



**Seacliff Uniting Church**  
**Online Worship & Electronic Resources**  
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**Celebration of Worship**  
**Easter Day**

**GATHERING**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
*Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Let us give thanks to God  
for God is good.  
*God's love goes on forever and ever.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
*Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Let's worship God.

**HYMN: "Yours be the glory"**

Yours be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory over death you've won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave-clothes, where your body lay.  
*Yours be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
endless is the victory over death you've won.*

See, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
for the Lord is living, death has lost its sting.      *Refrain*

No more we doubt you, glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without you: aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors through your deathless love;  
bring us safe through Jordan to your home above.      *Refrain*

**PRAYER**

O God, we celebrate this wonderful day!  
Jesus has shown us that your love and your way  
are more powerful than the forces of evil in our world.  
You have shown us that life cannot be defeated by death  
and through faith in you we do not have to fear.  
We thank you and praise you  
as we celebrate Jesus alive again and with us forever.  
Amen.

# ENCOUNTERING

## BIBLE READING

Matthew 28:1-10

## PRAYER

O God for whom there are no barriers,  
no stones too big to remove,  
roll away our resistance to you.  
Let your words fill us with new life  
and bring us out from the tomb of indifference,  
alive again in you.  
In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.

## MESSAGE: EXPERIENCING EASTER

Since the time of Jesus, the Christian Church has used many different symbols to represent its central beliefs. And Easter is a time overflowing with symbols which express what we believe,

We have the egg, for example, which symbolises new life. In some traditions they have the Easter fire which is lit on Easter eve, the Saturday before Easter, which reminds us of Christ the light of world. It is the practice that from this fire the Easter candle is lit. A lesser known but ancient symbol for resurrection is the Phoenix, the mythical bird of Greek legend. According to the legend only one Phoenix lived at a time and it would live for 500 years. At that time the bird would self-immolate on funeral pyre but would rise from the ashes.

A symbol for Easter and the resurrection that has become popular in recent years is that of the butterfly. Even though its popularity has increased in recent times, the butterfly is another ancient symbol for resurrection. In the ancient Greek language the word 'psyche' is usually translated as life, breath or soul. But it is also the word for butterfly. In some ancient Greek paintings depicting death, the butterfly can be seen emerging from mouth of the deceased. It's not a surprising symbol for as we explore life cycle of the butterfly we're reminded that it begins life as a caterpillar before it makes a cocoon eventually emerging as butterfly. The caterpillar dies, in that it is no longer a caterpillar, but it lives again as a beautiful butterfly. In this the caterpillar is utterly transformed.

The story of Easter is a story of transformation. Because of Easter everything is being made new.

This miracle of transformation is the theme of a delightful children's story called, Hope for the Flowers. The heroine of the story is Yellow, a caterpillar who dreamed of being a butterfly but felt it was impossible. One day Yellow saw a caterpillar upside down on a branch wrapped in some furry stuff. She thought the caterpillar was in trouble and so offered to help. But the caterpillar said, "No my dear, I have to do this in order to become a butterfly." Yellow asked, "What is a butterfly?" "It is what you were meant to become," said the caterpillar. "How do you become a butterfly?" asked Yellow. The caterpillar answered, "You must want to fly so much you are willing to give up being a caterpillar." "You mean to die?" exclaimed Yellow. "Well yes and no. What looks like you will die, but what is really you will still live. Life is changed, not taken away." And you can guess the end. In fear Yellow takes the risk and becomes a butterfly.

Those who went to the tomb that morning were unprepared. They were prepared to face death, they were prepared to honour their deceased friend and they were prepared to treat Jesus' body properly. After all, it had been rushed job on the Friday.

But what they were not prepared for was life. What they were not prepared for was to be encountered by risen Christ. Never in their wildest imaginations or deepest dreams could they conceive of resurrection, of life transforming death. There were hints long before Easter that God was in the business of life, not death. But those who went to the tomb that day like us, I think, were too much in the business of death to believe in life.

