

Prelude - Eric

Call to Worship

One: O Day of Resurrection, let us shine with joy!

All: Christ has led us from death to life.

One: O Day of Resurrection, let us live with hope!

All: Christ has led us from earth to heaven.

One: Christ has risen from the dead.

All: He has risen indeed.

One: Hallelujah!

All: Hallelujah, this day and always!

Opening Prayer

God of life and love,

Maker of all things visible and invisible;

on the first day of creation, you spoke,

and out of chaos came life;

out of darkness came light.

On the first day of the week, you raised Christ from the tomb,

and out of death came new life.

On the first day of this week, you call us to gather in Christ's name,

to rejoice in the power of resurrection

and claim your gift of new life in the Spirit.

Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto you, O God,

Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,

this day and always.

We continue our prayer with the words Jesus taught when people asked him how to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
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.

Readings:

As we journey through Lent, we will be using the Lenten Liturgies from PWS&D as our responsive readings each week:

Palm Sunday:

L: Christ is risen!

P: Christ is risen, indeed!

L: He was dead and now he lives.

P: Hallelujah, Christ is risen!

L: The tomb is empty.

He was dead and now he lives. The journey begins again Come, let us follow him.

L: And let us start the new journey with prayer:

**All: God of life, you came to us and you redeem all things. And now we give ourselves to you and continue your work of good news and reconciliation in the world. Give us the strength to follow you on the mission you have called us to.
In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.**

Our scripture passage this week is from the Gospel According to John, chapter 20 and verses 1-18.

John 20:1-18

¹ 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. ² 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!”

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

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

¹⁷ 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.’”

¹⁸ 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.

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Sermon: Back to Basics: What a difference a few days can make...

I’ve been blogging for more than 380 days, during the pandemic.

That’s alongside writing weekly emails to the congregation,
writing sermons and other pieces of correspondence I’m called on to write.
And when you write that much,
sometimes you find yourself wordless.

In fact, on the blog, I publish Wordless Wednesdays every week -
in which I post someone else’s words,
usually with just a sentence or two introduction of my own writing.

Because when you find yourself wordless, it’s good to rely on the words of others.
We need each other, and there’s nothing wrong with leaning on one another,
when we need to.

I’ve shared with you that I’m about to go on leave,
and part of the reason is how desperately wordless I feel these days.
I’ve never struggled with sermon-writing as much as I have
in the past two months.
If you’re the type to notice such things,
you may have picked up on the fact
that my sermons of late have been very short.
About eight minutes of preaching time,
which is about half
of what I’d normally do.

Because I’m just feeling THAT wordless.

So today, I want to share with you the writing of another.
His name is Sean Dietrich, also known as Sean of the South,
he’s a published author, columnist and pod-caster.
And during the pandemic,
he’s been publishing a daily piece of writing to Facebook.

This is what he wrote after the recent shootings at the massage parlours in Atlanta and the Kings Sooper grocery store in Colorado:

One week. Seven days. Boy oh boy. A lot can happen in seven days. In less than one week there have been two mass shootings. Yesterday a 21-year-old man killed 10 people in Boulder, Colorado, at a supermarket. Five days earlier, a 21-year-old man in Atlanta killed 8 people, 6 of whom were Asian women.

Seven days.

Modern times have gotten so frightening that I'm afraid to read the news. What horrors am I going to read about seven days from now?

Sometimes I worry about this world. I worry about where it's going. I worry it's falling apart because that's what everyone keeps saying. They all say the universe is coming apart. Mankind is turning inward on himself. It's enough to make you break out into shingles.

Which is why I am writing this to you. Because although this planet sometimes seems screwed up, I want you to know about a few other things that happened within the last seven days.

Take Mike. Mike is a 63-year-old man who grew up working various labor jobs. He has always been a blue-collar man with dirt under his fingernails.

His life reads like a tragedy in some places. Although, had his story ever been made into a literal book, Mike wouldn't have been able to read it. Because Mike couldn't read.

When Mike was around age 10, his father died. Mike quit school to work in his uncle's restaurant. He had never been a strong reader to begin with. Eventually he forgot grammar-school stuff altogether.

The technological world advanced without him. In his 63 years, Mike had never owned a computer, never owned a smartphone, never sent

an email, never penned a letter, never read his own junk mail. Reading-wise, Mike could do little more than sign his name and read every-day words.

But last year, Mike began taking reading lessons with a private tutor. And last Monday (less than seven days ago) Mike had three major benchmarks occur in his life. All on the same day.

Mike (1) finished reading his first 800-page novel, (2) bought his first smartphone, and (3) typed his first email to his daughter with his thumbs.

Something else that also happened last week? A dog named Silas finally made it home. I'll explain.

Silas had been missing for two days. And if you think two days doesn't sound like a long time for a dog to go missing, you're not a dog owner. Silas ran off one evening for no explainable reason. Terry, his owner, canvassed her neighborhood but found nothing. Her hopes were shattered when her neighbor called to report a dog that looked like Silas lying in the highway.

But days later, someone phoned Terry from the next county. A guy named Stew found Silas on his back porch, eating bird food. Stew had taken the stray to the vet where the dog's microchip was scanned. It was Silas.

