

Howick Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday Service 12th April, 2020 @ Home

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen Indeed!

Hallelujah!

On this day we celebrate resurrection.

The power of life has overcome the power of death.

Hallelujah!

The light of love has shattered the darkness of fear.

Hallelujah!

The way of peace has prevailed against the violence of empire.

Hallelujah! We come to worship the God whose resurrection power

lives on in the Christ we serve.

Hallelujah!

SONG: Lord I lift your name on high

Lord I lift your name on high
 Lord I love to sing your praises
 I'm so glad you are in my life
 I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth, to show the way
 From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay
 From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky
 Lord I lift your name on high

OPENING PRAYER

God of Promise and God of Hope,
 who through your great mercy
 have granted us new birth
 through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
 we praise your wonderful name!
 God of Glory and God of Might
 who through your great power
 have granted us new strength

to endure all things through faith in Christ our risen King,
we praise your wonderful name!

*We repeat our Easter shouts of
surprise and joy
again and again,
for news of your victory
over powers of death and evil
is news so startling
so amazing
so different from the news that bombards us day by day.*

Beyond our comprehension
You startle us again and again
with resurrection Life,
bringing grace and hope and joy.

*You, in your risen power,
are shaping all our days,
and so we praise you,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Amen.

KIDS TIME AND BIRTHDAYS

Hello to any boys and girls who are reading, listening to or watching this!

I hope you are having a special morning remembering how Jesus came back to life again! It is so cool eh!

Some of you might have had an Easter egg! I hope when you do that it reminds you of new life breaking out of a shell! And I hope you enjoy the chocolate too!

Ally is going to read us the story about this from the Jesus Story book bible.

Today we also celebrate everyone who had a birthday or anniversary this week. We give thanks to God for your life amongst us! You have made this world so much better for so many!

PRAYER

Dear God

Thank you for this very special day when we remember that Jesus came back to life.

Thank you that it reminds us that even though life can be tough, you will always be greater than the toughest times.

*May each Easter egg remind us of new life and that you love us.
 Help us to love other people and do kind things.
 Thank you that you love us and that you are always with us.
 Amen.*

What do we say each week? **“God loves us and we are special!”**

SONG: In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
 He is my light, my strength, my song
 This Cornerstone, this solid ground
 Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
 What heights of love, what depths of peace
 When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
 My Comforter, my All in All
 Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
 Fullness of God in helpless babe
 This gift of love and righteousness
 Scorned by the ones He came to save
 'Til on that cross as Jesus died
 The lamb of God was crucified
 For every sin on Him was laid
 Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
 Light of the world by darkness slain
 Then bursting forth in glorious Day
 Up from the grave He rose again
 And as He stands in victory
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
 For I am His and He is mine
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
 This is the power of Christ in me
 From life's first cry to final breath
 Jesus commands my destiny
 No power of hell, no scheme of man
 Can ever pluck me from His hand
 Till He returns or calls me home
 Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

READINGS

John 20:1-18 (NIV)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a

loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

SERMON – “It started in a Garden”

It began in a garden.

In the first book of the bible, Genesis, God creates the universe, the earth, and human beings. Made in his image, to be in relationship with him; to be caretakers of the earth.

God places them in a garden paradise called Eden.

However, these first people choose to live outside of how God made them to live, and they lose their place in the garden. Death enters the picture and paradise is lost.

Evil, decay, disease, death enter the human story. A perfect world becomes fractured.

At first it seems as if all is lost. However, God is on the move. God has a plan to restore it all again.

The human story will be a long one, but at the heart of it something else will be going on. God will be at work in the world to make it one day perfect.

Abraham.

As part of this plan, God chooses a man named Abraham, and through him and his people God will shine a light for all the world to see him. Through them all people will be blessed.

Early on, God asks what we would call a strange and awful request of Abraham. To sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering. God pulls the plug at the last moment, affirming Abraham’s willingness, and also making it clear that he is unlike other gods and their requests. Another sacrifice is made instead.

