

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Easter Sunday

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

Sunday, April 4, 2021

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor — Welcome and Announcements

Friends, good morning! Welcome to worship on this Easter day. We are delighted that you have joined us for worship. Together with God's people throughout the world, we proclaim with joy, Christ has risen, Christ has risen indeed! Alleluia!

This year, more so than in years past, I believe we recognize the profound difference that the Easter resurrection hope makes, both to our lives and to our world. For we do not mourn, even in the midst of a global pandemic, as those without hope. We live into the strength and hope, into the joy and wonder of Christ's resurrection. Thank you for celebrating Easter from wherever you are watching us today.

I'm grateful to be leading today's resurrection celebration along with Ashley Ashley, Mark Hovermale and Darlene Maginley. I'm grateful, as well, that we have the musical talent of our Chancel Choir and Solid Brass Ensemble, who will be appearing as part of this service through previous recordings of that choir. Thanks to Susan Underhill for her crazy video skills that allows all of these pieces to flow seamlessly together.

Friends, as part of our Easter celebration this particular year we are also holding a special offering to support the ministry of the deacons within our church. In a typical year the deacons receive their funding through 5th Sunday collections which happen four times throughout the year. Since Covid began, we've not been able to hold any of these regular collections. After a year of the deacons giving generously in the form of gift cards to our more than 70 college students and after they've generously provided Covid care kits and cancer care kits, End of Life booklets to over 200 people, and suppers of support to those in need, our deacons would benefit from a little support from us to make sure that they can continue with their pastoral ministry going forward. If you wish to contribute in any small way to the Deacons' Fund, you can do so online just by indicating it's a special offering for the deacons. Alternatively, you can mail checks to the church with the memo line, "For the deacons."

Now let us prepare our hearts to celebrate God and praise God on this Easter day. Mark Hovermale will now come forward to lead us all in prayer.

Rev. Mark Hovermale, Pastor for Youth and Early Adults — Opening Prayer

Let us pray. We come before you, Lord, with praise and thankful hearts for the resurrection of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Today, as we celebrate not just the pinnacle moment of our faith journey, but of human history, we take a moment to praise you by simply saying "thank you". There are no words we can use or say or articulate that can ever praise or thank you enough for your Son's sacrifice and resurrection. He died for

us and we celebrate today that He lives for us. Thank you, Lord. May this service bring glory and honor to you as we lift it up to you now. Amen.

**Chancel Choir and Congregation sing "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
(Hymn #288 from Easter 2019 Sanctuary worship service)**

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children's Ministry — Children's Message

Good morning, kids. And a very happy Easter to all of you. I was reading a poem the other day and it's talking about a rainbow on Easter. We usually don't think about rainbows on Easter. We think about the rainbow that God sent when Noah got off the ark, when He promised that He would never send another flood.

Then I started thinking about how great that was that there was a rainbow when He promised that He would always take care of us and now I have a rainbow for you for Easter, when Jesus came to fulfill all of God's promises.

So here's the poem that I want to read for you today,

There's a rainbow in my hand
Full of colors that are bright
They remind me of the Savior
Who was born on Christmas night

He left his throne in Heaven
To forgive the sins of man
The candy from this egg
Will reveal his mighty plan

The purple one reminds me
Of the sin that's in my heart
It separated God from man
And drove them both apart

The red candy reminds me
Of the blood that Jesus lost
When he went up on the hill
And he died upon the cross

Then Sunday morning came
And the stone was rolled away
By the orange light of sunrise
Christ arose on Easter day

Green is the color of the
New life in the spring
It tells me of the new life
That knowing Jesus brings

Yellow is the color
Of the gold that lines the street
In Heaven up above
Where Jesus we will meet

The rainbow in my hand says
That Jesus died for me
The Savior in my life says
That now my heart is free

So I have made a rainbow [of beads] out of all of the colors in our poem that we talked about. I'm going to turn mine into a bookmark, but here's a suggestion for you. You could get some beads of your own and you could make a bookmark, or you could make a bracelet. You could take yarn or thread and make a friendship bracelet or make two and give one to a friend. You could tell them about how Jesus is a rainbow.

