

Becoming
Sunday, April 12th, 2020
Easter Sunday || Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9 AM and join us in prayer and devotion

Audio worship, including music, is available at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>

A Blessing For the Interim Time
by John O'Donohue

*When near the end of day, life has drained
 Out of light, and it is too soon
 For the mind of night to have darkened things,*

*No place looks like itself, loss of outline
 Makes everything look strangely in-between,
 Unsure of what has been, or what might come,*

*In this wan light, even trees seem groundless.
 In a while it will be night, but nothing
 Here seems TO believe the relief of dark.*

*You are in this time of the interim
 Where everything seems withheld.*

*The path you took to get here has washed out;
 The way forward is still concealed from you.*

*“The old is not old enough to have died away;
 The new is still too young to be born.”*

*You cannot lay claim to anything;
 In this place of dusk,
 Your eyes are blurred;
 And there is no mirror.*

*Everyone else has lost sight of your heart
 And you can see nowhere to put your trust;
 You know you have to make your own way
 through.*

*As far as you can, hold your confidence.
 Do not allow your confusion to squander
 This call which is loosening
 Your roots in false ground,
 That you might come free
 From all you have outgrown.*

*What is being transfigured here is your mind,
 And it is difficult and slow to become new.
 The more faithfully you can endure here,
 The more refined your heart will become
 For your arrival in the new dawn.*

Scripture Reading

John 20:1, 11-16

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ... Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).

Sermon

I remember the first time I cried for sorrow since the pandemic began. It was about a week into our stay-at-home orders, and I was taking my dog Cosmo for a walk around the house before I clipped in him onto his lead in the backyard. I lowered myself down onto the cold concrete steps and, though I felt the warmth of the sun, a chill rose on my arms. Everything felt surreal, unimaginable, and somehow so distant from the world we once inhabited. How did this happen? We were worshipping together one week, laughing and giving each other hugs, and the next, it was all gone. And to begin to realize just how many people around the world were affected? This global pandemic was just starting to edge into our neck of the woods, and suddenly, the tears began to flow. Unwept tears of sorrow for those whose lives had been lost, of anxiety for those who had lost their jobs, of fear for those who work in hospitals, of stress for essential workers. I had tried to keep it all in, to be strong, to be able to handle everything, but here I was, weeping on my back steps. Cosmo's ears perked up and he turned around to stare at me, as though to ask, "Why are you weeping?" Then he bounded up the concrete steps and nuzzled my arm before sitting behind me, as though he were on the lookout for me, as though to communicate that he had my back. His actions brought more tears, but this time, they were tears of gratitude as I realized that I wasn't alone. It wasn't just Cosmo, but it was the church family who had shown up for one another when we needed it most. It was my family, with whom I had shared daily phone calls. It was my friends, with whom we shared postcards and recipes, video chats and even surprise gift boxes of spices left on our front porches. It is the strangers who show up, the ones we don't even recognize until they say our name. It is Jesus, who calls us by name.

This morning's Easter reading, from the very beginning, gives us permission to weep. It lets us mourn, even when we know we should be joyous. In this passage, Mary is asked several times, "Why are you weeping?" Can you imagine such an insensitive question? For three days, Mary had been holding onto *so much grief*. She had lost her Savior, her friend. She didn't want to believe it to be true. And I wonder if this was Mary's first visit to the tomb; maybe she sought closure, thinking that if she were just able to see it in person, she'd be able to finally believe that Jesus was dead and move on with her life. Imagine her shock and her sorrow when she saw that the tomb had been disturbed; she had been seeking peace, a way to grow from this new reality, and instead, she was prevented from receiving the closure she so desperately sought.

But the story doesn't end there; as Mary looks into the tomb, she sees two angels, who again ask her why she's crying. She believes that Jesus' body had been stolen, and all she wanted was to lay the body to rest, so that she, too, could rest within this new reality without him. And as she pleads with the angels, she turns around to see a stranger in her midst, who she believes to be the gardener, and begins pleading with him as well.

And then he whispers, "Mary."

In an act of recognition, Mary leaps up and gasps, "Teacher!" She knows that Jesus has risen, in the very moment he spoke her name. Jesus wipes away all her tears in his appearance, except for those tears of gratitude in knowing that she is not alone.

And nor are we. But let's get real: It's okay for today to not feel like Easter, because, in reality, we are in a liminal space. Liminal space acts as a threshold from the past to the future, a strange in-between moment when nothing feels stable, but where there are signs of hope, and where growth is occurring, even if it is underground and unseen. Liminal space is a place of becoming, a time when things are happening; we are in an *already but not yet* space, a time of waiting and watching for the sunrise. But perhaps it's not so invisible; maybe Easter *is* making an appearance.

