

HOSANNAH IN THE HIGHEST!

A Homily by the Rev. Janet L. Abel, with Music by Joyful Noise
Preached and Sung at the Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday Morning, April 5, 2015

It Is Easter Sunday; Welcome!

Joyful Noise, our church band, is going to start us off with the song "He Arose":

*"I believe in the resurrection of God's Son,
In the resurrection of God's Son.
I can feel the earth still shaking
Every morning I awaken
To the resurrection of God's Son.*

*"Jesus is our savior, He arose.
Wonderful creator, He arose.
There is no one greater, He arose.
He arose.*

*"Some of them denied Him, He arose.
Then they crucified Him, He arose.
But at the tomb they couldn't find Him.
He arose! He arose!"*

Hear the Call to Worship:

Alleluia! Praise be to God. Christ has risen indeed. We bring our joyful alleluias to this place today. The tomb is empty, and new life hovers in this dawn. We praise God for the mystery and excitement of this life, this day and always. Amen.

And now a "Celtic Alleluia":

*"Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
"Blessed apostles sing praise;
Prophets and martyrs give glory;*

*For your majesty praise the Spirit,
praise the Son.*

*"You are the Christ everlasting.
You are the Christ everlasting.
You have conquered death,
Opened heaven to all believers.*

*"Help those you saved by your blood,
Raise them to life with your martyrs.
You have saved us,
as our ruler raise them up.*

*"If we love one another,
If we love one another,
God will live in us,
and that love will be strong."*

Let Us Pray:

Amazing and surprising God, we come to this mountaintop today to be fed and freed. Show us our divinity in the depths of our being so we can never again be the same. Roll away the stones that keep us from all that is true and right. May we live without pretense and fear, and in the risen Christ, we pray. Amen.

We will now sing "The Lion and the Lamb":

*"Who is he? Who's the mightiest of all?
Who is he? Creation trembles at His call.
Who is He? The lowly sacrifice*

*Who paid a victim's price; His name is
Jesus.*

*"Who is He with the power none can
tame?"*

*Who is He when every foe would fear
His name?*

*Who is He who was humbly led away
To suffer that dark day? His name is
Jesus.*

*"Who is He with the eyes that burn
like fire?"*

*Who is He? Oh, the wonder He
inspires.*

*Who is He? He bore the guilt and
shame*

*For the ones who'd gone astray. His
name is Jesus.*

*"Jesus, from the Father's own right
hand.*

Jesus, Son of God and son of Man.

Jesus, who died and rose again;

Jesus, He's the Lion and the Lamb."

Hear the Word of the Lord as it comes to us from Mark 16 (RSV), this Easter story, verses 1 through 8:

"And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?' And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; for it was very large. And entering the tomb,

they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.' And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Welcome once again, everyone, to this Easter Sunday early morning service. It's snowy, which is a bit of a surprise, and because of that, we are inside instead of outdoors. We thank Joyful Noise for being here, especially those who are ill, and we're glad we're all here today. I'm the Reverend Janet Abel, the Associate Pastor. Our Senior Pastor, Art Suggs, is at the park, instructing people to come here in the sanctuary for this early service. We thank him for that.

Why do we have this early service, which is usually held outside on Easter Sunday morning? There are many reasons for that. I've been going to these early services my whole life, and perhaps you have, as well. You may love this kind of service. That's why you got up early and came here.

So what are all the answers as to why we have this early service on Easter morning, in addition to the regular service at 10:00 a.m.?

It's a tradition. You could say that. This service is short. That could be another answer for some. We are freezing, usually, at this point, and we kind of speed things up. We don't preach a full-length sermon. You don't have to dress up as much. You can wear jeans, boots, a heavy coat. And in New York, you have to wear boots. I found that out the hard way. The first year I did this, I had heels on, and I haven't ever done that again.

Those aren't the real answers, I think. Perhaps you got up early to help connect in a deeper way to spring and Easter because they go together, don't they? We were just saying it looks more like spring inside our sanctuary. Our beautiful flowers, when you look at them, make us think not only of spring but also of Easter and what Easter represents.

What is Easter?

There are many answers to that question. We just heard the Easter story in Mark 16. The women go to the tomb, and they are fully expecting to anoint Jesus' body. They ran out of time. When Jesus was taken down from the cross, that was on Friday, the beginning of the Jewish sabbath. They had to hurry. They had to buy spices, and so they waited until this day. the full Sabbath had to be over by sundown on Saturday.

Sunday morning they go early to the tomb. The stone is rolled away, and there's a young man sitting at the right side of where Jesus was laid. Maybe it was not just a man in white but perhaps something else, and he tells them that Jesus is not there. He is risen

and is going before them in Gallilee, and the women are terrified.

That's Easter. Easter is many things. Maybe it's rising from the ashes of what was. Easter is newness and change. And we know how we feel about change. It's not always completely positive. Change can be hard. But I was thinking about change and what makes it necessary and needed and sometimes welcome.

What Makes Us Embrace Change?

Kind of like this winter. Why is it making us embrace spring? Just last week, there were a couple of sunny days. Yes, up above 60 degrees, and it felt so good, didn't it? Incredibly good. And why? Because we've had a very long, cold, snowy winter. I think we may have broken a record. I don't know if it's really a record, but we've had 90 inches plus of snow, in addition to really frigid temperatures. Lots of ice. I know people who have slipped and fallen.

We know this has been a long, tough winter, and it has grown intolerable, so we are truly ready for spring. Even if you don't like the heat of summer, you're ready for spring. I'm ready for spring because that's what makes change necessary and welcome. When things have become intolerable. When we're in a place where we know we don't want to stay.

Those women just can't stay in the graveyard. They are terrified. They went expecting a body, and instead they find an empty tomb. You would think they'd be full of joy, but they're scared. Sometimes change scares us deeply.

But we always need to be ready to leave the graveyard. Leaving that graveyard represents anger and bitterness, fear of being unforgiven. They're all intolerable. We may be afraid of change like those women, distressed and terrified.

Hear the Good News of Easter

But hear the good news of this Easter morning. Jesus is alive. Alive in our hearts. In us and with each other. In this world. May we believe that sacred and wondrous truth. We can leave this place embracing all that is new, all the change that life can represent, all the change that life can bring us and be ready for it with open, loving hearts.

On this Easter Sunday and always, I want to wish you all a very happy Easter. We're glad you're here with us on this Easter morning.

Joyful Noise will sing again, "Hosanna":

*"Hosannah! Hosannah!
Hosannah in the highest!
Hosannah! Hosannah!
Hosannah in the highest!*

*Lord, we lift your name,
with hearts full of praise.
Be exalted, oh Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!*

*Glory! Glory!
Glory to the King of Kings!*

*Glory! Glory!
Glory to the King of Kings!"*

Hear this blessing for our Easter morning: We have visited the empty tomb, and we heard again this message. Don't be amazed, Jesus has risen. Return to your homes, and Jesus will meet you there.

We are witnesses to all that Jesus did in Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. Now Jesus works in our midst, and Christ lives in us today.

As Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit's power for a ministry of healing and doing good, so we are anointed and empowered to go and tell.

God Bless You, and Happy Easter. Joyful Noise will now sing the closing 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're 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.*

Amen.