***Embracing the uncertain***

**Lenten Worship Series – Easter SonRise**

***Go See Him for Yourself!***

**April 12, 2020**

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| **WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINE**SEach worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. Sermon manuscripts are included as a *sample* and not to be preached verbatim. |

**Announcements and Offering**

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| **Drama – Empty** |

***How Can We Be Sure?***

**Call to Worship:**

Given the diversity of perspectives among the four Gospel writers, it should not be surprising to hear that there are only a handful of miracle stories that all of the Gospels have in common. It should also not be a surprise to hear that the resurrection of Jesus is one of them.

Yet, each writer tells the story in his own unique way. By comparing their versions to one another, we can discover how each Gospel writer answers the question, “In a world of uncertainty, how can we be sure that the Resurrection is real?”

How do we get past our skepticism and find a way to claim that the Resurrection is real? When we take a look at how each Gospel writer answers that question, we not only find a way to *believe* that the Resurrection was real, but we also discover that the power of resurrection is still at work today.

 (*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 79-80)

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| **SB#228 – Low in the grave He lay**  | TB-905 – Up from the grave He arose | HTD2-T17 (3 vs.) |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#78 – Lord, I Lift Your Name on High****SB#379 – Lord, I lift Your name on high** | HC-78TB-948 – You came from Heaven to earth | HCD6-T18No CD |
| **HC#237 – Cornerstone**  | HC-237 | HCD22-T17 |
| **HC#241 – Crown Him with Many Crowns****SB#358 – Crown Him with many crowns,** | HC-241TB-162 – Diademata  | HCD23-T11HTD1-T8 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#217 – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing**  | TB-47 – Truro  | No CD |
| **SB#226 – Let us rejoice, the fight is won** | TB-43 – St Francis | HTD2-T15 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#227 – Look, ye saints! the sight is glorious** | TB-402 – Helmsley  | No CD |
| **SB#229 – O joyful sound! O glorious hour**  | TB-415 – He lives | No CD |
| **HC#233 – Christ the Lord Is Risen Today****SB#218 – Christ the Lord is risen today**  | HC-233TB-248 – Easter Hymn | HCD22-T13HTD3-T9 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#276 – Thine is the glory**  | TB-746 – Maccabeus | No CD |

***Go See Him for Yourself!***

**Choric Reading:**

**Reader 1:** Mary Magdalene and the other Mary knew what had happened to Jesus. Little more than thirty-six hours had passed since he died on the cross and was buried, so the news was still fresh in their minds. There would be no possible way for them to expect the events that greeted them when they arrived at the tomb.

**Reader 2:** 1After the Sabbath, as the light of the next day, the first day of the week, crept over Palestine, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb *to keep vigil*. 2Earlier there had been an earthquake. A messenger of the Lord had come down from heaven and had gone to the grave. He rolled away the stone and sat down on top of it. 3He *veritably* glowed. He was vibrating with light. *His clothes were light,* white *like transfiguration,* like fresh snow. 4The soldiers guarding the tomb were terrified. They froze like stone.

**Reader 3:** Notice that even though the women had witnessed the Resurrection, they were still not *affected* by it. Even though they were eyewitnesses to the good news, they were not yet living into the good news. We know this because the angel had to tell them not to be afraid, and not to dwell too much on what this scene all meant.

**Reader 1:** 5The messenger spoke to the women, *to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.* Don’t be afraid. I know you are here keeping watch for Jesus who was crucified. 6But Jesus is not here. He was raised, just as He said He would be. Come over to the grave, and see for yourself.

**Reader 2:** Notice what the angel does here. He recognizes the women’s fear and their anxiety. He acknowledges the fact that even though they saw the Resurrection happen, they did not yet know what it meant. Then he tells them, simply and directly, that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

**Reader 3:** The angel doesn’t even attempt to explain how the Resurrection happened. No word about how a body that had died could come back to life, how a brainwave that had gone flat could be jump-started again, or how cells that had been in rigor mortis could be stirred back into action. The reality is, God is resurrecting dead things to life all the time, all around us, yet we are so locked in our fears and anxieties that we miss it. So the very next words of the angel to the women are precisely the same words that Matthew believes you and I need to hear today:

**Reader 1:** 7And then go straight to His disciples, and tell them He’s been raised from the dead and has gone on to Galilee. You’ll find Him there. Listen carefully to what I am telling you.

