



Westminster-St. Paul's
Presbyterian Church
Easter Son-rise Service
April 16, 2005
7.30am

Son-rise 2006

Call to Worship: This is the Lord's new day; Christian friends, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Easter proclamation: John 20: 1-18

20.¹Early 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. ²So 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." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out

and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and 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. ¹³They 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."

¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" 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." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus 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.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

M: This is the gospel of our Risen Lord

P: Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Hymn 814: *“Morning has Broken”*

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Lord Jesus Christ, we greet you. We lift our loud thanksgiving to God that the cross has not defeated you, the grave has not kept you silent. At the first dew of the morning you met our sister Mary, and called her by her name. You told her not to hang onto you for you had yet to ascend to your Father and our Father, to your God and our God. We thank you that in those words you have called us your family and friends. We come now to confirm the rumour that you are alive. Meet us as you met Mary, with gentleness and resolution. Speak our names quietly in our hearts, that we may proclaim your name boldly on our lips. AMEN.

Organ Solo: *“Because he Lives”*

Paul on the Resurrection: I Corinthians 15: 1-57 (selected vv).

15.¹Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. ³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time....

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ...¹⁷If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²²for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ...

³⁵But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ...⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... ⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ...⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ...⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

⁵⁰What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable....⁵⁴When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

M: This is the word of the Lord

P: Amen! Alleluia!

Meditation: "A New Day"

About 10 years ago a friend of mine died young. I remember the shock of receiving the news and the renewal of the shock each morning as I would awake. For a few seconds after opening my eyes, I wouldn't remember that he had died. Then the knowledge would flood in upon me, and the day which had seemed so fresh and so new, would suddenly become overcast. How could I go on into this new day, living, adding chapters to my life story, tasting the new experiences each moment held, when my friend had been deprived of further life-chapters and of today's new experiences?

I imagine this is how Easter morning dawned for the disciples and for Mary. They would not yet have come to terms with a world without Jesus. They would not yet have absorbed the shock. The newness would be sucked out of the day when it had hardly begun, as soon as they remembered that they were awakening into a world from which their friend had departed.

Once a day has died, there is nothing which can rekindle it. There is nothing which can take a grieving person back to those first sweet moments of wakefulness before memory has kicked in. There is only the grim acceptance that this rather hateful world has spewed forth another day and the only thing to do is to meet it. There is only kicking the feet over the side of the bed, and getting on with the duties that remain for the living.

Mary has trudged to the tomb in the early morning, perhaps with some idea of anointing the body, perhaps merely to grieve there alone. Much to her surprise and alarm she finds the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. Immediately she sets off at a run to find Peter and John and tell them of this further perplexing development. They return with her to investigate, and seeing the rolled-up grave cloths, John, at least, begins to believe. But *what* he believes must not yet be too fully formed, because he does not set off at once, rejoicing; he and Peter merely go back to their homes. Mary remains at the tomb weeping, for it is all still bewilderment to her, and she fears that whoever has taken the Lord's body, they cannot have done so with a good purpose. It is at this point that she sees first the angels, then the One she mistakes for the gardener. "Sir," she says through her tears "if you have carried him away tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." And with a single word Jesus, recreates the day for her, and separates it from the night. "Mary," he says. And in the saying of her name, she knows him.

When I awakened to a new day in those months after my friend's death, and then awakened again, a few seconds later, to the shock and the grief of remembrance, I always wished somehow, that I could go back and start again. I wished that I could unravel time to a point before the death and replay it again with a better outcome. Or go back to that moment of waking and find that things were reversed: that it was actually the death which had been the dream, and that the reality was that glad relief which would replace it a few seconds later, when the world and the morning had come properly into focus: and I found that all my friends and family were safe and accounted for.

