

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ Sunday April 4, 2021 ◆

Easter Service

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH
congregational responses are in **boldface type**

◆ **GATHERING** ◆

PRELUDE – I Danced in the Morning
piano solo

* OPENING HYMN – *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*

VU 155

*1 Jesus Christ is risen today, hallelujah!
our triumphant holy day, hallelujah!
who did once, upon the cross, hallelujah!
suffer to redeem our loss, hallelujah!*

*2 Hymns of praise then let us sing, hallelujah!
unto Christ, our heavenly King, hallelujah!
who endured the cross and grave, hallelujah!
sinners to redeem and save, hallelujah!*

*3 But the pains which he endured, hallelujah!
our salvation have procured, hallelujah!
now above the sky he's King, hallelujah!
where the angels ever sing, hallelujah!*

*4 Sing we to our God above, hallelujah!
praise eternal as God's love, hallelujah!
praise our God, ye heavenly host, hallelujah!
praise the Son and Holy Ghost, hallelujah!*

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE:

One: The Easter Promise is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, from death to life.

All: A promise that we celebrate during this Easter season, a promise graciously extended to each of us by Jesus.

One: This is a grace that, through the Holy Spirit, empowers our community life to new and deeper experiences.

All: We light this Christ candle naming that gracious gift and promise.

....Christ candle is lit.....

HYMN - *The Strife is O'er*

VU 159

*1 The strife is o'er, the battle done,
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun, hallelujah!*

*2 The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions has dispersed:
let shouts of holy joy outburst, hallelujah!*

*3 He closed the ancient gates of hell,
the bars from heaven's high portals fell;
let hymns of praise his triumphs tell, hallelujah!*

*4 On the third morn he rose again,
glorious in majesty to reign;
O let us swell the joyful strain, hallelujah!*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, why do you weep?"

All: Mary wept because all she could see in front of her was death. She had lost her beloved teacher and friend.

One: Jesus says to us, "My people, why do you weep?"

All: Because, so often all we can see in front of us is death. We often lost sight of our path because of the tears and fears.

One: When Mary recognized the Christ, he said, "I am ascending

to my father and your father... to my God and your God!"

All: And so we look for the Christ, in the new life that grows within and without. We remember that death has lost its sting. We celebrate that we are one with the risen Christ – part of the family and household of God.

One: So we come together to worship.

Christ is risen!

All: Christ is risen, indeed!

One: Alleluia!

All: Alleluia, amen!

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

O Holy One – we come, puzzling at your mystery, yet in adoration and wonder.

Creator God, we wonder at your mighty works. O Holy One – we come in quiet breathing. Spirit, we breathe in your gifts with gratitude.

O Holy One – we come in silent movements.

Beloved Christ, we follow you into the quiet space. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

Note: A suggestion for another way to handle Assurance of Forgiveness – Rather than we confess and God sets aside God's wrath and forgives, we begin by being assured that God longs for a loving relationship, and that we acknowledge that Jesus did not come to change God's mind about us, rather Jesus came to change our minds about God.

One: The stone is rolled away – we are released! The tomb is empty – we can be free! Christ is risen – life can be full! Thanks be to God!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (TOGETHER)

Easter takes us by surprise, awakening us to the doubt and despair that have been rooted in our lives. Come to us, O God, like fresh water, softening the soil of a parched and weary land. We confess that the hurts and disappointments harden our hearts, frustrations and failures dry us out. Come to us, God with life-giving power. Free us from resentment, reluctance and reserve. Remind us that in your forgiveness, we are free. Forgiven, may we be forgiving. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A TIME WITH THE CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US
Story: The Empty Tomb

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Margaret Duff

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: Loving God, your word comes to us through the ages and reminds us that, though the details may change, your will is timeless. You call us to be a people whose love knows no bounds and whose service to others overcomes all barriers. Form us by your word, this day. Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Isaiah 25:6-9 –God provides a rich feast

One: On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the

disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

One: The Word of the Lord!