**Reader 2:** In other words, the angel tells the women, “Look, don’t just stand there trying to figure out what to make of this good news. If you do, you’re going to miss it, and you won’t understand it anyway. Instead, get up, get going, get moving, get active, and go see this Jesus for yourself.”

(Matthew 28:1-7, *The Voice*;

*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 81-82)

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| **HC#204 – See, What a Morning**  | HC-204 | HCD19-T14 |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#78 – Lord, I Lift Your Name on High****SB#379 – Lord, I lift Your name on high** | HC-78TB-948 – You came from Heaven to earth | HCD6-T18No CD |
| **HC#149 – In Christ Alone** **SB#861 – In Christ alone** | HC-149TB-132 – same  | HCD13-T19No CD |
| **HC#164 – Before the Throne of God Above****SB#243 – Before the throne of God above**  | HC-164TB-52 – same  | HCD15-T14No CD |
| **HC#209 – Come People of the Risen King**  | HC-209 | HCD19-T19 |
| **HC#237 – Cornerstone**  | HC-237 | HCD22-T17 |
| **HC#241 – Crown Him with Many Crowns****SB#358 – Crown Him with many crowns** | HC- 241TB-162 – Diademata | HCD23-T11HTD1-T8 (4 vs.) |
| **HC#248 – Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)** | HC-248 | HCD23-T18 |
| **HC#255 – Victory in Jesus** **SB#464 – I heard an old, old story**  | HC-255TB-908 – Victory in Jesus | HCD24-T15HTD10-T17 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#139 – He came to give us life**  | TB-645 – same  | No CD |
| **SB#167 – Hail Thou once despisèd Jesus**  | TB-370 – Hyfrydol  | HTD1-T14 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#168 – Hark! the gospel news is sounding**  | TB-399 – Cwm Rhondda | HTD3-T7 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#217 – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing**  | TB-47 – Truro  | No CD |
| **HC#233 – Christ the Lord Is Risen Today****SB#218 – Christ the Lord is risen today**  | HC-233TB-248 – Easter Hymn | HCD22-T13HTD3-T9 (4 vs.) |
| **SB#226 – Let us rejoice, the fight is won** | TB-43 – St Francis | HTD2-T15 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#227 – Look, ye saints! the sight is glorious** | TB-402 – Helmsley  | No CD |

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| **SB#219 – God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus** | TB-570 – Because He lives | HTD12-T2 (3 vs.) |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **SB#222 – He is Lord** | TB-649 – same  | No CD |

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**[Each week, *Embracing the Uncertain* is a time of silent prayer by the congregation. The leader should walk the congregation through the bullet points below.]**

**Leader:** If you are not in a place in your life where you can believe in the Resurrection, then start practicing it until **you *can* believe it:**

* If you are struggling in your prayer life with doubts about its nature and whether it is effective, spend some time now in silent prayer until **you *can* believe it.**
* If you have a strained relationship with your Bible, keep reading it, every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you until **you *can* believe it.**
* If you are reluctant to make church attendance and participation a part of your life, then keep on showing up, regularly. Pray for this discipline until **you *can* believe it.**
* If you have questions about God’s presence in the midst of daily life, then pray for God’s presence and guidance in your life until **you *can* believe it**.
* If you have real fears about being abandoned by a God you are not sure even exists, then pray for someone to come alongside you to join arm and arm whose belief can buoy your own until **you *can* believe it** for yourself.

**Leader:** In other words, if you doubt the Resurrection, then start practicing resurrection— living a life that counts on the Resurrection—until **you can believe the Resurrection for yourself.**

 That is exactly what the angel told the women. Go to Galilee. You may still have your doubts and may still be afraid. And who can blame you? But God is calling you to do something about it. Get active in your faith. Go meet this resurrected Jesus.

