



This is April 18, 2021...It is the Third Sunday of Easter

On behalf of our family of faith at Community United Church of Christ,
Medford, WI, welcome to this time of worship!

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey,
you are welcome here!”

Call to Worship:

Friends, Christ draws close to us. His presence is not announced
so much by bright light or angelic song, as it is by the gradual recognition
of something holy woven into our daily lives: simple as salt,
common as bread and unexpected as a treasure buried in a field!
Such is the presence of Christ with us on each ordinary day.

Let us praise God with joy!

-Diane Karay, All Seasons of Mercy, Westminster Press, 1987

Prayer of Confession:

With all the signs of new life in Christ around us, we still cling
to our old ways. Let us confess our sins to God and to one another.

In your mercy restore us to newness of life. Empower us to witness, with courage,
to the presence of Jesus Christ among us. Amen.

Assurance of Grace and Forgiveness:

Take heart, God’s Spirit empowers us to move away from the ways of death to the ways of new life.
Forgive one another as we have been forgiven. Rely on God’s help. Amen Alleluia!

Passing of the Peace of Christ

Let’s turn to someone near us now or call someone on the phone later and say, “Peace be with you.”

Hymn: “Christ Arose” #294, Worship and Rejoice

Verse 1: Low in the grave He lay- Jesus my Saviour, waiting the coming day- Jesus my Lord.

**Chorus: Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!**

Verse 2: Vainly they watch his bed- Jesus my Saviour, vainly they seal the dead- Jesus my Lord. **Refrain.**

Verse 3: Death cannot keep his prey- Jesus my Saviour, he tore the bars away- Jesus my Lord. **Refrain.**

Song #27783, © Words and Music: Robert Lowry, Public Domain
CCLI License # 11131534 and Streaming License #20947364

Scott K will read the Scripture today:

Luke 24:36-48 Common English Bible “Jesus appears to the disciples”

36 While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 37 They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

38 He said to them, “Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It’s really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones like you see I have.” 40 As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, “Do you have anything to eat?”

42 They gave him a piece of baked fish. 43 Taking it, he ate it in front of them.

44 Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. 46 He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

Thank you, Scott! **My Message today is entitled, Message: “These Things”**

Pray with me: You are with us, risen Jesus, and you speak to us through everyone who comes to us for a shoulder to cry on, or to ask for a helping hand. You are with us, Creator God, speaking to us through wind and snow and sunshine. You are with us, Holy Comforter, speaking to us when we are afraid to speak difficult truths; and when we are blessed with small surprises! We continue to listen and watch, loving God. So be it and thanks again and again!

“I believe in the sun even when it is not shining and I believe in love, even when there’s no one there.

And I believe in God, even when He is silent.

I believe through any trial, there is always a way but, sometimes in this suffering and hopeless despair my heart cries for shelter, to know someone’s there. But a voice rises within me, saying hold on my child, I’ll give you strength, I’ll give you hope. Just stay a little while.

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining and I believe in love, even when there’s no one there.

And I believe in God, even when He is silent.

I believe through any trial there is always a way.

May there someday be sunshine. May there someday be happiness.

May there someday be love. May there someday be peace.”

—Written by an unknown person during WW2, on the wall of a cellar, in the Cologne concentration camp.

These things we, too, believe!

Look back a few weeks. If the meteorologists would have predicted that “Everything is possible!” we may not have believed it. We now know for sure that there has been rain, sun, wind, snow, more rain, and some hail. This very minute, it is as if it didn’t happen. The cold of winter is leaving again and is being replaced by spring. We count on it every year. We have proof that spring follows winter and we believe in it.

On Saturday, April 17th, the North West Association Annual meeting will take place on Zoom. Five of us from Community UCC, will gather with our siblings in faith from around the NorthWest quadrant of the WI Conference of the United Church of Christ. The NWA is the largest of the WI Conference Associations, land-wise...but, in all of this land there are only 60 congregations. The guest speakers, Rev. Dave Ostendorf and Prof. Paul Lasley, have chosen the topic “Opening Roads Ahead, Small and Rural Church Leadership in the Aftermath of the Pandemic.” Without even having heard what they have to say, it is my guess that it will also be about believing: how local churches *have turned* from what “has been” to “what is now and can be.” Let me know if you would like to watch the recording of the meeting if you miss it.

How much does a witness have to tell us before we finally agree to believe what they have to say? The story of the resurrection of Jesus draws us in once a year, reminding us that we are believers because of the testimony of First Century witnesses and the Gospel writers who had *believing* fresh on their minds. They each put into words what happened in the days following the death of Jesus. Each description of the Resurrection story is not exactly alike. Pick up your Bibles this week, find the fascinating last pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and read them for yourself.

Just when the disciples thought that their mission might be over, God had something more to say. On this evening of the Resurrection Day, when Jesus appeared to them, he didn’t start explaining the mechanics of resurrection, nor did he tell them where he had been since Friday. Instead, Jesus taught and commissioned. He opened the scriptures to them and told them that they are the reliable, credible witnesses of all that God has done. They know it well and they have seen it.

Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay writes this commentary about the passage from the Gospel of Luke that you just heard or that you have read. *"We enter the story to find that Jesus has shown up with the gift of peace after the worst has happened. We hear Jesus challenge fears and doubts by offering reassurance of his tangible presence in their midst...and he freely displays the marks of the trauma he endured. Then Jesus gives us the disciples the opportunity to extend hospitality. Just as the dying Jesus was thirsty, the Risen Christ is hungry... The One who laid the table on Maundy Thursday needs a bite to eat on Easter evening.*

*God has not been satisfied by completing this work; the Holy One continues to reside in the human condition. Still, the resurrection has transformed even this moment: This act of serving Jesus a meal may have been as humbling for the disciples as having him wash their feet. The One who **transformed death** still conforms to the routine requirements of life. Breath, food, and water remain necessary and holy in the resurrected life and for resurrection people.*

Jesus, who began his earthly ministry by embarking on a fast when he comes out of the baptismal waters of the Jordan River, begins the resolution of his earthly ministry by breaking bread with his companions after coming out of the tomb."