Spring is showing its colors all around us. The bright green buds are beginning to unfurl, the bulbs have already emerged from the dark, cold soil, and the birds are singing their songs, even in the rain. Resurrection is here, everyday. As Christians, we can witness to the fact that Easter *is* actually everyday: we see reconciled relationships, healing from illnesses, families brought together through marriage, new babies born, and nature inspired to be renewed each day. With each sunrise, God's love bursts forth, spreading life and warmth to all of creation. This is the Easter message: we need not celebrate on one day a year. Resurrection from seed to fruit happens *everyday*. Resurrection from lost income to new provisions happens *everyday*. Resurrection from broken relationships to wholeness happens *everyday*. And it's all through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who first rose, so that we, too, might rise with him. Amen.

A Morning Offering
By John O'Donohue

*I bless the night that nourished my heart
 To set the ghosts of longing free
 Into the flow and figure of dream
 That went to harvest from the dark
 Bread for the hunger no one sees.*

*All that is eternal in me
 Welcomes the wonder of this day,
 The field of brightness it creates
 Offering time for each thing
 To arise and illuminate.*

*I place on the altar of dawn:
 The quiet loyalty of breath,
 The tent of thought where I shelter,*

*Waves of desire I am shore to
 And all beauty drawn to the eye.*

*May my mind come alive today
 To the invisible geography
 That invites me to new frontiers,
 To break the dead shell of yesterdays,
 To risk being disturbed and changed.*

*May I have the courage today
 To live the life that I would love,
 To postpone my dream no longer
 But do at last what I came here for
 And waste my heart on fear no more.*

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: God's hand in medical advancements, doctors, nurses, medical professionals, nursing home caregivers, police, firefighters, EMTs, and all essential workers who still must report to work and cannot stay home. Holding in our hearts: all those affected by the Coronavirus and the health of our world, all those who have lost income due to the virus, Barry, the family of Bernice, Betty, Dell, Evelyn, the family of Judy Bartlett in her loss, Melissa for her shoulder injury recovery, our prayer shawl recipients, Phyllis who is recovering from pneumonia at Quaboag, Priscilla, Rachel who is a nurse at Tufts, the Reim family, the United Methodist Church, all those who struggle with addiction. Note that this list will renew each month.

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.¹

¹ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Community Announcements

- **Welcome Melissa!** We are so excited to welcome Melissa Quilitzsch to our staff as the Music Director. You can hear her playing for the first time on last week's service at <https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>, and she will be playing again this Easter and for future services. If you are unable to access the internet, let Pastor Christy know, and she can mail you a CD of our services.
- **Recipe Collection.** In classic Methodist fashion, we all know that food brings us together. Pastor Christy is putting together a cookbook of our church's favorite recipes to share with everyone during this time of being apart. Please email, snail mail, or call Christy to tell her your favorite recipe(s) by Monday, April 20th. Feel free to share a story and/or photos surrounding the recipe too!
- **Prayer Chain.** If you are interested in staying in touch with folks and being a part of our Prayer Chain, let Pastor Christy know. If you have a request you'd like to send through, call Christy or Jane to initiate the chain.
- **Church Directory.** If you would like an updated Church Directory, please let Pastor Christy know, and she will send one in the next mailing.
- **Thank you!!** to Paul Ayers for his many years of service to our church as our treasurer! He has done incredible work for our church. Paul will be stepping back from his responsibilities in June, and we are now looking for a new treasurer. Let us be in prayer and discernment as we seek a new treasurer, and please contact Pastor Christy by April 15th if you are interested in serving. A Finance Committee Meeting will take place in the second half of April to discuss responsibilities and a transition plan.
- **Offerings** are still being encouraged during this time. Please consider mailing your offering to our church PO Box, so that we are able to continue in ministry through Christ for the transformation of the world. Offerings can be mailed to: George Whitefield United Methodist Church, PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585
- **Heifer Project** mission is still ongoing - this is our last week! Our Mission Project for Lent is supporting Heifer Project International, an organization that raises funds for economic development for folks in need across the world through environmental sustainability and other methods. We invite you to reach out if you haven't received a Heifer calendar and bank to "feed the hungry and feed our faith" through this effort. Checks can be made out to George Whitefield UMC with the memo line "Heifer Project." See Pastor Christy if you have any questions. Thank you for supporting this mission effort during Lent! *Please send your final checks to the church, and we will decide on which animal we'd like to purchase.*
- **The Sharing Cupboard** is experiencing high volumes of need at this time. If you are able to donate jelly, jam, coffee, or household products such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting cleaning wipes or spray, bar soap, toilet paper, paper towels, or laundry detergent, it would be greatly appreciated.
- **Future Services.** We are disappointed to say that all church services will continue to be suspended until further notice at Gov. Baker's orders, which means we will not be able to meet together for Easter. For the latest updates on our response to COVID-19, be sure to check out our website at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com or Like us on Facebook. You can also call the church number at (508) 867-3667 for more information.

A Companion Guide
The Upper Room Daily Devotionals
Monday, April 13th through Saturday, April 18th
Written by Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9 AM daily and join us in prayer and devotion. If you do not have a copy of The Upper Room Daily Devotionals, let Pastor Christy know & she will make sure you get one.

