



Dead Palms and an Empty Church, Easter Sunday, 2020.

Christ Church UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

and Rev. Dan Stark

www.uccmke.org

This Easter we find ourselves in an unprecedented Wilderness moment as a church, but not as the Church. The first Easter did not take place at a church. No, it took place outside of an empty tomb while the disciples were at home, frightened, grieving, and wondering what in the world they were going to do. Today we are the "first disciples" who huddled in their homes. Our faithful response to the resurrection during the COVID-19 pandemic is the response that Jesus' friends had to the resurrection on the first Easter Sunday. Though the church is empty, the body is not broken. Christ is risen, indeed!

Meditation on Jesus' Death

[The Night Weeps](#)

Slats Toole

Words of Welcome

Opening Litany

One: In this "room" - we recognize the Wilderness of this world.

All: From Bay View, West Allis, Cudahy, and Kenosha, we trust that God is near.

One: Where we are today, we hold on to hope.

All: In Burlington, Muskego, New Berlin, and Oak Creek, we hold on to each other.

One: In our place today, we sing, "Alleluia!"

All: From Wauwatosa, South Milwaukee, West Bend, and Racine we trust that love is stronger than hate.

One: In this wilderness of social disruption today, we celebrate.

All: From Brookfield, Wind Point, Milwaukee, and Mukwonago we sing.

One: From our homes, we trust that nothing can separate us from God's love – not even death.

All: Let us worship Holy God!

Opening Prayer

Holy God,

You have always been one who disrupts.

You interrupt suffering to bring peace.

You interrupt isolation to create community.

You interrupt silence with the sound of alleluias.

So today we ask that you interrupt us.

Stop us in our tracks with the good news that only you offer.

Freeze time and move among us, so that we can hear your word anew until the sound of alleluias ring in our ears.

Amen.

Prayer by Sarah Are / A Sanctified Art LLC / sanctifiedart.org



"Jesus of the Bayou" Pittman, Lauren Wright, 2014.

A Song for Today

Alive

by Natalie Grant
soloist Nancy Charles

A Time for the Child in Us

Empty Things

Old Testament

[Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)

Rev. Leslie Moughty, reader

Psalm 118 is a song of victory which declares the absolute steadfastness of God's love. No matter what the psalmist faces, God abides with them. The psalmist boldly declares that the faithful will not die but will live. God is the one who saves the people and God will be with those who have been rejected. Christians have come to know this truth about death in the life that Christ offers.

A Contemplative Reading

Lockdown

Brother Richard Hendrick

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.
 But,
 They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
 You can hear the birds again.
 They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
 The sky is no longer thick with fumes
 But blue and grey and clear.
 They say that in the streets of Assisi
 People are singing to each other
 across the empty squares,
 keeping their windows open
 so that those who are alone
 may hear the sounds of family around them.
 They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
 Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
 Today a young woman I know
 is busy spreading fliers with her number
 through the neighbourhood
 So that the elders may have someone to call on.
 Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
 are preparing to welcome
 and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
 All over the world people are slowing down and
 reflecting
 All over the world people are looking at their
 neighbours in a new way
 All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are.
 To how little control we really have.
 To what really matters.
 To Love.
 So we pray and we remember that
 Yes there is fear.
 But there does not have to be hate.
 Yes there is isolation.
 But there does not have to be loneliness.
 Yes there is panic buying.
 But there does not have to be meanness.
 Yes there is sickness.
 But there does not have to be disease of the soul
 Yes there is even death.
 But there can always be a rebirth of love.
 Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
 Today, breathe.
 Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
 The birds are singing again
 The sky is clearing,
 Spring is coming,
 And we are always encompassed by Love.
 Open the windows of your soul
 And though you may not be able
 to touch across the empty square,
 Sing