(*Embracing the Uncertain*, pp. 81-82)

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Message – Go See Him for Yourself**

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| **SB#222 – He is Lord** | TB-649 – same  | No CD |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#89 – Knowing You****SB#565 – All I once held dear** | HC-89TB-725 – Knowing You | HCD7-T19No CD |
| **HC#123 – Shine on Us** | HC-123 | HCD11-T13 |
| **HC#128 – My Tribute**  | HC-128 | HCD11-T18 |
| **HC#136 – We All Bow Down**  | HC-136 | HCD12-T16 |
| **HC#137 – Worthy Is the Lamb****SB#201 – Thank you for the cross, Lord** | HC-137TB-947 – Worthy is the Lamb  | HCD12-T17No CD |
| **HC#160 – I Surrender** | HC-160 | HCD14-T20 |
| **HC#164 – Before the Throne of God Above****SB#243 – Before the throne of God above**  | HC-164TB-52 – same  | HCD15-T14No CD |
| **HC#205 – Closer Still**  | HC-205 | HCD19-T15 |
| **HC#207 – Grace Alone****SB#699 – Every promise we can make** | HC-207TB-640 – Grace alone | HCD19-T17No CD |
| **HC#214 – Holy Spirit**  | HC-214 | HCD20-T14 |
| **HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty****SB#376 – King of kings, majesty**  | HC-219TB-722 – same | HCD20-T19No CD |

**Testimonies/Theme – I believe in the Resurrection because….**

**Benediction:**

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

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| **HC#241 – Crown Him with Many Crowns****SB#358 – Crown Him with many crowns** | HC-241TB-162 – Diademata | HCD23-T11HTD1-T8 (4 vs.) |
|  **Additional Optional Songs** |
| **HC#149 – In Christ Alone** **SB#861 – In Christ alone** | HC-149TB-132 – same  | HCD13-T19 |
| **HC#161 – My Great Redeemer’s Praise****SB#89 – O for a thousand tongues to sing** | HC-161TB-57 – Azmon TB-75 – Grimsby  | HCD15-T11HTD3-T4 (4 vs.)No CD |

DeVega, Magrey R. *Embracing the Uncertain: a Lenten Study for Unsteady Times*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

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| **Lent 2020 – Easter SonRise** |
| **DRAMA****Empty****By Martyn Scott Thomas**© Copyright 2019 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission. |
| **Topic:** | Resurrection |
| **Scripture:** | Matthew 28:1-7 |
| **Synopsis:** | Two people discuss the empty tomb. |
| **Characters:** | Player 1Player 2 |
| **Props/Costumes:** | None. |
| **Setting:** | Bare stage. |
| **Running time:** | 2 minutes |

[*Players 1 and 2 are standing center stage.*]

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** The grave is empty!

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** The body that was in it is gone.

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** Jesus was dead.

**Player 1:** He died on the cross and was pierced with a spear.

**Player 2:** And he was buried in a tomb.

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** [*wondering*] Maybe the disciples took his body.

**Player 1:** The same ones that scattered in the garden and left him alone with the mob?

**Player 2:** Good point.

**Player 1:** Plus the tomb was guarded by Roman Centurions.

**Player 2:** Maybe they were sleeping.

**Player 1:** And risk death for falling asleep on duty?

**Player 2:** Probably not.

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** Maybe he wasn’t really dead and walked out of the tomb by himself.

**Player 1:** He was whipped and beaten by Roman Centurions, executed on a cross, and stabbed in the side with a spear to ensure he was dead.

**Player 2:** It could’ve happened.

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** Empty?

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** Maybe the women went to the wrong tomb and just thought that Jesus had risen.

