**WORSHIP LITURGY: EASTER 2a Macedon Ranges Partnership 19th April 2020**

We continue our Easter journey, encountering the Risen one in so many surprising ways. Such encounters can be life transforming. Our eyes are opened, our hearts softened and we are encouraged to step onward in love and grace.

You may like to follow our service on our video. You can find it on our Worship Services page on our website or on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/V6k5qS8X9xw>.

Our service invites you to read the scriptures, pause, meditate and pray. Allow the stories told there to lead you. Our readings are: Acts 2:14a, 22 – 32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1:3 – 9 and John 20:19 – 31. We focus on the story from John’s Gospel in our video.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**: (Based on a Prayer by Thom Shuman: Worship in a Time of Pandemic 2020)

We are still isolated,

still feeling like we have been

left alone in a shadowed place,

but this is the day of the Lord when:

hope tiptoes us awake;

light guides us through the shadows.

We are keeping a safe distance from others,

we are quarantining ourselves,

we are not gathering as God's people,

but this is the day the Lord:

planting joy in our winter hearts;

drowning out despair’s cries with laughter.

This is a time of uncertainty and fear,

we wonder what today will bring,

we worry about the coming tomorrow,

but this is the day the Lord has made

the day grace does cartwheels in graveyards;

resurrection wonder outshines the brightest sun;

an empty tomb fills us with good news

and Jesus’ appearance to the gathered disciples & Thomas

fills us with amazement and joy.

**PRAYER:** (Prayer for Easter 2: John 20: 19-31) (Based on a prayer written by Rev Abi, and posted on Rev Abi’s Long and Winding Road blog. http://vicarofwadley.blogspot.ca/ )

Lord,

We find ourselves behind the locked doors of our isolation

just as the disciples were behind closed doors.

We too are afraid, perhaps for a different reason than theirs.

But we too need the breath of the Holy Spirit to take away our fears

so that we can one day come out from behind these locked doors better people.

Lord, we are like Thomas with our questions and our doubts.

We sometimes need to see in order to believe,

we need you in order to have faith.

Lord, we too need the peace you bring

because our world is fraught with fear and frustration.

Lord, just as Thomas confessed you are his Lord and his God,

we boldly claim this for our lives.

Lord we thank you for the blessing you have given us,

the ones who believe without seeing.

May the doors of our churches be open again soon

so that all will gather together with great joy  **Amen**

**CALL TO RECONCILIATION:**

We find ourselves living in the shadows these days, afraid to follow the light.

We wander in our backyards, alone looking for God in isolation.

Yet we are still,

we will be again,

we are always Easter people!

Let us speak of our fears of having the resurrection promise wiped away by the virus

of fear and panic, as we pray together:

Unable to gather together, still on this day, as we walk through the shadows of our lives,

we come to you, God who dispels our fears and frustrations.

Too often, we believe our foolishness is hidden from you;

too often, we stand before the open door of hope, wondering if we dare enter.

Uncertain of the good news offered to us, we would rather return to the comfort of our familiar ways rather than trusting in you.

Yet you come, as persistent as Mary at the tomb, as Thomas demanding to see your scars.

Joy of our hearts; open the gates of hope,

so we might walk in the gardens of hope;

you come, to open the gates of grace,

so we might plant peace in the bewilderment of the world;

you come, to open the gates of resurrection,

so we might know our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*Silence is kept*

**ASSURANCE of PARDON:**

This is the day of resurrection and new life.

This is the day God offers us steadfast hope and love which will never end.

We will sing and dance on this day!

We are still, we will be again, we are always Easter people!

We will rejoice and give thanks to the God who saves us. **Amen.**

**REFLECTION** (based on John 20:19 – 31):

I used to think it amusing when seeing somebody showing off their operation scars… until I had my own major operation! What I realized was that my scars speak of my story, my struggles and my journey. Every scar tells a story.

Our reading from John’s Gospel is a beautiful account of Jesus meeting his friends and disciples. Notice how even in this fantastic state of being resurrected, Jesus retains the scars of the cross when he meets the disciples. He shows them off to demonstrate who he is. His scars tell his story and make him recognizable. His scars are an essential part of who he is. His life and story go with him even into his transformed and resurrected state.

I often hear of people speaking of the time to come as being a time when we will be perfected and we be changed. It is almost as if we think that all that has gone before does not matter. We think that in heaven all is left behind and what we go through now is made insignificant.