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: A Vision of God's Victory! - Isaiah 25:6-9

Today's passage gives a vision of God's promise of reign being fully realized among us on earth. This idyllic state will only come about after a cleansing judgment, something that we would wish to forego because we prefer suffering and death to end, with no cost to ourselves. Viewed in terms of Easter, we would prefer to arrive at the morning of resurrection without having had to pass through the passion of Good Friday.

God does not often work within our comfort zone. Redemption of the whole earth is held in tension with stubborn human resistance to God's will. But one day God will prepare a rich feast, a royal feast, fitting symbol of the messianic banquet in eternal life. Our desire for a day when tears are wiped away removing us from suffering and death sustains us in our faith and remains, a promise for a life to come.

One day God will restore, redeem and vindicate God's people. The rich banquet is a salivating fulfillment for people who now go hungry; the removal of devastating tears is a welcome balm to those who are hurt through loss, abandonment, rejection, abuse and indifference. The joy of Resurrection morning has been

bought through the means of death; without death, resurrection would not exist.

Death is a natural end point of life, a reality of our finitude; like everything that lives, it all approaches the day of death. Without death, the planet would long ago have ceased because death is part of creation itself. There is both a time to be born, and a time to die. We see death as a symbol of separateness from God, a broken world. Thus, resurrection is God's sign of triumph over the power of death to bring evil and destruction in human life. God's promise is that everything that separates us from God will one day be destroyed.

Finally, it is faithful waiting that is required until that day comes of God's victorious reign. God's promises come to fruition on God's timetable, not ours. Transition from the painful struggle of the valley to the salvation on the mountain is a movement from darkness to light. John of Patmos saw this vision in his Revelation message, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth .. and I heard a voice saying he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Our message of Good News is that God transforms suffering into the promise of salvation and God's promise of forgiveness and redemption brings healing power of hope on earth as in heaven. Amen.

PSALM: 118:1-2, 14-24 - God is my strength

One: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love

endures forever!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of
the LORD does valiantly."

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of
the LORD.

The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me
over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter
through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter
through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become
my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief
cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be
glad in it.

GOSPEL: John 20:1-18 - Jesus' Resurrected appearance to Mary!

One: When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

MUSIC - Hochgelobter Gottessohn

J.S. Bach

Celine Cascanette, mezzo-soprano

Highly-praised Son of God,

let it be not displeasing to You,

that we now, before Your throne,

lay down a petition:

remain our Light,

because the darkness breaks forth.

REFLECTION: Rolling Away Stones! - John 20:1-18

Easter Sunday morning requires us to set aside our conventionally held beliefs that people we love who have died, do not rise again. Jesus' beloved disciple, Mary, visits the tomb in the early morning mist because there is nowhere-else she would rather be, than at the side of her Saviour. She is fully expectant of asking the soldiers to help her roll away the stone.

When she arrives, the stone has already been removed and the body of Jesus was not in its resting place. Confused, and frightened, and thinking that his body had been stolen, she ran to tell the others. Not believing her, they ran to see for themselves. When they had left, not understanding what was taking place, she remained by herself, weeping.

We are powerfully and emotionally, brought into the garden scene that was to follow? Two angels were in the place of Jesus and they asked her why she was weeping. "They have taken away the body of my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him." It was then that she saw Jesus, but did not grasp that it

was him until he spoke gently to her. **“Mary!” “Rabouni!”**
Exultation. An incredulous life-changing, encounter. In the
calling of her name, Jesus is made known.

Loved completely, and held in his gaze, we long for an encounter
with God. We want to be seen for who we are in the depths of
our being, complete with our dreams and our losses. God’s voice
comes to us through the voice of a trusted friend, the innocence of
a small child; the words of a stranger; the silence of our beating
hearts. Jesus, comes to us through the sharing of the bread and
the wine; while the empty tomb and the folded grave clothes,
bring full realization of restored life.

This Easter God of surprises has the power to roll away stones
leading to empty tombs - stones that block the acceptance of all
people as created equals, confronting the evil of racism; stones
that cause shadows and pain, fracturing the possibility of whole
abundant lives; stones that have created broken relationships;
stones that lead to despair of hunger and need; stones that block
and separate us from our natural and intended, relationship with
God.