**Player 1:** And nobody checked the other tombs to make sure Jesus was still there?

**Player 2:** I guess they could have done that.

**Player 1:** Empty!

**Player 2:** [*convinced*] Empty.

**Player 1:** He is risen!

**Player 2:** He is risen, indeed!

[*Blackout*]

***Embracing the Uncertain***

**Lenten Sermon – Easter SonRise**

***Go See Him for Yourself!***

**April 12, 2020**

[Adapted from *Embracing the Uncertain*, by Magrey R. deVega

Chapter 7: *The Empty Tomb and the Proof of the Resurrection*

and

“The Case for Easter” Worship Series (Lent 2006), *Defending the Empty Tomb*]

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-15; John 20:1-18; Mark 16:1-8

**Introduction:**

What a journey this has been over these past few weeks as we have made our way to yet another Easter morning. There is ample evidence that Easter is the pivotal point of the whole Christian message. 1 Corinthians15:17 (NIV) makes this point:

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

Jesus died on Friday. The evidence is clear. The disciples are in mourning; the authorities are likely feeling a bit relieved; the women, in particular, are needing to do something. They could no longer just sit. It has been hard enough on them knowing that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus hastily prepared the body of Jesus for burial. Now that the Sabbath is over they must minister once again to Christ, even in his death.

Herod and Pilate are likely just happy if this rabble nation is quiet for a while. What is it to them that had happened in the last few hours? They tried to save the life of this innocent man but the crowd wanted his blood. Perhaps with him gone, life in the region will get back to normal as it was before this Galilean stirred up the people.

So on this early Sunday morning before there are very many people stirring about, the women who had been faithful followers of Jesus make their way to minister to the body of Christ. The Gospel writers are not all clear on how many women or which women they were but the very fact that the first witnesses to Christ’s resurrection are women indicates that this is not a story made up by the disciples. If the story had been made up by the disciples to convince the populace they would not have chosen women. In a story conjured up by the disciples, men would have been much better and more acceptable witnesses. Women were not considered to be reliable witnesses—particularly in matters of the court. But God chose women to be the first witnesses.

**The Empty Tomb According to Matthew**

Let’s consider the events of this early morning. Matthew 28:1-8 tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, perhaps the mother of Jesus, are the two who went to the tomb. Matthew gives us some detail indicating that an earthquake has taken place and an angel of the Lord has moved the stone away from the mouth of the tomb. The guards were so frightened that they were like dead men. The angel then tells the women that Jesus is no longer in the tomb and invites them in to see the spot where he had been laid. Matthew 28:6-7 (NIV):

*6 “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’”*

But this was not the end of their encounter with the message of the risen Lord. Even as they were making their way to the disciples, Jesus met them. Matthew 28:9-10 (NIV):

*9 Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

**Reality for the Guards**

The guards certainly knew what danger they were in. How would they explain the empty tomb? Matthew again tells us what happened to the guards. Some of the guards went to the city and reported to the chief priest who consulted with the elders and devised a story and paid the guards to say that the disciples came at night and stole the body away while the guards were asleep. I can only imagine this must have been a large bribe…what guard would ever admit to having fallen asleep on the job? This was covered in the story that was given by Matthew. He tells us what the guards were promised (Matthew 28:14-15, NIV):

*14 “If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

**The Empty Tomb According to John**

John gives a slightly different account of the early morning events (John 20:1-9). John tells us that it was Mary Magdalene alone who went to the tomb in these early dawn hours. She sees that the stone has been rolled away and she goes running to tell Simon Peter, *“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him”* (v. 2).

Peter and another disciple have come and looked and gone away again when Jesus comes to Mary. She was in tears when a man spoke to her. She thought it was the gardener (v. 16):

*Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

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

Mary rushed back to tell the disciples the news (v. 18): *“I have seen the Lord!”*

So many things have happened in a few hours. The gospel writers agree on many issues even if the ordering of the events are not identical. For instance:

* + The women are the first to see and converse with the risen Christ.
	+ The stone was rolled away without human intervention.
	+ The tomb was empty.
	+ An angel proclaimed that Jesus was risen.
	+ The disciples need to know they will see him again.

It is very difficult to get the details of any event accurate from multiple witnesses. Because the stories are not identical does not mean the story is not true.

