

Welcome and Announcements – Easter 2020

Ashland Presbyterian Church will continue with online worship on Facebook through May when Session will reassess when we may be able to also get back to the sanctuary.

Susan continues to be in the office (working alone) to keep up our communication.

Kerra will begin to offer other options for scripture/prayer during the week. Let her know what you would like to see. She is available by phone, email, and now Zoom calling (with video/audio).

As you are able, the church is in need of your support – through prayer, through communication, and through giving. It is a challenging time to be the church – sharing hope in a time of grave uncertainty. The church – universal – needs your prayers. We, locally, need to hear from you what you need and what you want to see the church doing through these times. And we need resources to continue doing what we are doing and to be able to thrive into the future when the needs in our community will become even greater.

Prelude: *Welcome, Happy Morning!*

*1. “Welcome, happy morning!” age to age shall say:
Hell today is vanquished, Heaven is won today!
Lo! The dead is living, God forevermore!
Him their true Creator, all His works adore!
“Welcome, happy morning!” age to age shall say.*

*2. Earth her joy confesses, clothing her for spring,
All fresh gifts returned with her returning King:
Bloom in every meadow, leaves on every bough,
Speak His sorrow ended, hail His triumph now!
“Welcome, happy morning!” age to age shall say.*

Opening Prayer (lighting a candle):

Eternal God, in Jesus Christ you have given the light of life to all the world. Sanctify us by fire, and inflame us with a desire to shine forth with the brightness of Christ’s rising, until we feast at the banquet of eternal light; through Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. Amen.

Opening Hymn: *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!*

1. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

2. Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Dying once He all doth save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O Grave? Alleluia!

3. Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids Him rise, Alleluia!
Christ hath opened Paradise, Alleluia!

4. Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!
Our the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Scripture Readings: Psalm 118:1, 5-18, Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118 - A Song of Victory

- ¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
- ⁵Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.
- ⁶With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
- ⁷The LORD is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
- ⁸It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in mortals.
- ⁹It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.
- ¹⁰All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
- ¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
- ¹²They surrounded me like bees;
they blazed^[a] like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!
- ¹³I was pushed hard,^[b] so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.
- ¹⁴The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
- ¹⁵There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
- ¹⁶ the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."
- ¹⁷I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
- ¹⁸The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.

Matthew 28:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

28 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he^[a] lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead,^[b] and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Meditation for Easter:

The Lord is my strength and my might, and has become my salvation.

Augustine's Confessions – Because you have made us for yourself, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. (chapter 1, first paragraph)

Augustine nailed this one. There is a pervasive restlessness to being human. A month ago, in the “before” times, that would have likely been defined by our ongoing busyness – rushing from this thing to that, checking things off our to-do list. But now we have come to what author Julio Vincent Gambuto has rightfully called “the Great Pause.”

(<https://medium.com/@juliovincent/prepare-for-the-ultimate-gaslighting-6a8ce3f0a0e0>) In this pause, we might discover that the external restlessness is really an internal restlessness. I know I am feeling it. As much as there is a pause in how things have always been in our day to day world, there's a deep yearning that's being challenged within. I recognize that yearning because silent retreats were part of my spiritual direction training. The pause, whether it's chosen or imposed upon us, stirs us in ways that the pace of our previously ordinary lives doesn't quite allow.

The restlessness stirs us to ponder what is most important in our lives and to our hearts. What I love about the opening of Augustine's Confessions is that it's full of questions – all the questions. To me that's the sign of any reasonably good theology. It will be full of questions before it tries to take on any answers, and the answers will always be tempered by the depth of the questions. I'm no expert on Augustine's work - (which you can read for yourself here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm>) – skimming chapter one as this quote kept popping into my mind was about as far as I got. But his inquisitiveness drives his interest, and his interest is in getting closer to God – as a way of meeting that restlessness with the one thing that will actually bring true rest and peace.

Julian of Norwich was also no stranger to silence and alone time, and she made the same discovery – that putting trust in God allowed her to acknowledge the evil of the world and still be able to hear from God that “You shall see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well.”