Rolling away our stones, one chip at a time, allows us to see Jesus
in new illuminating ways, so that we, like Mary, can speak with
confidence from the garden, **“I, too have seen the Lord.”** Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: The Risen Christ startled us when he came into our world.
He startled us when love touched our hearts, when kindness
came through his open heart, and finally when he rose from
the dead. We share our gifts from our abundance so that
others may receive the good works our gifts allow. We

thank you for the generosity of God's love which is graciously given by our people of Melrose. Thank you for your continued support.

OFFERING HYMN – *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*

VU 541

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.*

An Easter Story to Make You Think!

Jeremy was born with a twisted body, a slow mind and a chronic terminal illness that had been slowly killing him all his young life. His parents tried to give him as normal a life as possible and they sent him to elementary school with the other children, in spite of the fact that he was five years older. At age 12, he was only in second grade and very slow at learning. His teacher was becoming very frustrated with him and called the parents to ask them to put him in a special school for children with learning problems. The mother cried and said there isn't a school like that near-by.

The teacher thought about it after her talk and she felt guilty. She prayed to God, "here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared with that poor family! Please help me to be more patient with Jeremy."

From that day on she tried hard to ignore his noises and blank stares. Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about Easter. The teacher told them the story about Jesus and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a plastic egg "Now," she said, "I want you to take

this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows a new life. Do you understand?" "Yes." They responded. The next day they came proudly with their eggs. In one was a flower; in the next was a plastic butterfly; another held a rock with moss on it. The fourth was empty. She presumed it was from Jeremy and obviously he had not understood what he was to do. But then he spoke up, "Ma'am, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" "But your egg is empty, Jeremy". "Yes, he said, but Jesus' tomb was empty too!" When she was able to speak, she said to him, "But do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh yes!" Jeremy exclaimed. "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then his Father raised him up!"

The recess bell went and the teacher cried. Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see 19 eggs on top of his casket - all of them empty.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

One: The tomb is empty, Jesus lives! The world will be a better place when: the abuse and exploitation of children will be unacceptable in every nation, and the wisdom of the elders will be heeded; the peacemakers will find a way to end conflict.

All: In the spirit of the risen Christ, the world will be a better place. Jesus lives. Hope is alive.

One: The tomb is empty, Jesus lives! The world will be a better place when: the neglect and abuse of seniors living alone will be recognized and stopped; mental illness will be as accepted as physical illness; those who have lost a friend will find someone to listen to them.

All: In the spirit of the risen Christ, the suffering will find relief. Jesus lives. Hope is alive!

One: The tomb is empty, Jesus lives! Each one of us will discover

new life. We will rejoice in friends and companions; We will contribute our best talents in all that we do; we will live with disappointment; we will forgive the deepest hurts; we will exercise our creativity; we will become more self-confident; we will develop our dreams into reality; we will speak words of love to those most close to us;

All: in the Spirit of the Risen Christ, nothing is impossible.

Jesus lives. Hope is alive!

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, and all our shut ins, and for all who are still grieving loss of their loved ones.

Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs.

(Quiet reflection)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil;

For thine is the kingdom,

And the power and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN -- *Thine Is the Glory*

VU 173

*1 Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son,*

*endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

*Angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where the body lay.*

*[Refrain:] Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

*2 Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb!
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth:
death hath lost its sting. [Refrain]*

*3 No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of life;
Life is nought without thee:
aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors,
through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above. [Refrain]*

COMMISSIONING

One: Can this Easter event be true? Death has been overcome.

Jesus is alive. Has the faith community been changed?
Community is restored; the disciples are a force for good.
Will this make a difference? The Realm of God has come
within our reach. Is Easter effective for our time? The Risen
Christ calls us to follow and to act for justice and peace in
our day and age. With our love, we proclaim: Christ is risen!
Christ is Risen indeed. Hallelujah! Amen.
Go now in Peace.

MUSIC - Go Now In Peace

BENEDICTION

One: May God keep us in our going out and our coming in,
In our lying down and our rising up,
In our work and in our leisure,
In our laughter, and in our tears.
Until we meet again. Amen.

POSTLUDE - Fuga

J. Nares