Eleven disciples, frightened and confused, gathered to discuss, in private, their next move. Life seemed to be closing in on them. How would they continue their three-year-old ministry? How would they keep the message of Jesus Christ alive when they had been betrayed by *one of their own*; when some had denied their relationship with Jesus; when the crowds were turning against *them*; and when their teacher and friend had been executed? Any further spreading of his ideas would almost certainly mean their own deaths.

Into this hopeless scene, walks someone they never expected to see: the risen Christ. They were so startled that they feared they were seeing a ghost, but it was Jesus, in the flesh. As the story was told over and over again, it wasn't always received well. It is not believed by some today. Thomas was not **the only** doubter throughout the ages. The disciples were not always *welcomed in and* were not always treated kindly. Some, in fact, were killed for their beliefs.

The story of the Resurrection challenges us, as well, to keep on believing and continues to transform us.

It is in our grief...like these days of missing loved ones who have passed away; in our hopelessness...like these days when violence and injustice occur again and again; in our feelings of helplessness...like when we are not allowed to visit our loved ones in the hospital or in care facilities; or in our yearning...like when we experience another holiday without family nearby...that the message of Resurrection comes to us as the peace and joyful hope that we need.

We are descended from a great cloud of witnesses who believe in Jesus: his life, his teachings, his death, his resurrection, and his promises. My friends, keeping the message alive begins with us right here, right now... not to be confined *within the walls* of the city, or any one home, or any building. The disciples were told not to expect the world to *come to Jerusalem* to hear what they had to say, but to go out into the world. Jesus never commanded the whole world to go to church. He commanded his followers to go into the world.

If the disciples hadn't believed quite enough to do that, Christianity would have been just another sect that stayed within the walls of Jerusalem. Thus, we are not, in our strongest love and or in our most pious devotion, called to make the Gospel a relic.

We dare not bury God's Good News at the bottom of a cedar chest in the back corner of the attic until next year. The message of our faith is not dead, not gone...it is alive. Right here and right now, we are still part of the "after Easter" stories that are still happening.

We may believe in many ideas and theories, believe in the sun, believe in love, believe in our teachers and mentors, believe in our neighbors and our dogs. The proof is in the seeing. Our faith takes on a different kind of trust in the unseen, a certain amount of seeking for ourselves, studying, experiencing an epiphany or two, a few surprises and perhaps a miracle; a still small voice inside, a lone daffodil pushing through the soil, a

recovery, a survival, safety after a storm, living through a pandemic...followed by a new way of life and new possibilities.

We, along with the disciples are resurrection people who are the believers of these things! Whether we are in our homes, in assisted living, in the hospital, at work or at school; inside the church building or outside of its walls; however we act or re-act, whatever we say or do mirrors what we believe.

Just as we *“believe in the sun even when it is not shining and believe in love, even when there’s no one there.* Just as we *“believe in God, even when He seems to be silent,”* be assured that these Resurrection stories are real and that Jesus is with us even today. Never stop believing these things. Amen.

Take a deep breath... and let it out

Time for Prayer: Let’s spend a few moments in silent prayer. Let us pray – Gracious and loving God, we thank you for all the blessings that you have given to sustain us in our daily walk with you.

We pray, O God for your Church. Enable us to be your hands and feet...caring for the poor, forgiving often, fighting for the powerless, sharing our resources, embracing diversity, protecting your creation...

We pray, O God, for the World, that the nations may turn to serving one another peacefully. Whisper words of peace into the ears of those who seek to do us harm. Keep safe those who serve our country at home and in foreign lands; and those who are preparing to come home.

We pray O Lord, for young people - that they may find new ways to witness to the joy of life in Christ where they are each day. We lift to you those who will soon be confirmed that their faith may continue to grow.

We pray, O Lord, for our families and our friends - and for all those whom you have placed upon our hearts this day, especially: Jim S, Kay, Sandy K, Mike K, Susan S, Maggie M, Tom N, Dan, Albert, Darrell P, Phil G, Christine D, Cathy S, Rick G, Teresa G, Doug, Angie, Shelly B, Mike G-P, Matt L, Audrey, Nancy, Rob M. Bless, heal, and strengthen all who are recovering from surgery, those who await surgery, those going through rehabilitation and medical testing. We pray for church leaders and congregations as they make decisions to do the right things to help keep one another safe.

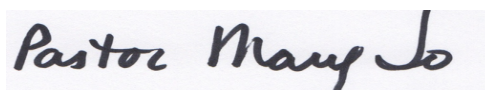
Hear now the prayers we hold in our hearts...we ask for whatever may be **best for us** as we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior and in his words: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

A Time of Intention and Thanks:

Oh God of endings and new beginnings, we offer you our time, talents and treasure, knowing that you have more for us to do than we have yet imagined! Bless us and our gifts in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Benediction: Go now. Let our intent be this: to live the days of our lives as though Jesus were not GONE. This hours’ worship is over, let our service begin again and again.

Peace be with you and be safe!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Mary Jo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It is positioned on a light purple rectangular background.

**You will find this *recorded service* at uccmedford.org
Click on “media.” 715-351-0450**