Monday, April 13th, 2020

Read Psalm 16:5-11

“I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.”

One of the things that has struck me the most during our social distancing is just how quiet it gets at night. There is less traffic, people are not traveling as much, and nature has begun to take over. And, in fact, it's not quiet at all. We hear crickets and peeping frogs, the hooting of owls, and perhaps even our own breath as we survey the sky, picking out our favorite constellations. What a blessing it is to breathe in the cool night air, knowing that it is God who comforts us in the midst of the unknown. What a blessing it is to be counseled, tended by God's great love, knowing that we have all that we need.

Let Us Pray Together

God of the earth and skies, You make all things come alive, even in the silence. You remind us what it means to be alive as You counsel us through the night. Be ever present with us as we navigate through the world today, providing us with hope, peace, and comfort, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, April 14th, 2020

Read Colossians 3:12-17

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion.”

Though the news has been filled with heartbreaking headlines and fear-inducing stories, one thing has become clear: we can count on God, and we can count on each other. Good news is here; we just have to look a little harder. You see, God has provided angels in our midst who are compelled to give generously and with compassion. God also calls us as Christians to clothe ourselves in compassion, bearing with one another in love and gratitude as we embark on a journey none of us have taken before. We, too, are good news to a hurting world. What does compassion look like for you? How can you show compassion to your neighbors, friends, and family?

Let Us Pray Together

God of compassion, Your love toward us surpasses all understanding. You provide us with all we need, and as followers of You, You compel us to act in compassion as well. Show us the ways we can serve You and each other today and everyday, through the example of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, April 15th, 2020

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

Over the past several weeks, I've noticed that I've been increasingly hard on myself; I feel like there is always something more I could be doing, like I'm not doing enough. But in daily prayer, I hear the Divine whisper, “My grace is your grace; be gentle with yourself.” In the midst of unknown times, it's easy to be self-critical and take things more personally than under normal circumstances. But we know that Christ supports us in our weakness and makes us strong, even as we face uncertain times. God is holding us in the Light, giving us peace and encouraging us to be gentle with ourselves today and always.

Let Us Pray Together

God of our faith, You raise us up even when we doubt You and ourselves. You encourage us in power even when we are weak. Be our Rock as we seek Your grace, which ultimately is our grace through Jesus Christ, who taught us to be gentle with ourselves as You are gentle with us. Be our guide, through the Divine love of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, April 16th, 2020**Read Matthew 8:23-27****“What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”**

If there was ever time to feel like we were stranded on a boat during a storm, now would be the perfect example. Many of us are feeling weary and exhausted, wondering when this pandemic will end, just trying to keep our heads above water to ride this season out. But we can take hope knowing that Jesus is taking charge, even now, even when it's difficult to see through the rain and wind of our worldly events. When we call on Jesus, we experience a peace that surpasses all understanding, which begs the question, “Who is this man?” Who is Jesus in your life? And how is he quelling the fears you have, allowing you to rest in the peace he brings?

Let Us Pray Together

God of the storm and God of the perfect spring day, You are present with us even as we encounter a new day in this new normal. You are with us, even when we doubt and are afraid. You provide us with calm that inspires us and calls us to new depths. Be with us, now and everyday, through Christ our Savior. Amen.

Friday, April 17th, 2020**Read Genesis 15:5-15****“Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”**

Many of you know that I went to college in Florida and studied at seminary in Boston. Along the way, I have met many wonderful people who are scattered across the country and world, from as close as our neighbors down the road to as far as Okinawa, Japan. Every time I've had to say goodbye, I've seen those friends as constellations of love, pinpoints of peace that I can count on throughout all of life's seasons. May we recognize the ways in which God has blessed us with descendants of love, whether our own biological descendants, or of friends from afar. God blesses our relationships, not just our relationship with the Divine, but also with each other.

Let Us Pray Together

God of all love and peace, You provide us with the friends and family we need during this time. We're grateful for the ways in which we are able to connect with one another, even from afar. As we continue to reach out in love to one another, we remember the example of Jesus Christ our Lord who does the same. Amen.

Saturday, April 18th, 2020**Read 1 John 3:1-3****“See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God.”**

This week as I was working from my parents' home, I was in the thick of phone calls and emails, quickly realizing that my to-do list was growing by the minute. My dad walked in and asked if I needed anything, and I said, “No, thank you, though!” A few minutes later, he came back in with a vase full of daffodils and other flowers from the yard, set them in front of me, and told me he loved me. I teared up as I gave him a hug. What love is this, that my dad knew exactly what I needed in the moment, and what love is this, that our Divine God knows even more what we need, that we should be called God's children? How are you experiencing God's love today?

Let Us Pray Together

God of the wildflowers and spring blossoms, You provide us with everything we need. Your love overflows and compels us to act in love for others. Help us to live as Your children as we serve You and others. May we feel Your love, now and forever, through Christ our Lord. Amen.