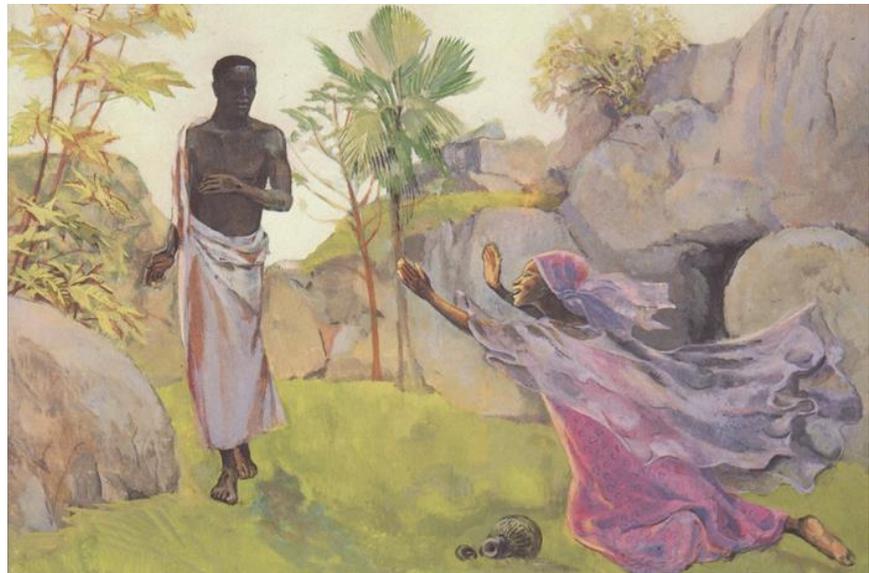
Wilderness Poem

I used to know the wilderness only as pain;
 A land without food, a land without water.
 But you rained down manna
 And even water flows in your desert.
 I used to think the wilderness was total isolation—
 But the Israelites had each other,
 And you had the stars in the sky.
 So then I thought the wilderness must be time
 wasted—
 Forty years of circles.
 Forty years of wondering.
 But then I realized, each step is a step,
 And maybe there's growth in that.
 So then I concluded that the wilderness must be
 lonely spaces—
 The woman and her well,
 The blind man and his gate,
 Martha and her kitchen,
 Peter and his fire.
 But then you showed up in each of those places,
 To each of those faces.
 So now I wonder—
 What if the wilderness is the birthplace of
 creation?

The Wilderness is a Place of Joy

Sarah Are

What if the wilderness is where call begins?
 What if the wilderness is where joy is birthed?
 What if, between the dirt and the sky
 And that wide orange horizon,
 The wilderness is where we find you?



“Christ Appears to Mary” Mafa, Jesus. Cameroon, 1973.



“John and Peter on Their Way to the Tomb on Easter Morning” Burnand, Eugène. Paris, 1898.

Lauren Wright Pittman, narrator
John’s Gospel begins by announcing that God’s Word, which brought all things into being, became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus’ ministry reveals God’s power through signs and miracles. In this reading, Mary Magdalene arrives at Jesus’ tomb and sees that the stone has been rolled away. She runs to inform Peter and Jesus’ beloved disciple to bear witness to the empty tomb. The other disciples ran to the empty tomb but did not understand what had happened. Mary remained and grieved, while the other mourners went back to their homes. While she stood outside the tomb, the resurrected Christ showed himself to her. At first, she did not know who he was, but when he called to her by name, she recognized him as her Lord.

Homily

We Are the First Disciples Now

Rev. Dan Stark

A Song of Response

Christ the Lord is Risen Today

Mark Hayes, Arr.

Prayers for This Day

God of the grave,
 God of fresh air in lungs,
 God of another tomorrow—
 Today is a day unlike any day.
 For they came in the dark—
 Disciples and women,
 Those who loved you,
 Those who grieved for you.
 They came in the dark with plans to bury you,
 But love could not be buried.
 So today is a day unlike any day,
 For we are basking in light.
 Your goodness has found us
 Like light finds the horizon,
 Like moths find the light,
 Like water finds the ocean.
 Today is a day unlike any other day
 Because the alleluias ring clear,
 Hope echoes louder than fear,
 And the wilderness seems to be kept at bay.
 How did you do it?
 Beating hearts long to know!
 What was it like?
 How did you feel?

