

Easter Service Text
Rev. Thomas Cary Kinder
United Church of Strafford, Vermont
April 4, 2021 Easter Sunday
Psalm 118; John 20:1-18

Easter Proclamation:

Leader: He is risen!

All: He is risen indeed!

Leader: In him was life, and the life was the light of the world.

**People: The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness does not overcome it.**

Leader: Hallelujah!

People: Hallelujah!

All: Hallelujah!

Call to Worship: Good morning, and welcome to the United Church of Strafford on this Easter Sunday. Imagine strangers gathering at the empty tomb that first Easter morning, coming to see if the wild story they had heard about Jesus coming back to life could possibly be true. Imagine how that possibility made everything else they yearned for seem possible. Imagine how just showing up and sharing that experience could make total strangers laugh with one another and feel like family.

Two thousand years later Easter still has that intensity and power to make us one. If we let its brilliant light shine on the world and in our hearts, if we open to possibility of its hope and joy, it will transform our lives as it did the first disciples', and it will unite us.

Charlotte Brontë wrote, "Happiness quite unshared can scarcely be called happiness; it has no taste." A Swedish proverb says that joy shared is joy doubled. The poet W.H. Auden talked about practicing the scales of rejoicing, learning to be good at joy by practicing it.

We have a concentrated essence of joy here today, so I encourage you to savor it and share it. Allow yourself the magical gift of being in this beloved community on this day when strangers become new friends and old friendships deepen. I invite you to linger for the second hour of Joys and Concerns after the service, and I encourage you to reach out to people later today who could use the light you have found here. May your joy double today, and double again.

Announcement: And now it is my joy to make an announcement. “LENT IS OVER!” We have emerged from the wilderness into a day of celebration. It is a day to put resurrection and new life above all else. Let those facing trials hand everything over to God because this day proclaims that God’s power to renew and restore is greater than any earthly power, including death itself. So do not worry about anything! Forget confessing your sins today—you are forgiven! The resurrection has released a force of cosmic light into the world that nothing can overcome. If you do not feel joy today, try acting joyful anyway, in the hope that with God’s help your behavior will change your attitude. Let us join in worship together with reckless abandon and loud jubilation!

It takes poetry to do this day justice. Here are the words of ee cummings. Let us pray...

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun’s birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Story Time Poem: *The Tale of How the Easter Bunny Came to Be*

There was once a young bunny with softest of fur,
and yet nobody wanted to cuddle with her.
She was born as the smallest of three times thirteen.
Her poor mother was busy, her father not seen.
All her siblings would play but she couldn’t keep up.
With so many to feed there was not much to sup,

and her teeth gave her trouble so for a whole year
she could not eat a carrot or corn on the ear.
She was starting to feel that her life was a bore
and would sulkily sit by the rabbit den door
or wander quite aimlessly through the great wood
always looking for trouble and up to no good.
I am sorry to say she took pleasure in things
like gluing together a butterfly's wings
or turning a turtle smack onto its back,
till all creatures would hide from her, fearing attack.

Now, all bunnies who cared if they lived or they died
would stay clear of the human world lurking outside,
and would never cross under the fence to the field
where all manner of dangers and traps were concealed,
like mower blades, dog teeth and little boy hands—
it gave them a shudder to think of those lands.
But this littlest bunny was too glum to care
and one day half from boredom, half mischief, went there.

She had hopped through an endless wide ocean of grass
and found nothing exciting to make the time pass
when all of a sudden she saw rise ahead
the terror wise rabbits would flee from in dread,
the form of a human!!! The hugest of men!!!
Though really a pretty small girl, not yet ten.
She was sitting, her back to the bunny's approach,
and was really no threat of a cut, bite or poach.
In fact she was crying. Tears poured from her eyes,
for her brothers all teased her and sisters told lies

and her father was busy and mother was cross,
and their portions of pasta were small, and no sauce!

For a minute the bunny hung back, still afraid,
but her heart understood the strange sound the girl made,
and the bunny discovered she knew what could help,
though at first the girl jumped with a very loud yelp.
But the bunny that brushed her bare leg had soft fur
and the look in its eyes said it cared about her.
So they cuddled a while and then started to play,
and for both this began a new life and new way.

They would meet there quite often, the girl would bring friends,
and the bunny would bring little gifts, odds and ends,
like a wren's nest or robin's smooth sky-blue hatched egg.
She would hide them sometimes and the children would beg
to be given a hint, but the bunny stayed mum.
She brought candy like jelly-beans, chocolate and gum,
and would fill little baskets with treasure and treat.
It gave her life purpose. It turned her life sweet.

All the bunnies back home were amazed at the change,
and they thought she was magic, though some thought her strange,
and it's true that she grew to unusual height
and so quick, she could visit all homes in one night,
but it's really no mystery what she's made of—
she is made of the joy of the sharing of love.

Easter Communion Introduction: We come now to the celebration of communion.
We have not done this together on Zoom before, which means it has been over a year, so

this is a joyful thing we do, and I hope you have yummy things on your plate and in your cup.

Some churches call communion the Agape Meal. Agape is the Greek word for God's love that we see in Jesus, love not as liking or affection so much as an approach to life with a wide open, generous heart, with compassion and lovingkindness for even the stranger or enemy. Agape is not love because something is worthy of love, but love because it is just what we do. Communion reminds us of the love we have for Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit, the love we have for this earth they created and the life they gave us, and the love we have for one another.

The word communion means literally to be in union with others. Communion reminds us that we are truly one, made from the same stardust, all humans and all life descended over billions of years from the same first living cells, all of us sharing the same spirit as Christ and all God's creation. We symbolize this oneness by taking into ourselves the bread and juice that comes from the one earth that the Spirit of the universe created and sustains.

As the book of First John says, "We love because God first loved us." Communion reminds us that we are all made by God's love for the purpose of loving others as God loves us. This is what Holy Week and Easter tell us as well, so it is fitting that we share communion today.

People have been gathering for this Agape Meal for two thousand years. I will say traditional words, but if you have trouble relating to them, only two words really matter—oneness and love. Come with the need to love and be loved that we all share, come with love of God and one another, and let us be one.

A Double Haiku by Mel Goertz:

This force called Beauty.
It opens the heart
like the petals of a rose.

This beauty
I open my door in the morning.
It is everywhere.