By the time Terry arrived, the people at the vet's office had given Silas a bath with fancy perfumed shampoo—no charge.

Terry is a widow. Silas is what she refers to as, "The only friend I have left."

Chances are you'll never read a news story about Silas. Neither will you read about how Janell was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune illness a few years ago and was told she was dying.

Janell's disease was supposed to kill her quickly. And it certainly looked that way. Her doctors were not optimistic; doctors told her to get her affairs in order.

So Janell did what dying people do. She started doling out heirloom furniture to her children, writing letters to be read upon her death, dividing her finances.

Meanwhile, her adult kids did something, too. Namely, they started praying.

Now, before you quit reading because you think I'm getting all hooky-spooky spiritual, you should know Janell's adult children have never stepped foot in a church building. In fact, they have never attended any event more spiritual than a WWE professional wrestling match.

"Our mother didn't raise us in church," one of her children said. "My mother just wasn't spiritual. Actually, I used to think Mom was an atheist."

But herein lies the beauty of this story. The woman's children had no idea how to pray, but they gave it a shot anyway.

Janell's daughter, Anna, says she spent entire weeks sitting silently in her spare bedroom.

"I kinda sat there, like people do in yoga," she told me over the phone. "I asked Whatever-Is-Up-There to please help me. I begged and begged, 'Help my mom, please, whatever you are.'"

The thing is, Janell's children's requests must have worked. Doctors still have no explanation for her recovery, which was made official this week. Doctors don't understand what happened, or how she started gaining weight. They don't know why her tests suddenly showed up negative. None of it makes logical sense.

But then that's the best part about life itself. Things don't make sense. They aren't supposed to. I wish I could explain to you exactly what I mean by those words, but my explanation wouldn't make any sense, either.

All I can say is that when people tell you the world is bursting apart; when life seems like a morbid riddle with no solution; when you find that you cannot read the news without shedding peach-sized tears, do not give up. Not yet.

Because a lot can happen in seven days.

He's right, a lot CAN happen in seven days.

But as Christians, we know that a lot can happen in three days.

Three days ago, we observed the crucifixion of Jesus,
events full of pain and sorrow.

I never make it through a Good Friday service without crying,
and this year was no different.

But now - now it Easter.

Now, the tomb is empty.

Now, Jesus is risen! Risen, indeed.

And the stories Sean Dietrich shared are resurrection stories.

Every one of them is a story of going from death, to new life.

From defeat to triumph.

From despair to hope.

And they are stores shared by another.

And that is especially important on Easter Sunday.

You and I - we wouldn't about Mike, or Silas, or Janell if Sean Dietrich
hadn't written about them,

and if I hadn't seen fit to share their stories by reading his piece.

Why does that matter on Easter Sunday?

Because you and I wouldn't know about the Resurrection,

if Mary hadn't shared it with John and Peter,

and if they hadn't rushed to the empty tomb to see for themselves,
and then shared what they experienced with others.

We think of the Resurrection as a single even -

Easter Sunday morning, three days after the crucifixion -

but the truth is that we are still experiencing and sharing the Resurrection
more than two thousand years later.

The Resurrection is an ongoing, communal event.

Every sermon I write points towards it, if I'm doing my job right.

Every song we sing is shot through with it.

Every prayer we pray relies upon it.

It all comes down to the difference three days can make.

Not just for those first disciples, not just for you and me,
but for all people of all times.

And I guess I just want to leave you with a question to ponder this Sunday:
What are you doing to share the good news of the Resurrection?
What are you doing to bring people from death to new life,
from defeat to triumph, from despair to hope?

And if that sounds like a daunting or impossible task,
let me give you a few examples, which I see from among our community of faith.
Some of you are sharing the Resurrection
by volunteering at the St. James Foodbasket.

Some by giving to PWS&D or other aid agencies.
Some by buying groceries for neighbours who are shut in.
Some by making masks.
Some by picking up some of the tasks I would normally do,
during my absence.
Some by praying,
or sending cards, or making phone calls,
to those who are going through a hard time.

The good news is true: the tomb is empty, Christ is risen - he is risen, indeed!
Now, go - share the good news with others.
and use words only when necessary.

Let us pray.

Hymn of Response - 243 Jesus Christ has risen today

Prayers of the People

O God, with faces touched by the light of a new day,
and hearts warmed by our prayers and praises,
we come before you to pray
for the needs of our world.

Into the light of Easter morning
we raise those who are struggling with illness,
with despair over their lives, or with
the breakdown of relationships.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring those places in our world

where war, violence, poverty and need
are the experiences of everyday life. (These places may be named)
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring the headline news of this weekend (this may be named):
we hold in our hearts the pain
of those suffering violence, bereavement or conflict.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

And into the light of Easter morning
we bring ourselves, the private struggles,
the heart's yearnings, the hidden dreams,
the unfulfilled potential.
May the light of Christ shine upon us.
May the light of Christ shine upon us. AMEN.

Postlude - Eric

***Benediction**

And now, dear friends, go from this place, in peace and in love, in joy and
in hope through faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit