

⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

¹⁰Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb

¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹ *Stages on the Way: Worship Resources for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.* Copyright © 1997 Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community. GIA Publications, Inc., exclusive North American Distributor. pp. 182-183.

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Message: “Instructions for Living a Life”

I have felt myself drawn to re-visit the poems of Mary Oliver since her death a few years ago. If you’re not familiar with her work, I would encourage you to seek her out – she has penned many, many poems, and they are wonderful. One of her works, entitled “*Sometimes*”, includes a section entitled “Instructions for living a life” – The title itself is really important – it’s only five words, but they speak volumes.

I want you to remember that, because in a minute we’ll re-visit five words spoken by another woman, many years ago, that are also important, and instructive for us as followers of Jesus Christ, in our day and time.

So here are Mary Oliver’s instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Perhaps these “Instructions for living a life” are words for our time that speak to you. They certainly speak to me. They make me pause, and wonder, when have I not paid attention to what is happening all around me? When have I not allowed myself to be astonished? And when have I failed to tell about it.

I have no idea what Mary Oliver was thinking when she penned her poem, but I do know that she was a Christian – a follower of Christ. And knowing the little I do about her life – because, really, when can we say we know about someone else’s life? – I suspect that she would be able to relate to Mary Magdalene – and her life, as someone who lived outside of the boundaries of ‘polite’ society at times

and as one who found affirmation and acceptance in the company of her Lord and Saviour.

And I do think that Jesus would be nodding in appreciation of her suggestion of how we should live our lives –

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Mary Magdalene, over 2000 years ago, used those “instructions for living a life”, and hers were powerful, powerful words, that give us some direction on how we should approach every day of our lives. Preachers are always looking for something profound to say – particularly on Easter morning, as if the empty tomb on that first Easter morning isn’t profound enough...

I’m not sure that I could preach a better sermon than Mary Magdalene did on that first Easter morning.

Mary doesn’t say, “Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.” No – she says, using those sparse five words, “I have seen the Lord.” If you ask me, there is nothing more profound than that...

So, I guess what I would encourage you to think about this morning is when, and where have you seen the Lord...

I can tell you that at this time of the year, I see the power of the Lord every day. Some people call it spring. When I look into my back yard, and see the crocuses breaking through the cold earth, stretching towards new life, the bright green of the buds on the trees, it’s nothing short of miraculous, and transformative. That looks like resurrection to me.

All around us, if we are willing to see, there are signs of resurrection, and new life. We just need to allow our eyes and our spirits to see them.

I see resurrection when those who have lived in a broken relationship decide to give it one more chance, to put the past aside, and determine that they will forgive and begin again.

I see resurrection when we decide we will put ourselves in the place of the other, to really work to experience how the other might feel, and to change the way we behave as we learn from that.

I see resurrection, when I see how the Indigenous peoples of this world encourage us to pay attention to the earth, and the miraculous way the earth regenerates, and brings forth new life.

I see the resurrection in the Creator's work—in the "green" that pushes through scorched ground, in the rivers that renew, in the species that revive—when we practise relationship instead of domination.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel once said, "We teach children how to measure, how to weigh. We fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe. The sense of the sublime, the sign of the inward greatness of the human soul and something which is potentially given to all..., is now a rare gift." This gift of paying attention, of noticing the incredible gifts that surround us every day needs to be nurtured. And we are the ones who are called to nurture that in our children and young people – and yes, in those of us who only remember what it's like to be children. When we can recognize the holy is to be found in the ordinary, each and every day, and when we can discern that, we are given a gift from God.

I certainly realize that there are times when it's difficult to see the Lord, to see resurrection, to be astonished. We live in scary times, times when it seems easier to surrender to fear and to fall victim to anxiety. But opening ourselves to the power of the resurrection means we will choose to move beyond our more familiar self of fear and anxiety and with faith embrace a new self, with the courage to face the world and boldly proclaim, "Jesus lives!" and "I have seen the Lord!"

And so, I would ask each one of you this day: where do you see the Lord? Where do you see new life? In your families, in our communities, in our county. In our hurting world. Where do we recognize Easter moments? Because evidence of the resurrection is all around us. But too often we are too busy to notice; too often we are too hesitant to tell about it.

So, when you do experience those moments, go and tell. Tell us. Let's tell each other. This Easter day, I would encourage each and every one of you to:

*Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.*

Amen.

Hymn: #260 Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord

Offering Prayer:

God of all creation, You are the author and giver of all good gifts in our lives. Today we are once again filled with amazement as we realize that you gave your beloved Son, Jesus, so we would know the depth of your love for us. We are so grateful and ask that you would use the gifts we return to you this day, so that all may know, and be amazed, by your boundless love for the world. Amen.

Prayers for the World:

God of love, and grace and new life,
there is not a moment when we do not belong to you.
Thank you for the reminders of your steadfast love that surround us each day.
Lord of all hopefulness, we pray for the world you created and love so much.
We place in your tender and gentle hands the brokenness we have helped to create:
conflict between peoples and nations,
degradation of the earth, water and air.
Use us and the gifts you have given to us to bring light and hope to those trapped in darkness and despair.

Lord, we pray for those you have placed in positions of power in this world. May their hearts be guided by humility and compassion for those in their care, particularly the oppressed and vulnerable. May self-interest give way to care for all of creation. May we all recognize the responsibility we have to care for one another.

On this day of resurrection, as our hearts are filled with the joy and exuberance of Easter, we ask that our hope in you will never fade but continue to grow and spread through this world.

We pray particularly for those who are suffering from illness of body, mind or spirit;

We pray for those who grieve, for those who experience conflict within their family, community, and even their church.

We pray for those who live under the crushing burden of poverty; for refugees, fleeing for their very lives, just as Jesus and his family once did;

We pray for prisoners, and oppressed people everywhere.

Where violence and fear reign, Lord, send your peace.

We ask that you would continue to expand our capacity to love each other, as tenderly as you do.

Give us the grace and courage to love, even, and most particularly those we find it difficult to love.

In doing so, may we recognize you in everyone we meet, in every place we go.

As we go from this place, remind us that we are Easter people. Open our eyes to your presence, that we all may follow your instructions for living our lives; may we all “Pay attention; be astonished and tell about it” to everyone we meet.

This we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray as we now say together, “Our Father...” (The Lord’s Prayer)

Easter Affirmation of Faith (ALL):

Hope is stronger than memory.

Salvation is stronger than sin.

Forgiveness is stronger than bitterness.

Reconciliation is stronger than hatred.

The open tomb is stronger than the bloodied cross.

The Risen Lord is stronger than the dead Jesus.

We are the Easter people

We are the people of hope.

We are the people of the empty tomb,
the Risen Lord,

the new life in Christ. Amen.

Hymn: #249 The Day of Resurrection

Benediction:

Life is short, and there is not much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk the way with us.

So, make haste to love,

Be swift to be kind.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The love of God,

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

be with you, and those you love, this day and forevermore. Amen.

Written by the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie, minister of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Orillia, Ontario.