But when they arrived they found the tomb was empty and it was not long before they were encountered by the risen Christ. Again they would know his presence, not the same as before, but just as real. Jesus had been transformed.

However, it was not only Jesus who was transformed, but those who followed him were transformed too. Following the events of 'Good Friday', the disciples were huddled together, fearful, anxious and desolate. But on that Easter day they were encountered dramatically by the risen, transformed Christ and were themselves transformed.

Neither does the story end there, for the the resurrection of Jesus is about us being open to the transformed and transforming Christ and in our own encounter being transformed ourselves.

Many years ago, when we were living in Port Pirie, I was rung up one afternoon just before Easter by the local paper. They wanted a religious piece for the pre-Easter edition of the paper. I asked when they wanted it and was told that it was required in 15 minutes! Eventually they conceded to two hours! So there I was, with a blank sheet of paper in front of me (this was before computers) and two hours to say something about Easter that would mean something to the population keeping it to a few hundred words. What to say? Eventually the Apostle Paul's words to the church at Philippi came to mind. Languishing in prison with his life hanging in the balance, he wrote, "*All I want is to know Christ and experience the power of his resurrection.*" (Good News Bible) Those words became the basis of the little article, in which I said, "*Easter is not meant to be explained, it is meant to be experienced.*"

More often than not though, I feel the resurrection is a basis for argument rather than something to be experienced. We argue over its authenticity: did it really happen?; Over its meaning; what is the point? Over its relevance; what does it matter? And because we become so caught up in argument I think we miss what the writers of the NT were so intent on communicating, that is, the resurrection life is not only what happened on that first Easter but is what can happen now in our experience.

So we read things like, "*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies.*" (Romans 8:11) Or "*By (God's) great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*" (1 Peter 1:3)

And there are others too, but they all make the point that the One who raised Christ, works to transform our lives by that same power.

This is what the followers of Jesus found on that first Easter morning and in the weeks ahead- that the life of God flowing into each person, into this world through Jesus could not be stopped by his death. It was this continuing life of the Risen Christ that transformed them and brought them to a fuller experience of life. Easter tells us, that in all of those life situations that threaten to diminish life, life still comes and nothing can stop it. David Householder (yes that's his real name) said, "*If anyone or anything tries to curse or kill the Goodness at the Center of all things, it will just keep coming back to life. Forever Easter.*"

All we have to do to allow that life to embrace us is to give up clinging to a way of life that is less than the life God has for us. That was what Mary had to realize when Jesus told her, "*Do not hold on to me.*" (John 20:17) It must have been tempting to want to keep hold of Jesus. Mary had lost him once, on the Friday. This One who had brought so much to her life was suddenly taken from her. Why risk that again? Why not hold on to him for dear life. Why not try to preserve the experience.

But Jesus makes it clear to Mary that she cannot hold on to their past history. Their relationship in the future would be very different from what it had been in the past. It would be just as real and just as important, but it would be different. To try and hold that past experience would mean Mary would miss the new experiences of Jesus, the new life.

*“Mary... Do not hold on to me”* means the best is yet to be. Don’t miss it by living in the past. So Mary let’s go.

In terms of Yellow the butterfly... *“What looks like you will die, but what is really you will still live. Life is changed, not taken away.”* Sometimes the life we cling to is the very thing that is preventing us from living the fullness of life God invites us to, a life of flying.

Easter is utterly central to Christianity. *“God raised Jesus from the dead”* is the foundational affirmation of the NT. But it is so, I think, not only because of what happened on the first Easter morning. Rather, Easter is central to Christians because Jesus continued to be an experiential reality. Throughout the centuries, into our own lives, Jesus has continued to be a living spiritual reality.

Easter is about life! It’s about us experiencing the resurrection life in our own lives. “Christ is Risen”, is more than a proclamation about Jesus, it is also about us, in that our lives can be and are continually transformed.

## **RESPONDING**

### **DEDICATION OF OFFERING**

Christ gives us the gifts of new life and renewed life.  
He asks us to share this gift with others  
that they too may come to him  
and receive his resurrection life.  
We offer ourselves and our gifts for this ministry.