You could even plant a flower garden this summer with purples and reds and oranges and yellows and then you can remember all summer long the rainbow that Jesus is!

So on this Easter day I hope that your day is full of Jesus, sunshine and rainbows.

Let's pray together. Dear Jesus, thank you so much for giving your life for us and thank you for your resurrection that gives our life new hope and new meaning and the chance to be in heaven with you someday. We are so grateful for the rainbow that you give us each and every day. It's in your name, Jesus, that we pray today. Amen.

Happy Easter, kids!

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — First Scripture Reading — John 11:17-27

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles^l from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sermon, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life” (Part 1)

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious God, source of all light, by your words you give light to the soul. Pour out upon us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that, being taught by you and holy scripture, our hearts and minds may be open to know the things that pertain to life and to eternal life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friends, a year ago, this past Easter here in Michigan, we were all living under lockdown. I remember when that lockdown first began sometime in mid-March of last year, I remember saying to my colleagues in the church, “Wouldn't it be wonderful if the lockdown ended, and church resumed just in time for Easter Sunday.” Well, little did I know or understand at that time that the church building would be closed not only for last Easter but this Easter as well!

Now if I were to pause here in the midst of all that has happened in the past year, if I were to stop and ask you, “How are you doing?”, how would you respond? More specifically, if I asked you to complete the sentence that begins with the words “I am,” how would you respond? How many of us would respond with “I am tired” or “I am frustrated and fed up” or “I am ready for my life to return to some sense of normalcy.” I think some of us would say “I am grieving,” grieving the loss of a loved one or grieving the loss of our life from what it once has been.

But the experience of the past year that we have all lived through is in many ways like a battle. I don't think it is a battle that anyone ever wins unless you happen to manufacture toilet paper or hand sanitizer or own stock in Zoom, but our battle really is to simply keep moving forward out of Covid. In some cases the battle is literally and figuratively a battle to breathe through the effects of the illness and through the weight of anxiety, fear, and grief that have accompanied this pandemic.

Here in the church, over the past six weeks, throughout the holy season of Lent, we've been studying the “I am” statements that Jesus makes, all of which are recorded in John's gospel. These statements are not made in any way in reference to our condition, saying how *we* are, but they *are in* reference to God's condition. They are the means by which Jesus identifies himself to his people. For us today there's a very good reason why we've been studying these “I am” statements during this particular season of Lent. Where we may come before God collectively, saying “I am tired” or “I am lost” or “I am alone,” Jesus says clearly in his response through words spoken over 2000 years ago, “I am the way, the truth and the life”; “I am the Good Shepherd who guides you forward in both faith and love”; “I am the gate that opens the path to eternal life”. Jesus says, “I am the bread of life, I provide you with strength beyond your own strength, I will nourish your faith.”

We end this “I am” sermon series, focusing today on Jesus' words as they are found in John, chapter 11, for there Jesus says clearly, “I am the resurrection and the life.” These words seem so appropriate for our Easter celebration but these words actually are not spoken in reference to Jesus' own death and resurrection. They are spoken in reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus' dear friend Lazarus, the same friend over whom Jesus wept bitterly, realizing his death.

Friends, in these words, “I am the resurrection and the life,” and through the actions of Jesus Christ regarding the story of Lazarus, we are reminded how deeply God cares for

his people, even in the darkest of times. We are reminded through these words that there is still hope, even in the face of death, when I am reminded that there is still the promise of life. We are going to study these truths further in the second half of our sermon, to see more deeply what it means to have a life and resurrection hope.

But first, let's listen again to Jesus speaking for himself through our next scripture reading from John's gospel which will be read for us by Mark Hovermale.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Second Scripture Reading – John 11:32-44

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

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

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Third Scripture Reading – John 20:11-22

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.

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

May God add his blessing to all of these readings from his Holy Word. Amen.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sermon, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life” (Part 2)

Friends, this past Christmas our church had, for the very first time, an outdoor Christmas tree. That tree was both big and wonderful! On top of the tree there was a marvelous star made by our own incredibly talented woodworker John Roose. That star lit up the sky and provided light in what is usually a dark corner in Plymouth, not only through the month of December, as you might expect, but that star stayed on throughout January, February, and into March, nearly all the way up to Holy Week.

