

Celebration of the Resurrection: Easter

April 24 2011

*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*

Opening Doors

Prelude

Call to Worship

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge
above perfect description.

**Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.**

Death was not the last word.

**God raised Jesus from death,
turning sorrow into joy,
despair into hope.**

We sing of Jesus raised from the dead.
We sing hallelujah.

Introit *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*

EASTER HYMN **VU 155**

Easter Acclamation

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Alleluia!

Welcome to Worship and Announcements

Centering Prayer and the Prayer of Jesus

Hymn *And on This Path*

GOOD **MV 8**

Opening Minds

Scripture Reading John 20:1-18

Hymn *Behold, Behold, I Make All Things New*

BELL **MV 115**

Learning Together

Hymn *Who is There on This Easter Morning*

FRAGRANCE **VU 176**

Opening Hearts

Prayer of Gratitude

Litany

We place our hope in God.

**We sing of a life beyond life
and a future good beyond imagining:
a new heaven and a new earth,
the end of sorrow, pain, and tears,
Christ's return and life with God,
the making new of all things.**

We yearn for the coming of that future,
even while participating in eternal life now

**Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.**

Hymn *Joy Comes with the Dawn*

DAWN **VU 166**

Sermon Open Up!

Litany

We find God made known in Jesus of Nazareth,
and so we sing of God the Christ, the Holy One embodied.

**The Risen Christ lives today,
present to us and the source of our hope.**

In response to who Jesus was

and to all he did and taught,

to his life, death, and resurrection,

and to his continuing presence with us through the

Spirit,

we celebrate him as

the Word made flesh,

the one in whom God and humanity are perfectly

joined,

the transformation of our lives,

the Christ.

**Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.**

Scripture Reading Psalm 118 parts One, Two, Three **VU p. 837**

Hymn *This is the Day that God Has Made* EASTER JOY **VU 175**

Litany

We sing of a Church
seeking to continue the story of Jesus
by embodying Christ's presence in the world.

**We are called together by Christ,
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
loving what he loved,
living what he taught,
striving to be faithful servants of God
in our time and place.**

We sing of God's mission.

Our Offering for God's Work in the World

Prayer of Concern in two voices

Opening Doors

Litany

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being.

As children of the Timeless One,
our time-bound lives will find completion
in the all-embracing Creator.

**In the meantime, we embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life.**

**Grateful for God's loving action,
we cannot keep from singing.
Creating and seeking relationship,
in awe and trust,
we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love.
Amen.**

Hymn *Christ Is Alive*

TRURO VU 158

Commissioning and Benediction

Recessional *And on This Path*

GOOD MV 8



**And on this path,
the gates of holiness are open wide.**

**A note about the litanies, prayers, scripture, Learning Together and meditation
for this Easter service**

The litanies are taken from *A Song Of Faith*, a timely and contextual statement of faith of the United Church. A remit on making this statement as well as “We Are Not Alone” into official United Church doctrine takes place next winter.

The hymns are marked for Voices United (VU) and More Voices (MV).

Centering Prayer

We call upon all we hold most sacred to bless this holy day:

We call upon our minds and our hearts,
the work of our hands and the loves of our homes.

We call upon our abilities and our pleasures,
our energy to do the right thing, and our wisdom to know what that is.

We call upon the roads we traveled to get here,
the wind in the trees and the sunshine on the grass.

We call upon the hearts we cherish and the loves we have lost.

We call upon the mistakes we have overcome and the forgiveness we have known.

We call upon the beauty of this sacred space
and the open doors through which we have been welcomed.

Most of all, we call on the Christ, the One who is home to our hearts and direction to our feet.

Calling on him, God who knows all our prayers, we center ourselves on You.

May we gather energy to hold this transforming world in our prayer
and be held in the transforming grace of your love.

May the power of the resurrection take hold of our spirits and open up our hearts.

Our Father ...

Prayer of Gratitude

God, at the wonder of resurrection we pray:

Bringing to mind the chorus of voices singing this morning
we acknowledge that you are praised through all ages
in languages and melodies and cultures far beyond our own;

Bringing to mind the power of the northern rivers, the depth of river beds carved over millennia
we acknowledge that you come to us in all circumstances,
pushing against the bedrock of our resistance;

Bringing to mind the brilliance of spring light after a long deep winter
we acknowledge that your peace is vaster than we can imagine;

Bringing to mind the wind over the mountains
we acknowledge that you exceed the volume of hope we can carry in our souls;

Bringing to mind the open tomb
we acknowledge that you are more powerful than death.

Thank you.

Amen and Amen.

Prayer of Concern in two voices (please read the paragraph beginning “All our fears” slowly)

Let us pray:

God of wonder, we pray for one another, friend and neighbour.

God of peace, we pray for all people, kin and stranger.

God of grace, we pray for situations we do not understand, disturbing or hopeful.

God of life, we pray for the world, threatened by human greed and yet springing to life.

God of wonder, peace, grace and life, it is as though we all stumble out of the tomb,
As though we come out of the shadow, rubbing our eyes,
As though mystery unveils before us, and takes our breath away:
And we see, right before our very eyes:

All our loss and sorrow is turning back
Turning back from the edge of death
Death is not the last word
The last word is from the heart
From the heart comes pain
Pain carried by movement, like waves on the ocean
Waves on the ocean rise and fall
Rising and falling we trip again
Trip again and fall on our face
Fall flat on your face
Face the truth
Truth comes from the heart
Heart of the Word
The Word.
Amen.

