



WELCOME TO ALL - Shelly Wilson

CALL TO WORSHIP – from "A Better Resurrection" by Christina Rossetti
read by Patricia Thomas

(Composed in 1857, Rossetti wrote this poem after a failed love relationship as she turned to her spiritual nature in search of solace. It is particularly significant for this time of layered heartache that also has deep strata of hope!)

I have no wit, no words, no tears;

My heart within me like a stone is numbed too much for hopes or fears;

Look right, look left, I dwell alone; I lift mine eyes, but dimm'd with grief--no everlasting hills I see; my life is in the falling leaf. My life is like a faded leaf.

My life is like a faded leaf, my harvest dwindled to a husk:

Truly my life is void and brief and tedious in the barren dusk; my life is like a frozen thing, no bud nor greenness can I see:

Yet, rise it shall, the sap of Spring... rise!

Rise! Rise, O Life, in me! Rise!

SINGING IN EASTER– "Hallelujah Chorus" from "Messiah" by G.F. Handel

(The composition of *Messiah*, the complete 260-page oratorio, began on August 22, 1741, and was composed in just 24 days, when Handel finished the final orchestration on September 14, 1741. When he completed "Hallelujah," he reportedly told his servant, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself seated on His throne, with His company of Angels." The first performance in Dublin, Ireland happened on April 13, 1742. It is particularly appropriate that we sing it this year as the earliest performances of *Messiah* became an Eastertime tradition at the Foundling Hospital in England, the proceeds from the performances used to help the poor, needy, orphaned, widowed, and sick. If you follow the link below, you will experience the 300+ members of the Mormon Tabernacle choir combined with over 2000 voices around the world singing for joy at Life overcoming death!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akb0kD7EHIk>



PRAYER

(by e.e. cummings)

i thank you god for this most amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and of wings
and of the gay great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any – lifted from the no of all nothing –
human merely being doubt unimaginable you?
(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

OPENING HYMN – “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvelGmAUdkQ>

Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia! Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids His rise, Alleluia! Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia! Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia! Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia! Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!



PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

At least in part, this time of isolation reminds us of the deep truth that our stories of sorrow and of joy connect us to each other, body and soul. Truly, we are all in this together.

When you remember your own experiences when you were injured, please remember those who have endured accidents and other illnesses during this time, and are afraid to seek medical help.

When you remember times when illness of body or mind wounded you or one you loved, please remember those who are ill around the world and those who are risking their lives to care for them.

When you remember your own experiences of grief when death broke your heart, remember the families of our beloved who have died--June Smith and Eleanor Rouse from Church of the Isles and from Trinity. Please remember those who have lost loved ones around the world and those who remain in isolation and fear.

When you remember your own happiest days about which you smile when you retell the stories, please remember to seek for the blessings, the beauty, and the courage that are alive in this world.

O Spirit of the Resurrection, May our hearts opened with gratitude for life make us present to those who deeply grieve its passing beyond our eyes and hands. May our experiences of injury and sickness bring us to compassion for those suffering now. May the love we have known cause us to offer our support and blessing to one another. May the times when we have felt the hospitality of others when we were seeking home and safety cause in us a deep compassion for those who are sequestered in their homes or those who have no homes. May the grace we have experienced from you, O Beloved Creator, Healer, and Restorer of Joy, make us instruments of your peace for those most in need and for your beautiful Earth, our Mother and Home to all. Amen.

OFFERING/SPECIAL MUSIC - "I Believe"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOXHvnSeoAo>

Thank you for mailing in your offering or for setting up bank draft. Your local congregation's work continues and even expands while we are the scattered church! Thanks for your support!



SCRIPTURE

Mark 16:1-8

read by Adrian Thomas

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

SERMON

"Easter Mourning"

Shelly Wilson

Mark's Gospel is the perfect Easter story for this year. In the earliest versions, only the 8 verses Adrian read for us are dedicated to the Easter story, ending with a stranger's words: "Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, but he is not here--he has been raised. Now go and give this message to his disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee and you will see him there.' And the women ran from the tomb, terrified." It is a very different Gospel from the glorious, hallelujah, great-gittin' up morning, victorious resurrection stories we read in Matthew, Luke, and John. No Jesus breaking out of the tomb, showing up in the garden or running around talking, eating, ascending on high, blessing people, none of that. We too, are having a very different Easter... mourning...m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g. But like for the Whos in Whoville who knew that Christmas does not come from a store, Easter does not come from our favorite bunnies and eggs and churchy traditions. And we are relearning, especially this year-- what it is true--that the raw material of which faith stories are made is the stuff we cobble together out of the broken clay of our everyday little lives. As much as some of us might miss it this year, the gospel writer Mark doesn't dress it up for Easter Sunday. He writes with commas, not periods. No satisfactory ending... Rather like my life, maybe like yours.

So, as you ponder Mark's version of Easter, I invite you to ponder these two little modern stories, too, if you will. They are simple experiences, and I share them because I suspect that they are Easter stories, too, stories of what, at least in part, life after death and life in the midst of death, may mean.



