**Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway**

**United Church of Christ Honolulu, Hawai’i 96817**

**Online Worship & Sermon April 12, 2020**

**EASTER SUNDAY**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE *What Wondrous Love Is This?* Jieun Newland

GREETING/CALL TO WORSHIP *(People: respond in bold)*

Beloved Church, behold the victory of our God:

Jesus, our Lord, has conquered the grave.

**Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

Sin and death shall reign no more.

**Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

Let your hearts and souls be filled with joy.

**Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

**Thanks be to God.**

OPENING SENTENCES

After the long season of Lent, the world—and especially the church—wakens to a new day. Indeed, we celebrate the New Life Christ brings to us. We give our hearts and our lives to the promise that God is renewing our life and the life of the world through Christ.

Today, God is lifting our hearts and lives. So, let us lift our voices to proclaim together:

**Christ is Risen!**

**Alleluia!**

CALL TO CONFESSION

God has opened to us the gates of righteousness that we may enter through them. Confidant in God’s love and God’s invitation to do so, let us set down every burden.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (*unison*)

Loving Savior, through the power of the Holy Spirit we have been raised from the waters of baptism to share in your glorious resurrection. Yet we have not lived as Easter people. We are unsure of your promise, confused about your will, and afraid in the face of danger. Like Mary, we weep at the tomb, and do not recognize your presence.

Call us by name, risen Lord, that we may know you with confidence. Whenever we are tempted to fear death, give us courage to confess your Easter victory. Whenever we are overwhelmed by the power of evil, reveal again to us your triumph over the destructive power of oppression.

Help us to truly receive the grace that covers us and shields us from shame forced upon us by others, or even by our own conscience. With the strength you give us from your own heart, help us to rise so that this life you have given us will be a testimony to your salvation through the love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A MOMENT OF SILENCE – *please reflect on the burdens you carry, and give them to God.*

AN AFFIRMATION

Listen church: God who raised Jesus from the dead will not give us over to death. So hear the good news: Jesus is the Christ and has risen from his grave, and we are raised-up also from all that burdens and anxieties. Therefore, let us live as forgiven and forgiving people!

A READING FROM THE GOSPELS

John 20:1-18 *The Resurrection*

*Let us hear the story.*

It was still dark. I couldn’t go…not when it was light. I had too many tears. I was afraid I’d never stop crying. I brought the spices; he deserved a proper burial. I had so many questions. Why? What now? What were we going to do now? There were no answers, so I just kept walking.

I had imagined every scenario in my head. Perhaps the guards would help me roll away the stone. Maybe they would be kind and realize I just want to anoint the body of our Lord.

That was wishful thinking—I know: The men who murdered him, be *kind?*

I thought maybe…maybe God would give me the strength to roll it away myself. Maybe I’d be arrested right there. Who else would want to anoint his body other than a professed follower?

Maybe they wouldn’t arrest me. Maybe they’d just kill me. Who would miss me—just one more woman among many. I drove myself crazy thinking and imagining every possible scenario.

When I got to the gravesite, I realized I was wrong. I hadn’t pictured this: *Someone had broken into the tomb. It was empty!*

I wanted to cry but I was dazed and confused. I needed help. I needed the others, the disciples. I needed to tell them. So, I started running back; back to the upper room where they were all still in hiding.

I banged and banged on the door and called out to them. Finally, someone opened it to me and I just about fell into the room among them.

“The tomb is empty!” I told them.

I must have been disheveled and breathless, but something in my eyes or my voice convinced them. Peter and the disciple Jesus loved hesitated for only a moment, but then they took off running too.

I went after them, but I couldn’t run as fast the second time. They got there before me…

…I don’t know what they saw, but they left just as I returned. Neither spoke to me. They moved away like men in a dream-state.

It was as if the nightmare just wouldn’t end. I started to cry. I couldn’t help myself and my crying grew louder and louder, and I got angry and shouted, "Who’s done this? Who’s taken him?! They have taken away my Lord and I don’t know where they have put him. Please tell me! Tell me who has taken Him."

…And then I noticed someone standing there…a man…it must have been him—*he* must have done it, the gardener!

I was afraid but I was heartbroken and this gave me the courage to speak. In one last desperate breath I begged, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

It was then that the gardener turned to me and said, "Mary."

He said my name.

And I knew it was Him…

SERMON *Morning is Breaking*

Happy Easter!

It *is* a happy Easter, even though the world is very different for all us right now. It is still a happy Easter because our faith and our traditions in the Christian church are all geared toward *this moment in history; this moment in our lives*.

It is Easter morning—Christ is Risen! Alleluia! He is risen, indeed.

One of my favorite hymns is called, *Now the Green Blade Rises.* In that hymn, we sing about seed that has been hidden in the cold ground. In the semblance of death, the buried seed appears to have no life, no hope…but then spring comes…

Here in Hawaii, we don’t really have the same understanding of winter and spring that a lot of folks living in the northern areas of the country do. I know this from experience because my first call—the first church I served—was in Baker, Montana. I remember very well that first winter.

It came on gradually with the lengthening of the days and the dropping of the leaves. Soon the trees were bare and we would have full-on darkness at 4:00pm. Every day was short, dark, gray. Then it got *really cold!* Most days starting in late November, it started to rarely get above 20-degrees. On many days, the temperature dropped well below zero.

Snow? Yes, of course, but not as much as you would think. Sometimes it was too cold to snow! The hard part was that even when there wasn’t a lot of snow-fall, the temperatures were so low that the snow that had fallen would not melt! It would just sit there alongside the roads in big clumps that went from white to gray as it accumulated dirt and debris.