And so begins the movement of this people. Who will walk through good and difficult times.

At one time in their history, they find themselves in Egypt as honoured guests, but as the years roll on and their number grew, they eventually would become slaves in Egypt.

God hears their cry for deliverance, and through a man named Moses, God delivers them from Egypt in the great Exodus. This deliverance of God from the bondage of slavery would become a key part of their story; one that they would remember every year at a festival called Passover.

They would go on to find their identity in an encounter with God at a mountain called Sinai. They would walk through the desert for many years, they would go on to find prosperity as a nation, and struggle as a nation, eventually spending time in exile. They would be faithful to God, and unfaithful as well. And so the pattern of the Garden of Eden continued.

But a hope always remained that God would continue his work of renewal in the world.

The prophets of this people spoke of a suffering servant, a firstborn child among God's firstborn nation Israel, who would take upon himself the burden not only of Israel's exile, but the exile of all humanity.

And at a time in their story where they were living under Roman oppression, God made his master move.

God becomes a human

He took on human form, and lived with us.

This is who Jesus Christ is. God in human form – fully God and fully human.

This is what we celebrated 4 months ago at Christmas time.

That in the midst of oppressive Roman Rule, and overbearing religious leadership, God plonks himself right in the middle of it.

Being God, he could have been born in a palace, to royal earthly parents.

Instead he does pretty much the opposite.

He chooses a poor young couple, about to be married.

He's born in a small town called Bethlehem, surrounded by lower class workers, and pagans from far away lands. It's all a bit strange really. God becomes a vulnerable baby, and places himself among persecuted people from the middle east.

And yet, he grows up and tells this persecuted people that there is a greater force at work in the world.

A force greater than the Kingdom of Rome, and greater than the practice of religion led by the religious leaders – A force called the Kingdom of God – where God's way of life is lived on earth as it was always meant to be.

And in this kingdom, the blind can see, and the paralysed can walk, and sinners will be forgiven, and outcasts are welcome, and even creation itself is no longer set against people.

This is how Jesus lived. Through his teaching, and his miracles – he said God’s Kingdom – God’s way of doing things is happening here and now, and one day it will come in all its fullness and there will be no more evil, disease, decay or death. This was God’s great plan of restoring the world again.

Yet, the religious leaders hated him for this message. They hated that he challenged their religious control – that he challenged them to stop making religion so oppressive!

Two days ago we remembered how corrupt religious leaders colluded with corrupt political powers to destroy this man.

And so, at the same time that Abrahams people were celebrating Passover, remembering their Exodus from Egypt, the final scene of Jesus work on earth unfolds.

Jesus took the ritual remembrance of that night and turned it to himself.

He’s knows he’s about to be arrested, put on trial, and then hung on a cross to die. He knows where this is headed.

For Jesus, his coming death is about a new Exodus. Betrayed by a friend, a victim of injustice and cruelty at the hands of religion in collusion with empire, God’s Son chooses the path of a lamb.

In the first exodus, a lamb’s blood was placed on the doorposts of the house for the salvation of the Israelites who lived there. In the new exodus, Jesus’ blood is about something bigger.

The apostle Paul describes Jesus as ‘the firstborn,’ but not the firstborn of a single household. Not the representative of a people suffering in Egypt. Paul describes Jesus as “the firstborn over all creation.’

The blood of this lamb is about something far bigger. Jesus is the representative of the entire human family. His blood covers the entire created order. Jesus is saving everyone and everything.

Jesus is leading all of creation out of the Egypt of violence, sin and death. All that was lost back at the garden is being redeemed in the act of this firstborn son.

This is what Jesus death was about.

So the Romans and religious leaders savagely destroyed him, and thought they had won.

He was buried in a tomb in a garden near where he had been executed.

“That’s it”, they said. The movement is over. His disciples have disbanded. No more Jesus movement.

But it’s not over! And that’s where we find ourselves today.

At the Garden Tomb

Today we read John's account of the empty tomb.