A Day Like None Other

Did it hurt?
 But our biggest question is— why come back for us?
 We admit, it is hard to wrap our minds around a love like yours—
 A love that never runs out.
 A love that never gives up.
 A love that knows the darkness and has wilderness scars
 And chooses us anyway.
 It takes our breath away.
 So today we run to you,
 Just as those disciples ran to that empty tomb.
 We run to you,
 And we bring with us our hopes and our dreams,
 Our prayers and our insecurities.
 We bring with us gratitude for church steeples,
 For cups of coffee and family recipes;
 Gratitude for choirs that sound like angel choruses,
 For sunrises that remind us that new life is dawning,
 And for the names of our loved ones on the tips of our tongues.
 However, we also run to you with concern
 For those who still feel lost in the desert,
 For those who are still weeping in the garden,

For those who cannot escape the darkness of Good
Friday to see Easter Sunday.
We ask that you would wrap your arms around them.
Transform their wilderness with
Flowers in the desert,
Streams of justice,
And horizons of hope.
And bottle us up with light,
So that we have grace for the Good Friday days,
Patience for wilderness wanderings,
And enough light to share.
God, today is a day unlike any day,
So on this holy day, we ask that you would pour out a
double portion of your Spirit on us.
Turn this ordinary bread and ordinary cup into a
reminder

Prayer by Sarah Are / A Sanctified Art LLC / sanctifiedart.org

That you are a God of the particulars,
Which means you know us and love us as no one else
can.
And in this meal, may we remember that you gathered
with friends
To teach them how to love
So that in this meal,
We might gather with friends and share that same
love with your world.
God of the grave,
God of fresh air in lungs,
God of another tomorrow—
Fill our lungs with your Spirit.
We are here. We are breathing deeply.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Confession

God of new life,

We come to you confessing that we are guilty of creating emotional wilderness spaces—

Spaces of raised voices and slamming doors,

Of judgments passed and accusations cast,

Of cold shoulders and deep regret.

We create these spaces when we feel threatened, afraid, or ashamed,

Which is far too often given the promises you make to us.

So draw us back to the beginning— where you created and it was good.

Smooth over our wilderness scars and fill our veins with your love;

For like the disciples on that Easter morning, we are running toward you.

Amen.

Words of Assurance

The Invitation to Communion

Family of faith,

When we come to this table, we come with wilderness scars.

Scars from moments when we didn't belong,

And memories of nights that felt too long.

The wilderness is inescapable from time to time,

So that is why we *have* to come to this table.

Because here at this table, all belong.

Here at this table, the night never wins.

And here at this table, we remember that life overcomes death.

So come—

Come with your prayers and your alleluias.

Come with your hopes and your dreams.

Come, not because you have to, but because you can.

And come, because each wilderness has its end.

Jesus is here— Jesus with his scars and empty tomb. So come!

Prayer by Sarah Are / A Sanctified Art LLC / sanctifiedart.org

The Story of the Lord's Supper

The Prayer of Consecration

Passing the Peace

Although we cannot be physically close to one another at this time, we can be relationally close. This Sunday morning, you are invited to pass the peace with your church family and loved ones by taking a moment to text, write, call, or message the people in your church family to let them know you are thinking of them. May the peace of Christ be with you.

A Song for Sending

He is Risen Medley

David Lantz III, arr.

Sending

This Easter Sunday is unlike any Easter we have seen before. We are not gathered as a church family. However, we can trust that God is with us and God is still speaking. Remember this morning. Take a picture. Journal about it. Document this moment in time. We will not be in the Wilderness forever. No matter where we are, we can boldly proclaim, Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

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If you should need to contact Pastor Stark, please email pastor@uccmke.org.
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915 East Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee, WI, 53207.