By January that first winter, I remember holding my hands over the open flame opf the gas stove in the parsonage trying to warm-up a little, and wondering if I would ever be warm again.

But, you get used to it.

I did actually get used to the long, dark days. I got used to putting layers and layers of clothing on before I went out. I got used to turning on the car engine and letting it run in the driveway while I had my coffee in the morning. I got used to never, never forgetting to put on my gloves!

...I got used to all these things and all the other accommodations you make for the weather. I even began to be quite proud of myself and how well I was adjusting. I even bragged (a little) to friends I spoke to back here in Hawaii about my new-found prowess!

“20-below, aw that’s nothing!” I remember telling one friend, “yesterday it was 53-below with the wind chill.”

Then, one day in late March, I had to go to another town about eighty miles west of the little town I lived in. I needed to go shopping in a place called Miles City, Montana. A “big city” by Montanan standards, Miles City boasted of a population of right around 8,000 souls and had the only department store, like Walmart, for another hundred miles.

As I raced down the highway at 75-mph (the legal limit in those parts), I suddenly noticed something unusual out among the snow drifts in the fields beyond the road. There were small patches of green starting to peek-out from under the snow. As I continued down the highway, there was more than green, there were small blue flowers here and there.

I found myself slowing down a little to see if it was really true. Sure enough, as I rolled over one low hill, there stretched out across the prairie, was a carpet of blue flowers—a type of wild bachelor buttons. The carpet of flowers were still surrounded by snow drifts, but they had been given a little room, and a little warmth, and they had taken the opportunity to burst into bloom.

A little room and a little warmth.

Sometimes that is all that is needed.

In the following days and weeks, I experienced what it is like to live in a world that is awakening to warmth and space. It truly felt like new life was coming into the world. It really was renewal. God was proclaiming it all around me, and it was wonderful!

I had almost forgotten what it was like—a world of warmth and color.

We are such forgetful people sometimes, aren’t we? We forget, or disbelieve the goodness and righteousness that is life with God.

Even Mary Magdalen forgot. She did not forget the tremendous love Jesus had inspired in her, and so despite her fear, despite all of the violence she had seen perpetrated on her teacher, and the one she believed was the Messiah, she came back to that awful place of his death. She braved the Roman soldiers, and the condemnation of her neighbors—love brought her back.

Once back, though, she could not get past her sorrow and her…disbelief.

As much as she love Jesus, as much as he had taught her, as much as she had seen and heard of him doing, somehow she still believed that he was dead. She believed that nothing was stronger than the violence that had killed him.

She was so convinced that death was going to have the last word she did not recognize him when he stood beside her. She thought he was the gardener!

Mary is to be forgiven—certainly the risen Christ forgave her right then and there, and gave her a message for the others…that he would meet them again.

Christ forgives us, too, when we forget—and most of the time we do. We forget that resurrection is real because it is founded on God’s love.

This is the promise: that love will win out over all human maneuverings and schemes that make for violence of and death. The promise is that God wants life for us and all of creation, and God’s love is stronger than any kind of destruction we can devise. This is our reality, but to experience that reality we must be ready to receive it.

At first, Mary Magdalen was not ready to receive it. At first, her reality was the human reality she had seen as Jesus died on the cross. She had to hear his voice again to be awakened into new life, and a new reality—God’s reality. In that moment, the world changed for her and for all of humanity for that moment and until the end of time itself.

This is the reality we live in right now—we live in a world that is constantly being remade. Sometimes it is being remade by human machinations. However, God is also remaking the world—building it over again and again on the foundation of love that God demonstrated when Christ rose from the tomb!

Do you hear God calling your name?

I do. I heard it just recently in an article I read in an English newspaper called *The Guardian.* The title of the article was: *Oceans can be restored to former glory within 30 years say scientists.* The article says that it will take a lot of work (no surprise there), as a redoubling of a lot of the work that has already been done.

This is what it is like to hear our name being called—it is in a glimmer of hope that is held out to us. It is being told that our support and effort is required, our presence in this moment of hope and love for the earth.

This our good news, and there is more: God is calling our name in many places of our lives—in the life of creation, in the life of our community, in the life of our family, even in the life of our Nu‘uanu Congregational Church—just like Mary Magdalen, we are invited to experience the resurrection for ourselves in the many ways in which God wants to resurrect our lives—in the many ways God is resurrecting our lives, even now even today.

What I pray for—for myself and for you—is that we will be happy and willing to receive the resurrection God offers us. I pray that we will respond to the sound of our name being called. I pray we will enter into God’s joy and love with all our hearts to that we can exclaim, with perfect assurance,

*Christ Is Risen! He is risen, indeed, Alleluia!*

GIFT OF MUSIC *Halleluja!* Paula Yamamoto

*Please sing along with Paula, as you are comfortable!*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & THE LORD’S PRAYER

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God all creatures here below;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Praise God above, ye heavenly host;

Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**BENEDICTION**

Do not look for the risen Jesus only here, in the confines of this, or any, building.  **Seek the risen Jesus on the roads and in the streets, in all the pathways and byways of our lives.** Do not seek comfort in the familiar, but dare to risk the unfamiliar for the **Resurrection makes all things new!** Do not cling to all the old, expected notions about God, Jesus, Spirit, but go forth and celebrate this truly new Good News: **Because Christ lives, new possibilities are ever before us!**

Christ is Risen Indeed!   
**Alleluia and amen!**

POSTLUDE *Toccata from Symphony V* Jieun Kim Newland

Charles Marie Widor (1844-1937)