**The Open Empty Tomb**

Let me share with you a fact of the story. The tomb was opened not *for Christ to come out* but *for us to look in*.

Matthew indicates that the angel opened the tomb and at the time there was an earthquake. The story does not say, “Then Jesus was released and came forth….” No, Jesus was already gone and the grave clothes were there.

The stone was moved for us to see the empty tomb. How often in our experience do we need God to remove the barriers that would block our seeing the miracles and the reality of the living Lord in our lives? The stone was moved for us—not for him.

[“The Case for Easter” Worship Series (Lent 2006), *Defending the Empty Tomb*]

**The Empty Tomb According to Mark**

If you’ve ever seen a live Passion play, you’ve probably seen the usual visual effects when it gets to the Easter story. Something funny happens with the lights. There’s a loud noise. Maybe a rush of wind or a burst of blaring trumpets. Then suddenly, thanks to some theatrical magic, the rock that sealed the entrance of the tomb mysteriously rolls out of the way!

That’s the usual sequence of events in live Passion plays. But it’s not what happens in Mark’s Gospel.

In Mark, nobody sees the Resurrection happen:

 *When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back”* (Mark 16:4, NRSV).

Did you catch that? The stone was *already* gone. It was a past tense event!

But here’s something else. Matthew and John each record a meeting between the women and Jesus. It happens shortly after they’ve been told about the Resurrection (Matthew 28:8-10; John 20:11-18). The most famous account of this is when Mary Magdalene meets Jesus at the tomb and thinks he’s the gardener (John 20:11-18). But nothing like this happens in Mark’s Gospel.

The women were not only too late to experience the Resurrection, but they were also too early to meet the resurrected Jesus (Mark 16:5-7, NIV):

***5****As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

***6****“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.****7****But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

In Mark’s Gospel, the meeting between the women and Jesus takes place after the final curtain closes, if it happens at all. The implication is that Jesus has gone ahead of them, and they are to continue moving forward in order to meet him. In other words, in Mark, God’s power and presence had preceded the women in the act of resurrecting Christ and had also gone before them in the presence of the resurrected Christ.

In one seemingly ordinary moment in time, at a place where the women came to the tomb expecting to find death and despair, they came to realize that not only was God with them in the present moment, God was working clearly in their past and already preparing their future.

In Mark’s Gospel, resurrection is presented as that which God has done, is doing, and will always do.

The power of the Resurrection through Christ is nothing less than the power to redeem the haunting guilt and shame of our yesterdays, the ongoing sufferings and despair of today, and the anxieties and worries of tomorrow. The message of the cross is comprehensive. It is thorough, it is timeless, and it is time-altering.

If any of this sounds to you remotely resonant with John Wesley’s understanding of grace, then I think you’re on to something.

God has worked in our past, in ways that we are not fully aware of, luring us into a relationship with God, injecting our lives with little glimpses of grace. There have been unexpected moments when God spoke to us, loved us, and cared for us, in effect rolling away the stone for us, even before we realized it. This is called prevenient grace. It is the grace that God gives to us even before we know it.

God is working in our present. The power of the Resurrection leads us to a place of utter humility and obedience to God, to the point where we are left with no response but to surrender ourselves wholly to the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Through the Resurrection, we can experience new life today. This is the justifying, saving grace of God, available to everyone. Accepting that grace will lead to an experience of new life and new freedom.

God is working on our future. God is molding you, shaping you, and preparing you for the destiny God desires for you. God will journey with you into the vast depths of unknown tomorrows, showing you how your talents and abilities will contribute to the wider plan of God’s kingdom. God’s resurrection guarantees our future security. This is the sanctifying grace of God.

John Wesley believed that the grace of God comes before us, goes before us, and lives with us still. That’s what the women at the tomb experienced firsthand. The Resurrection had happened. The resurrected Christ awaited them. The Resurrection experience was real.

[*Embracing the Uncertain*, *pp. 82-85*]

DeVega, Magrey R. *Embracing the Uncertain: a Lenten Study for Unsteady Times*. Abingdon Press, 2017.