Our bodies and souls on some level, scientists tell us, remember every death, every trauma, and each one reminds us of every other, large and small. One year, on the anniversary of her father's passing, I asked my daughter Julianna what sense she made of the Easter resurrection stories. And here is what she taught me. She said that, for her, resurrection truth often works this way. "Inside me, life and death are together," she said. "I learn how to live with them every day. My heart is broken all apart and all scarred up, but it heals a little, all the time. And I carry them both all the time, through all the moments of my life--dead and alive. I know them inside me...I run in a 5-K, and celebrate my great race...and my dad is dead. I graduate from college and am blessed to get a good job, and my dad is dead. One day, will be my wedding day and my dad is dead. I carry it all along with me, all the time."

Once, somebody wrote, Easter is about this: we tell the stories of how we experience resurrection in a world where everybody dies. That Mark's Gospel isn't full of magic and easy answers is really okay with me, this year, more than ever. For Easter in my experience is the messy mixture that Julianna described--we carry it along with us, all the time as we grow our spiritual capacity within the cycles of life and death and life after death, learning how to experience resurrection in a world where everybody dies. Mark's Easter story is a mixture of these realities, the women have come to do a courageous thing--though they in their context are powerless about the great evil that has been done in the capital punishment of their beloved friend. So like us in our time as we witness not only the suffering, but also experience the great evil and injustices being done all around us. Though the women can change nothing in the events that already have occurred, they and we may exercise our choices regarding how we respond to all of it, and their response is to return to their faith and to offer a final loving act for the body of Christ. But, even when they do that, still there is an empty tomb and no easy answers and they run away in fear, hearing the echo in their heads that Christ has gone ahead of them. Whatever that may mean.

That's how it ends up sometimes. Easter mourning. There is lots of running and lots of fear in their story, sometimes in ours, too. But it is often the case, too, that even seeds sown in fear and watered with our tears can be the fertile compost where the tiny green shoots of new life may push courageously through. And we may find ourselves in a resurrection story, who knew... but not in a Cadbury chocolate bunny or dramatic Hollywood Easter movie kind of way, but in ways that I suspect we often know them--life after the death of our beloved, or our life



as usual or our expectations. And we awaken to our new life that requires us to carry the scars and to go ahead to the next right thing, not knowing what we will find, but hearing the words again, "Do not be afraid, the One has gone ahead of you. And there you will see." A great theologian wrote that every Sunday is a little Easter," but actually, every **day** is a little Easter, filled up with empty tombs we are free to run away from when we are ready, and like cocoons, ripe with the possibilities.

And here is the second modern Easter story. About three years ago, in the same year that I lost my dad, I graduated from nursing school. One afternoon, the week after he died, I was at the hospital doing a clinical rotation when one of my patients glanced at my name badge and said, "Oh, a Wilson, huh? I bet you live out in Vilas, and from the looks of you, you must be a-kin to old Shelton Wilson!" When I smiled and acknowledged proudly that indeed he was my dad, the man said, grinning, "Shelton was a character! We went to school together at the old Appalachian High School and I sure will miss him." Then he paused and looked at me thoughtfully, and added, "But, then again, as long as **you** keep a-going, he'll never be gone from around here. You know that?" I'd not thought of it that way, but then I knew that what he'd told me was an Easter story, too. For the Scriptures and our life experience affirm the truth that it is precisely in the cave of the heart, at the grave of our former life, behind the stone blocking the door, where we may recall the whisper that as long as we and those after us are keeping on, Jesus and all the saints are never gone from around here. Flesh and fur and feathers and fins and blossoms and birds and trees and toads, in the helpers and the healers and the ones who serve, the mysterious One is always alive around here--not caught in a death trap, but is risen. So, the apostle Paul said it in the 4th chapter of 2 Corinthians just like Julianna said it to me so many centuries later: "we live our lives, always bearing within the dying of Jesus so that the life also is made manifest in our bodies."

God indeed works in mysterious and wonderful ways. We carry them within--life and death and life anew. We dwell in caves of the heart, tombs of death, with stones blocking our way, and stones that get pushed aside. What the crucifixion meant to the first disciples and what our own individual little deaths and the big global deaths and abuse of Earth and each other mean to us, are emptiness, fleeing in fear, ending, the destruction of hope. But, that is not where the story ends, for even the running carries us forward and toward the unfolding. The life we seek is beyond the doors slammed shut by fear. Love has gone ahead of us, the



Easter story teaches, and there we will see, just as we've been promised. It is a courageous step, to run away from the tomb when it is time, and to move toward new Life. Remember we are people of faith and not of fear. Happy Easter!

PRAYER FRANCISCAN BENEDICTION

May God bless you with Discomfort ...

at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with Anger ...

at Injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with Tears ...

to shed for those who suffer from sickness, pain, exhaustion, and grief
so that your heart will be opened in compassion and will find new ways to sojourn in
kindness alongside them, even while we are apart.

And may God bless you with enough Foolishness ...

to believe that you can make a difference in this world,
so that you can do

what others claim cannot be done. And remember, Easter. Is. Always. Happening. **Amen.**

HYMN "In the Bulb There is a Flower"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDpByzZqeQ4>

In the bulb there is a flower; In the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: Butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter There's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, Something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, Seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness Bringing hope to you and me.

From the past will come the future; What it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, Something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; In our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; In our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; At the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, Something God alone can see.



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