



WEEKLY STUDY April 9-15, 2023

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

Easter

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, 'Rabbouni'" (which means Teacher). 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.' 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 experience Easter Joy?

2) For many of us, one of the special parts of an Easter service is the abundance of music. This Sunday we experienced voices, trumpet, timpani, piano, organ. The music filled us with praise and celebration as we recognized the miracle of resurrection. Our music was a mixture of old with new. We, like many, many congregations had as one of our opening hymns, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." It was written by Charles Wesley (brother of John Wesley – founders of the Methodist Movement), and sung for the first time 1739 in a deserted iron foundry that became the first Wesleyan Chapel in London, England. The tune, the words, and the echoing Alleluia (which was added by some editor at a later time) makes it one of our most memorable Easter hymns. We then had as our sermon response, "Miracle in the Works" - published in 2021 – stirring our spirits as we listened to Debra and the choir sing.

Question: Which Easter hymns or songs are favorites for you? Why?

3) Easter is our great reminder of death and of resurrection. Pastor Sam led us through Sunday's scripture – describing the reactions of Peter, John, and Mary. She told us each of those disciples of Jesus came to the tomb dealing with their own experience of Jesus' death. So each responded differently. She reminded us that each of us today comes to the tomb dealing with OUR own experiences of death. Sam then said, "What encourages me today in our story is that each person walking through their own experience of death has their own personal experience of resurrection."

Question: What experiences with death do you bring with you this Easter? What helps you experience resurrection?

4) Pastor Sam reminded us of the miracles we have studied during the season of Lent:
A water to wine story that invites us to travel from emptiness to overflow.
A feeding of 5000 on a hillside that invites us to let go instead of hold on so that everyone has enough
A walking on water encounter that delivers us from fear and grants us courage.
A healing of a blind man that asks us to open our spiritual eyes and stay awake and alert.
A healing of Jesus' friend Lazarus that reminds us to help untie and unbind one another from the grip of death.

Because of the recent events in Nashville, Pastor Sam said those have led her to another miracle she sees with Jesus resurrection. She cited time and time again where Jesus – faced with violence – did not retaliate. This led her to state, “Resurrection is not just victory over death; it is victory over **violent** death. It is a force for life that responds to violence with nonviolence. Violence does not have the final word.”

Question: What in that message – at this time – inspires you?

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.

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