That is *not* what happens here. Mary is not, by some miracle, enabled to unravel recent events to a time before the crucifixion, and to rewrite the story so that it ends differently. That is what happens in the third Harry Potter novel when Hermione uses her time turner to go back and rewrite history, sparing the lives of an innocent fugitive and a falsely condemned hippogriff. Mary does not awaken like Pamela Barnes in the seventh season of Dallas, to find that Bobby Ewing has not died after all, and that the whole previous season was a dream. Christ creates a new day for Mary, not a recycled day with a different ending, but a brand spanking new day such as has never been lived in the world before. On this day for the first time, a man who was dead and buried, has, stretched his arms, shaken off his shroud and burst out in the morning light. This man, is not like Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus who responded to the call of a resurrectionist. This man rose spontaneously, because of the Spirit of

God that secretly, mysteriously, wondrously, quickened within him. Because this man was raised as the firstborn of many brethren, on this day for the first time, those who are Christ's friends can breathe easy about their own deaths, can rejoice in the salvation of their God, knowing that nothing here or hereafter will ever interrupt that song of grateful praise. Because this man was the Son of God, crucified for the sin of the world, a new day has been declared on our record of wrongs. On this day for the first time, those who were running from God in life, and who feared to meet him at death, have received glad tidings: human sin together with its punishment is yesterday's news. A new day has been declared. And we are exhorted to live in it as children of the day.

It cannot be a coincidence that the arrival of this new day, this day of resurrection, takes place in a garden. When John begins his gospel with the words "in the beginning" he is consciously reworking the first chapter of the book of Genesis – the story of creation. Here at the end of his gospel, John shows us a garden, like the garden of Eden, but a new creation. The early Christians called Sunday, the eighth day of creation. Genesis says that creation was completed in six days and on the seventh day God rested. Jews keep the seventh day, Saturday, as a holy day -- the Sabbath. The early Christians began to observe Sunday as their holy day, because it was the day of Resurrection. On this day, the calendar doesn't move back to day 1, it moves forward to day 8. This is a new day, a day that has never been seen before. A day that was not imagined in the scheme of creation. It is the day on which God completed his work of creation by redeeming and reclaiming and glorifying what his hands had made.

The early Christians used to baptise new believers early on Easter Sunday morning. Often the baptistry would be a separate building adjacent to the church, and often it would be an octagonal – an eight sided – building – the baptistry of the duomo in Florence is a good example. At Westminster-St. Paul's our baptismal font is not eight-sided, but many baptismal fonts are. There are two explanations given for this. One says that it's a reference to the eight people who were saved through the waters in Noah's ark. The ark being a symbol of the church and baptism a sign of our salvation through the waters, as it says in I Peter. The other explanation says that it's a reference to the eighth day of creation. At our natural birth we are born into a seven-day world. At our supernatural birth – at our baptism – we are reborn into a creation that has an eighth day, a day not previously seen or imagined -- a day of resurrection.

I'm sure when she meets him at the tomb the only resurrection Mary is overjoyed to discover, is the resurrection of her Lord. But as Paul writes in I Corinthians 15, resurrection is not just for Jesus. It is for all who are baptised into union with him in his death and resurrection. It is the hope of every Christian. My friend had come to know the Lord a few years before his death and had received baptism. What moved me from focusing on the tragic loss to focusing on the Christian hope, what allowed me after many days to enter the new day on the other side of mourning, was the thought that although those baptismal waters were rather gentle and undramatic, yet they tied him to that greatest of Powers which stirred there in the darkness of that sealed tomb. He and you and I are all in the safe keeping of the one who made for Mary a new day, and who is preparing a new heaven and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem, and whom John records as saying: "behold, I make all things new."

An Easter Prayer and the "Our Father"

Christ alive, we give you thanks and praise for your death of perfect obedience, and for your triumphant resurrection. We thank you that these great events have drawn a line under the past, that the record of our wrongs is really abolished by your cross, and that truly a new day has dawned. We praise you that when we feel captive to any power there is a greater power to which we have recourse. We praise you that when we feel the shadow of death, we need fear no evil, for you have blazed the trail for us through death to life beyond. Help us now to live as children of the day, putting to death all in our lives that should rightly die, and being lively in all the fruits and graces of your holy Spirit. We pray further in the words you gave to your disciples: Our Father....

Hymn: 257 "*The Strife is O're, the Battle Done*"

Easter Affirmation:

M: There was darkness over the earth before creation;

P: There was darkness in the tomb before resurrection;

M: But now Christ is risen!

P: The dawn has come.

M: It is the eighth day of creation.

P: And all who are in Christ are new creatures.

M: We are born anew with Christ,

P: Nevermore to die, for death is done away.

M: Christ is Risen.

P: He is risen indeed!

M: Thanks be to God!

P: Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

Benediction