Now prior to Holy Week, our Christmas tree came down as temperatures here in Michigan went up, and the tree was actually starting to lose its needles due to the heat. But that wonderful Christmas tree was also needed to serve an even greater purpose. With the help and expertise of our building and grounds crew, and particularly through the determination and hard work of one man in that crew, Rich Felcher, that Christmas tree was cut into smaller pieces until some of those pieces were able to be fashioned into the cross which you see before you today.

There is a message found in a Christmas tree that is turned into a cross, for this cross serves as a powerful reminder that the joy and hope that we first celebrate at Christmas turns into an even deeper joy and a stronger hope at Easter. Christ, who is born into the

world to share the love and grace of God as a baby, showed the full measure of that love and grace through His own death and resurrection. The power of the cross is that death no longer has the final word in any of our lives. God showed us not only in the resurrection of His own Son after death, but through Jesus' own experience of raising Lazarus from the dead, that this life does not need to end in death.

In a year, friends, when our country has known more loss from disease than from all war losses combined, the message of life after death has never been more needed. If that message was not great enough and not reason enough for us to celebrate on this Easter day, Jesus also shares in John's gospel through His words, "I am the resurrection and the life." There is a deeper meaning hidden in those words that we only understand as we turn to those words as they are written in their original language.

In Greek we understand, through a phrase related to the resurrection and having life abundantly, that what that implies is not just a regular life but in the Greek that term of having life abundantly really means a super abundance of something. So what we understand here is that God desires not only to give us life at the end of our lives so we can live with God forever, but God desires to give us even a greater life than what we know now, here and today, in our own experience.

God does not desire for any of us to just go through our lives as we exist, going through the motions. Many of us have felt like we simply have been existing in this past year as our own freedom has been limited. But our lives, God says and Jesus makes clear, are not defined by our external circumstances, but our lives should forever be defined by God's love for us and by the way we both receive and offer that love to others.

This Easter, here in church, we proclaim with real joy that Christ is risen from the dead. In his resurrection we gained the hope of heaven, the promise of eternal life, the promise that we will not only see God face to face, and meet Jesus face to face, but we will see those whom we have known and lost in faith.

But more than that, this Easter, we celebrate the resurrection hope that God provides for us, that in this life our lives can serve a greater and deeper purpose as we share the deep love, the deep hope, the deep strength, and joy that no circumstance can take from us, but is ours forever, because of the grace of God. We hold on to this hope, this wonder, this joy this Easter and always. I pray that in the year ahead you would know a super abundance of life, not because our freedoms are returned, but because we would know and believe how valued we are, how precious we are, in the sight of God. Amen.

Congregation and Chancel Choir sing "Lift High the Cross"
(Hymn #287, from Easter 2018)

Ashley S. Ashley — Prayers of the People

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, on this Easter morning we welcome you into our lives. We welcome the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for it is life - changing, life-giving, and life-sustaining. We welcome the hope it brings to our world. We welcome the joy it brings to our darkness. We welcome the empty tomb, for we know that it means that you are here with us right now.

In the joy and hope of this Easter morning, in the midst of our singing and celebrating, we know, though, that there are those among us who are hurting and sad. We pray for those

who find it difficult to hold on to hope, for those who suffer from addiction and chronic physical and mental illness. We pray for those places and people in our world who daily encounter death, poverty, homelessness, senseless violence and prejudice. In the joy and hope of this Easter morning we realize the depth and breadth of what it means to be your Easter people. For we are the ones who are called to go out into your world to work for justice and peace, to bear witness to the promise of the resurrection, to hold those in despair and believe for them that love, God's love, is indeed stronger than death.

In the joy and hope of this Easter morning, oh God, give us the courage to bear your image in every corner of our lives. Bind us together as your people, saying the words that you taught us to pray together saying,

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.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of God. Let us set out from here as those who have received new life, new hope, new joy, and new strength in Christ.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.

**Chancel Choir sings Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus"
(Easter 2018)**