*Christ Jesus,  
who transforms our lives by your presence,  
transform these gifts that they may express your love and life  
May our lives bring hope and healing to the world.  
Amen.*

### **PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE**

With the joy of this resurrection day  
in our hearts, let us pray.

We remember with gratitude  
the presence of the church  
in remote and highly populated areas  
all over the world.  
We pray for Christians rejoicing today  
in the wonder of the resurrection.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

We pray that we may recognise you  
as we walk through our days  
and we ask you to disturb any complacency  
which is blurring our spiritual vision.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

We pray for the courage to speak out  
against injustice and oppression;  
we pray that our leaders may establish and uphold  
compassionate values and sensitive laws.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

We pray that those of our family and friends  
who have not yet met you  
may be drawn into your company and introduced  
so that they can enjoy your faithfulness and love.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

We remember those whose lives  
are filled with pain, anxiety and sorrow,  
and ask that you come alongside them  
and speak tenderly their name.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

With the words of resurrection fresh in our minds  
we commend to your eternal love  
those who have died  
that they may live with you forever.  
(Silence)

Life giving God,  
*give us new life in you.*

God of life and new life,  
may our lips and our lives  
express our thanks and praise to you  
for rescuing us and setting us free to live.  
Merciful God,

accept these our prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:  
*Our Father in heaven,*  
    *hallowed be your name,*  
    *your kingdom come,*  
    *your will be done,*  
        *on earth as in heaven.*  
*Give us today our daily bread.*  
*Forgive us our sins*  
    *as we forgive those who sin against us.*  
*Save us from the time of trial*  
    *and deliver us from evil.*  
*For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours*  
    *now and forever. Amen*

**SONG:** “Now the Green Blade Rises”

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat down in the dark earth many days has lain;  
love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love whom hate had slain,  
thinking that he never would awake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Up he sprang at Easter, like the risen grain,  
he who for the three days in the grave had lain;  
raised from the dead my living Lord is seen:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
then your touch can call us back to life again –  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
Love has come again, like wheat that springs up green.

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# JOURNEYING

## BLESSING

Christ is risen!  
*He is risen indeed!*

Now that you have heard the good news  
what will you do?  
*We will go into the world  
showing by our lives  
that Christ is risen indeed!*

Praise God!  
And how will you do this?  
*We will tell the story of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ  
and we will continue Christ's loving acts among humanity.*

*Alleluia! Praise God! Christ is risen indeed!*

## FOR REFLECTION

- When and how did the meaning of the resurrection first impact upon you?
- What difference does the resurrection make to your life?

“The tomb was empty... The question is, of course, what really happened there? And what does it have to do with us? The answer is simple. Transformation happened. What had always been became more of what it was. And because of that, life changed everywhere. The transformation was on both sides: Jesus waxed to new fullness, yes, but so did the people around him. New life burgeoned everywhere.”

-Sr Joan Chittister, “In search of belief”

- When has your life been transformed? When have you experienced a new fullness of life?

“Together with Jesus’ followers, we are invited to journey into resurrection. Many of us fear resurrection without realizing it. We can focus so much on the crucifixion of Good Friday that we never move ... into the bursting forth of Easter Sunday. ... Why are we called to put faith in Christ crucified? Because of the resurrection! Resurrection is a power event. Power.. to bring life to all that we thought lost and hopeless. Power to gift with new vision and new possibilities. Power to breathe life into places where despair, emptiness and a void once existed. ... Easter Sunday confronts us with some hard questions: Have we grown comfortable with lifelessness? Have we grown so accustomed to pain that we don’t want to let go? Will we let God grow in us a big, huge, passionate. heart?

-Sr Laura Swan, “Engaging Benedict”

- Spend time reflecting on the questions Sister Laura raises.

"We ask that streams of Easter light might flow into the intimacy and privacy of our hearts this morning, to heal us and encourage us and enable us to make again a new beginning."

- John O'Donohue, *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*, 21st century

"The very first Easter taught us this: that life never ends and love never dies."

- Kate McGahan, 21st century