He tells us that Mary saw Jesus after his resurrection but did not realize it was him.

Jesus asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

"Thinking he was the gardener, she said..."

Take note of that line "thinking he was the gardener". Biblical scholars believe it has special significance.

Jewish writers like John did things like the all the time in their writings. They record what seem to be random details, yet in these details we find all sorts of multiple layers of meaning.

There are even methods to help decipher all the hidden meaning in a text.

One is called the principle of first mention. Whenever you come across a significant word in a passage, find out where this word first appears in the Bible.

John does this in his gospel. The first mention of the word love is in 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son".

We then discover that love is first mentioned in Genesis 22 when God Tells Abraham to take "your son, our only son, Isaac, whom you love" and offer him as a sacrifice.

John is doing something intentional in his gospel: He wants his readers to see a connection between Abraham and his son, and God and God's son. John's readers who knew the Torah would have seen the parallels right away.

Back to the empty tomb and Mary's inability to recognize Jesus. She mistakes him for a gardener. Where is the first mention of a garden in the Bible?

Genesis 2, the story of God placing the first people in a ...garden. And what happens to this garden and these people? They choose to live outside of how God made them to live, and they lose their place in the garden. Death enters the picture and paradise is lost.

John tells us that Jesus is buried in a garden tomb. And Jesus is mistaken for a gardener. Something else is going on here.

Could it be that there is a connection between the curse of the Garden of Eden, and Jesus rising from the dead, defeating the curse.... in a garden.

There is a new Adam on the scene, and he is reversing the curse of death by conquering it. As one writer put it, "it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. And he's doing it in a garden. He's reclaiming creation. He's entering into it and restoring it and renewing God's plans for the world.

Jesus is God's way of refusing to give up on his dream for the world.

And so Mary recognizes the risen Jesus she has encountered. Soon the other disciples will too.

And they will never be the same.

The promise of return, and the completion of the mission.

The Risen Jesus would eventually return to heaven, but he said that he would return one day, and complete the work of restoration of the world.

And so we read at the end of the bible

Rev 21:1-5 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

This is where it is all headed.

And so, there are movement of us in the world today, who dare to believe that there is something at work in the universe.

A force that is greater the evil, pain, and suffering we see on the news today, or we read about from times such as the Roman rule.

The force we believe is the life of God.

The God who came to live on earth as Jesus.

The God who corrupt roman and religious rule tried to destroy, but couldn't.

I believe the tomb was empty.

I believe that history is headed somewhere, and I have put my trust in this crazy idea that love is the greatest force in the world, and that one day this love will conquer all.

May the hope, peace and life of the resurrected Christ be with you all!

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We now take time to pray for our world, our country, our local community and our homes.

God on this Holy Resurrection Sunday

We pray that the hope of your resurrection power would be known to those who suffering around the world and in our communities at this time.

We remember those who are ill with the Coronavirus, or other sicknesses.

Those who are afraid.

Those who are living in desperate situations.

Victims of abuse and injustice.

The poor, the homeless, the forgotten.

Our friends and family, who we name now silently in our hearts or out loud.

May hope, strength and courage be known to them

May loving action assist them.

And may we be ready to offer practical out workings of love and support.

Thank you for all those who are serving this world of need.

Strengthen, encourage and sustain them also we pray

In the name of Jesus who taught us to pray together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN: Amazing Grace – My Chains are gone

Amazing grace
 How sweet the sound
 That saved a wretch like me
 I once was lost, but now I'm found
 Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
 And grace my fears relieved
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed

*My chains are gone
 I've been set free
 My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
 And like a flood His mercy rains
 Unending love, Amazing grace*

The Lord has promised good to me
 His word my hope secures
 He will my shield and portion be
 As long as life endures

When we've been there 10,000 years
 Bright shining as the sun
 We've no less days, to sing God's praise
 Than when we first begun

CLOSING BLESSING

May the God of peace,
 who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus,
 provide us with every good thing we need
 in order to do his will;
 and the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 be with us now and forever.

Amen.