It's not easy to come to this rest, this assurance, this understanding that all shall be well – especially in a time when we are wrangling with a terrible disease and every impact it is having on our lives from the restless anxiety and boredom, to the drops in our retirement accounts, to the grief of loss as deaths from COVID-19 come closer and closer to home. This pause has been mandated FOR us, and yet there is an opportunity lurking within it. As I think even more about this on Holy Saturday – the day between the crucifixion and the resurrection, a pause like this leaves us hanging between the worst we know about our world, and the hope we have for the best. It may be Easter on the calendar, but we are, or at least I know I am, deeply feeling the “in-between-ness” of Holy Saturday. And to be fully in that “in-between” we need to practice the most difficult thing that Jesus did on the cross – which was to let go – to not remove himself from the situation – but to go, in every painful part, through it. For Jesus that meant dying a very human, very agonizing, very humiliating death. For us, it may mean letting go of the way things were to allow for the way things could be or the way we want them to be AFTER the

transformation of this extended time of loss and lament. What will rising up from the great pause look like? I think that is THE Easter question for 2020.

Psalm 118 poignantly reminds us that when we are in distress, when we are wondering what ELSE we could possibly add to make this awful situation worse – rather than put our trust in princes, and powers, and stock values – it is better to take refuge in the Lord. Our hearts are restless – until they rest in God. “Deeds are done which appear to be so evil to us and people suffer such terrible evils that it does not seem that ANY good will ever come to them...” and YET, all shall be well, says Julian.

We arrive at this sense of hope – not by denying that bad things happen – they happen all the time. We arrive at this resilient and revolutionary kind of hope by remembering that God does amazing transformative work – even through, or maybe especially through, the Holy Saturday moments. God works in despotic times to free slaves from the Pharaoh who chooses to build monuments over memories. God works from death row and transforms unjust punishments into acts of divine love. God dances in graveyards and sings songs of love in quarantine. God turns grocery store clerks into heroes and reminds the rich that relying on riches alone is absolute emptiness. Will it all be transformed? Maybe in God’s bigger picture. We won’t see all of it, but my hope is that we will see enough. That we will see enough of it to stir that restlessness to find its home in God.

My prayer to follow this message is an open-eyed, open-hearted reflection on the verse from Psalm 118 that keeps speaking to me and reminding me that when the going gets tough, we can always turn to God: The Lord is my strength and my might, and has become my salvation. How are these three things – strength, might, and salvation – being found in you, today? Let us pause and wonder...

The Lord is my strength.

Strength – the capacity of an object or substance to withstand great force or pressure

Glennon Doyle – We can do hard things.

Doug Ottati – Life is hard, sometimes very hard, yet grace abounds.

What does it mean to say the Lord is my strength?

The Lord is my might (or song).

This part can (and has been) translated two ways – might or song.

Which do you prefer?

Does God give you might to change what you want to see changed, or

Does God put a song in your heart?

The Lord has become my salvation.

In the “in-between” of imagining Jesus’ death as holding all our sin,
And the promise of resurrection as freeing us for new life –
What does salvation look like now?

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who 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, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: *Up From the Grave He Arose*

1. Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Savior!
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Refrain

Up from the grave He arose!
With a mighty triumph o’er His foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

2. Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!
(*Refrain*)

3. Death cannot keep His prey, Jesus my Savior!
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!
(*Refrain*)

Responding to God's Word in the World:

Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should that need arise. —*Rabbi Yosef Kanevsky of Los Angeles*

Response: Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Easter Blessing

Postlude: Sometimes a Light Surprises (READING ALOUD)

*1. Sometimes a light surprises the child of God who sings;
It is the Lord who rises with healing in His wings.
When comforts are declining, He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining, to cheer it after rain.*

*2. In holy contemplation we sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation, and find it ever new;
Set free from present sorrow, we cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown tomorrow bring with it what it may.*

*3. It can bring with it nothing but he will see us thro'
Who gives the lilies clothing will clothe His people, too;
Beneath the spreading heavens, no creature but is fed;
And He who feeds the ravens will give His children bread.*

*4. Tho vine nor fig tree neither their wonted fruit should bear,
Tho all the fields should wither, Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding, His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding, I cannot but rejoice.*