But this clearly not the case. The resurrected Jesus still bears the scars of his trauma. He is still recognizable. He still refers to the experiences they shared. He continues from where he left them.

If your dream for heaven or the resurrection time is that all our struggles will be wiped away, like we are told will happen to our tears, I have news for you. And it is good.

Yes, like story of Jesus, the good news to us, including the salvation experienced now does not erase scars of our failures and suffering. For to wipe them away is to dishonor our pain.

To retain our scars is to honor our story – your life now matters, your past matters, your future matters. God honors your story. God honors your pain. All you have been through matters to God.

Your tears are not lost. Your struggles to find the right way is valued. Your pain in the tough times is remembered. The scars in you are seen in Jesus. The times you cried out to God feeling alone, is heard in Jesus’ cry on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me...”

The scars of Jesus are not only a reminder of his story and suffering. They are a reminder his story is shared with ours. Our scars, our struggles are part of us and an important part of telling the good news. Our story is who we are and it is what we have to pass on. It is as we share our story with one another, it becomes part of the story of the community. For as you share your story with me (and others), I am made a better person.

Some Christian denominations build into their worship times for people to share their story of life with God. It was called their testimony. In sharing, others were encouraged and understood better the gospel of Jesus. The journey of growing, of mistakes, of needing forgiveness and being forgiven, of struggle and pain and Jesus in the midst of it all declares that God is present. Our journey and life matters to God.

It is not surprising then that it is in the midst of scars and mistakes that Jesus comes and breathes forgiveness, healing, peace and life. The disciples encounter him in the midst of their fear, not courage. And they too are transformed. They receive grace. They are called to share grace.

And so we too are sent; just as Jesus was. When we go, we go in the life of Jesus and likewise breathe grace into scars and the struggles of life. We listen. We forgive. We hold accountable. We breathe life into situations of death and despair. That is our calling. That is the challenge – to be yourself; healed but also a healer.

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS** *(These prayers are adapted from “Brief Prayers for Australians” © B D Prewer, used by permission)*

The world with its multitudinous needs is always with us. So is the Presence of Christ. Let us pray for some of them.

*For those making hard decisions:*

 Most loving God, be with those who this day are on the brink of hard decisions. Save them from being taken in by either false appearances or subtle self-deceit. Give to your indecisive children clear heads, strong wills, and peaceful hearts.

*For those who feel deserted:*

 God of the Christ who was betrayed by one friend and deserted by eleven, we pray for all people who are feeling rejected or forsaken. Let them know that you will never leave them nor forsake them. May they rise up from their deep hurt and find a peace and a purpose that is not dependent on fragile human loyalties, but is grounded in you steadfast love.

*For hospices for the terminally ill:*

 Lord of gentle, wounded hands, please bless and bless again, those hospices where the dying come to watch and wait. Give to all the staff a profound sensitivity, and to each patient a profound serenity. When death comes, may it come like a friend opening a new door.

*For peace in our world:*

 Risen Friend, Prince of peace, please strengthen the hand of all peacemakers. Steer negotiators through the shoals of injustice, prejudice and pride. Build up courage, trust, forgiveness, patience and hopefulness, and teach us how to look into each other’s eyes without fear or self-righteousness.

*For our governments:*

 Living Lord, we pray for our parliaments and our councils across this continent. Keep the minds and hearts of our leaders open to Divine grace that they may be wiser than they know and have the courage to make the hard decisions that will help our nation to reach towards its true mission and destiny among the nations of the world.

*For the church:*

 When we think of that handful of men and women who first gathered to celebrate your resurrection, Lord Jesus, we marvel at your church now in every country of the world.

Whatever our denomination, style of worship, numerical strength, or influence, we pray that we may all keep the faith with integrity and love. Teach us that the closer we draw near to one another the closer we come to you, and the closer we come to you the closer we must be to each other. **Amen**

**WORD OF MISSION & BLESSING:**

Scattered from one another,

we can still go with God into the world.

We will offer healing and hope to all

who wander in the shadows of life.

Separated from one another,

we can still go with Jesus to serve others.

We will listen to the ignored;

we will speak out for the forgotten.

Alone, stuck wherever we live,

we can still join the Spirit in offering steadfast love.

We will hold on to the fearful and frightened, to the lonely and longing,

we will rebuild shattered communities.

(Based on a Prayer by Thom Shuman: Worship in a Time of Pandemic 2020)

And may the love of God,

the peace of Jesus Christ,

and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit

be within you and among you until we meet again. **Amen.**