Scripture

John 20:1–18

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, not 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.

Learning Together

Invite the children forward. Bring the photograph from the front of the order of worship.
Ask about the path, the open gate, and the bower of trees. Ask whether Jesus' friend Mary Magdalene might have seen a similar sight when she stood up in the doorway of the tomb, looking out. Remind the children that God loves this world and wants it to be healthy, loving and cared for. Ask whether a person might walk through the gate in that picture with confidence the way Mary ran to the disciples.

And pray:

God who loves us, thank you for the wonder of this world. Thank you for your love that inspires us to care for one another. Thank you for the Easter story that tells us you are always with us, just as Jesus was with Mary Magdalene. Amen.

Sermon Open Up!

*God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge
above perfect description.*

Mystery.

pause

An open tomb and a few linen cloths: mystery.

pause

Weeping and looking into the open tomb, Mary sees angels: mystery.

pause

The gardener speaks – or she supposes it is the gardener – and he calls her by her name: mystery.

pause

At the open door of the tomb, he calls her by name. She opens her tear-rimmed eyes. She opens her heart. "I have seen the Lord," she announces to the disciples, and opens up a mystery that will rock the world till kingdom come.

pause

*God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge
above perfect description.*

This morning we sing about mystery, we pray, we listen and we open up our hearts to a reality that is better than truth, deeper than love, brighter than possibility. We open ourselves to a Holy Presence that defies the very things that make us tremble in fear. Death, sorrow, loneliness, hurt, anxiety, betrayal: they all fade out of colour in the presence of Christ. The breath of his quiet voice, calling our names, dispels the fears and we are free to open up to the wonder before us.

Catherine MacLean, who wrote this service, tells flying out of Norman Wells, flying back home to Yellowknife. It was early autumn and the afternoons were still long. The aircraft rose up, up, up to altitude and banked south and east toward home. Below was the Deh Cho, the great river, also called the MacKenzie, curving and graceful. To the west was the cascading light of the setting sun: rich colours flowed across the land. With three seats all to herself on the 737, there was lots of space to draw a breath. The long colours of the sunset spilled across the land like a great river itself. "Open up!" the light seemed to say. "Open up!" the land, the great Sahtu, seemed to say.

“Open up!” the river seemed to echo. Mystery: gracious as the river, wide as the land, brilliant as the sun that sets way into the autumn evening.

When has the beauty of the land called you to “open up”?

pause

She tells another story, this time from Iqaluit. It was March and although the sun was high and the midday light was bright, it was cold. Bone chilling cold, the kind you can't take your mitts of in for fear of losing your fingers, the kind of cold when you can feel your intake of breath all the way down into your lungs, the kind of cold that crystallizes in memory. She was walking from downtown to the airport, not a long walk, but did I say that it was cold? Hurrying to race the temperature, she arrived at the entrance and reached for the handle of the door. Pulling, pulling, pulling, nothing happened. She pulled again. Nothing. “Open up!” she called. “Open up!” Just at that moment a figure appeared in the glass, smiling. Calmly, he opened the door. *Inward*. He pointed gently at the sign in the glass: “Push to Open”.

When has fear called you to cry “Open up!”?

pause

One more story: This time a kitchen table, where two people sit in the shadow of the night. A light on the stove illumines the tears, silver traces watery on a cheek. The other's eyes are red and his chin trembles. “Open up,” he whispers, barely audible. “Open up. Forgive me.”

When has love called to you “open up”?

pause

And there is the living room, curtains pulled wide into the nighttime aurora borealis, where curtains of green, purple and red move across the sky. Indoors people are tired; faces show strain. Yet a peace rests in the room. A family and a close church friend sit around a hospital bed. The words echo through everyone's mind: “His body is failing.” A quiet word from the bed: “Open up” he whispers.

When has the completion of a life here with you called you to “open up”?

pause

Word comes of a great wall of water, rivers bursting banks and oceans raging through city streets: desperate. Hearts cringe and spirits wail. “Open up,” we say to ourselves; “open up,” we say to one another. Fatigued by more disaster, we cannot cope – yet we hear the call, “open up.”

When has disaster called you to “open up”?

pause

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.

These stories become pale at the telling of the great Story. They bend a knee in reverence. They offer their small glory in the face of great Glory. They break into song. They melt into colour, then into profile like elms against the dusk, then they begin to sparkle like sunrise. They sound a note like a string on a guitar, and then the great Story bursts into music like a well-rehearsed orchestra.

For in the great Story, he calls Mary Magdalene by name. At the open door of the tomb, she opens her tear-rimmed eyes. She opens her heart.

This Mystery calls your name, too.

pause

Beauty, fear, love: they are all occasions when the great Story can begin to speak. On the other side of the closed door a voice calls “open up!” At the tomb of despair there is a door open toward hope. Through the gloom, the shadow lifts to reveal a garden, a promise. Through the open gate you see a paved path, a bower of trees, a destination in the light, out of sight but straight ahead.

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.

At the open door of the tomb, he calls her by name. She opens her tear-rimmed eyes. She opens her heart. “I have seen the Lord,” she announces to the disciples, and opens up a mystery that will rock the world till kingdom come.

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