



WEEKLY STUDY March 31-April 6, 2024

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday we join our voices with Christians world-wide proclaiming, "Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!"

Our Easter Sunday scripture is: John 20:1-18 (NRSV)

"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 towards 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' head, but 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. As she 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 round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' 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, 'Rabboni' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not eat 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."

1) Easter is meant to be a sensory delight. It is the message that changes our concepts of life and death. So in Christian Churches all around the world, there are things we see, things we hear, in some services things we smell, and things we taste and certainly things we feel. It brings in the elements of new life, new growth, new beginnings. All of the smells, the tastes, the sights, the sounds, the touches, the feelings are to help us remember and join in the proclamation, "Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed. Hallelujah!"

Question: Reflect on Easter Sunday worship. What were the things that awakened your senses and helped you join in the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection?

2) Every year we read the story of Easter morning in scripture. I sometimes think, "There cannot possibly be anything new to consider on Easter." But Pastor Sam once ore led us to consider what – for me at least – was a new aspect: the grave cloths. She pointed out to us that when Jesus raised Lazarus, Lazarus emerged from the grave with the cloths still wrapped around his body and over his head. Jesus directed those around him. to help him be freed of the cloths. And Sam reminded us that through this act, we are directed to step up and help loose the cloths of death holding others. But with Jesus resurrection something entirely different happened. Jesus emerged free of the cloths that had been woven around his body. It was a visual that Death has no hold on God. God is always the one who unbinds us from death.

Question: Had you considered the message contained in the images of the death cloths? What struck you most in these images? What "cloths of death" are binding you today?

3) A second image Pastor Sam asked us to consider was the one when Mary encounters Jesus. She does not recognize him until he calls her name. In the moment, when Mary hears Jesus say her name, Mary recognizes him. In the same way, we are assured that God knows us, and calls to us personally. Sam said to us, "Jesus makes resurrection personal. Jesus calls your name." Joy is restored.

Question: Have you had such an encounter with God? Have you had a time time in your life when you were overcome with sorrow, or fear, or loneliness when God's assurance led you back into the light? In what ways are you experiencing the joy of resurrection this Easter?

4) Pastor Sam told us 2 things are required as we contemplate resurrection: 1) Claiming and 2) Sharing. She said the work of resurrection is not complete until it is shared. Sam quoted from a Lent devotion written by Tom Lee. A lay member of west End UMC and delegate to the upcoming General Conference of the UMC). His devotion centered on witnessing. Most of us think of witnessing as public speaking. Mr. Lee quoted research that shows fear of public speaking to be one of the most common fears. This makes it hard and scary for many adults to do. But he says in his devotion: "We need not witness with public speaking. We can embrace, we can sit with, we can ask, we can share, we can write, we can draw, we can dance." He concluded with, "All we need do is tell the story – however we tell it."

Question: What are your ways of witnessing this Easter to God's comfort, power, care, and love?

Prayer: (Collect for Easter, *The New Zealand Prayer Book*)

Living Christ, you are risen from the dead!

Love reigns!

You are life stronger than death;

Raise our eyes to see you

As the new day dawns;

For the glory of your holy name.

Amen

Weekly Challenge: In the Christian Church, we celebrate the season of Easter until Pentecost Sunday. This year, make Easter more than a day. Start each day by saying "Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed" to yourself or to others. Look for Easter joy each day and every night remind yourself where you have claimed joy that day.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)