



A Simple Service of Testimony and Song in Celebration of the Resurrection

Worship with members of the Council of Conference Ministers and national setting staff of the United Church of Christ (UCC)

WELCOME AND GREETINGS

Rev. Elizabeth Dilley - Minister and Team Leader, Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization team, national setting of the UCC

Hello church. My name is Elizabeth Dilley and I serve as minister and team leader for the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization ministry team here in the national setting of the United Church of Christ. On behalf of the national setting and the Council of Conference Ministers, I want to invite you to enjoy this simple worship service, where we hear some testimony to tangible elements of the resurrection in this season, and we look with hope to what lies ahead in our faith, in our life and in the world. I'm so glad you could join us today.

OPENING LITANY

Based on John 20

Rev. Elena Larssen - Minister for Volunteer Engagement, national setting of the UCC

One: Peace be with you.

Many: The land drips with violence, people rage with contempt, even the air spins a path of destruction. How can we claim peace in a time like this?

One: Peace be with you.

One: Receive the Holy Spirit

Many: We are too afraid of this power, too enchanted by it, too disturbed by it. Is not this gift too powerful to be entrusted to humankind?

One: Receive the Holy Spirit.

One: See my hands.

Many: We do not want to see the wounds of the world; there are too many names to recall, too many places scored by violence. Why will you not let us forget?

One: See my hands.

One: Reach out your hand.

Many: We are so bound up in your love, O Christ, that your peace, your Spirit, even your pain will not let us go. Therefore we remember, take hold, receive, and move in faith.

One: Do not doubt but believe.

Many: Amen.

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 20: 19-31

Rev. Kent Siladi - Director of Philanthropy, national setting of the UCC

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. **31** But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

TESTIMONIES:

Introduction - Rev. Elizabeth Dilley:

In today's text the disciple Thomas yearned for a physical tactile sign of Christ's resurrection. So I asked a few of my conference minister and national staff colleagues if they would reflect on what those physical and tactile signs they were seeing throughout the world in this Easter season. What follows is just a few of those testimonies. Hear these words from the people of God, to the people of God.

Rev. Dr. Edward Davis - Conference Minister of the Southern Conference:

Good evening. I am the Rev. Dr. Edward Davis. I serve as the Conference Minister of the Southern Conference United Church of Christ. In this Easter season, we are reminded in John's gospel of the story of the doubting Thomas. Thomas was a disciple who did not show up with the other disciples after Jesus had been resurrected. And Thomas said to the disciples after hearing that Jesus had risen, he said that unless I see the physical evidence, unless I'm able to touch him, to touch the wounds, unless I am able to see those wounds, I will not believe it. Well, Jesus shows up on another occasion and yes Thomas was there, and Jesus says, Thomas, touch my hand, touch my wounds. This is me, I'm here. And upon touching Thomas believed, and Jesus says, blessed are those who having not seen yet they believe. That's our faith, brothers and sisters at work.

And in this Easter season, we are seeing evidence of the resurrection of Christ among us the people, we are seeing people being vaccinated, we're seeing people returning to work, we are seeing yes, the lifting up from depression, and we're seeing evidence of Christ among the people. Can you not believe that we will be restored, can you not believe that there will be a resurrection in our society, even now as we speak, but we have to have faith. Even though we do not see the physical evidence of a restoration or resurrection in our society, we must believe that we will be resurrected in spirit. No matter how bad things are in your life right now, you are right around the corner from a resurrection. So I leave you with this prayer, may the light of God surround you. The love of God invoke you, the power of God protect you, and the presence of God watch over you. Always remember that no matter where you are, having not seen, you believe that God is there. God bless you. Thank you.

Rev. Lynn Bunjak - Conference Minister of the Vermont Conference:

In Northern New England, spring is notoriously tardy. I have led many an Easter sunrise service in snow-boots and my parka. And yet the longer I live in this climate, the more I have come to appreciate the often hidden, mostly missed Harbingers of hope. Sometime in late February, the soundtrack outside my window changes, joining the raspy crow voices or Redwood blackbirds and chickadees, and even the occasional enthusiasm of a pileated woodpecker. The flock of turkeys that wanders through our yard pause while the Toms display themselves in all of their feathered glory and the hens ignore them.

Willow trees, ever hopeful, strain toward life. Beech trees seem to glow from within, the sap rises in maple trees and signals the time for the annual ritual of sugaring. Where do I find tactful, tangible experiences of resurrection? They are all around. This is a season that encourages my own resurrection journey. As the snow melts I walk our property, seeing where branches and old trees have come down. And I am reminded that there are places in my own life that have died and need to be let go. My times of meditation often send me looking for new green shoots arising within when I have the patience to see. I have experienced this long year of COVID like yearning for a season that is so delayed it might never come. This is a harsh climate we inhabit, it takes its toll on our physical and mental health. It strains our family relationships. It aches in hunger and homelessness and loneliness.

And yet even here are the small, easily missed signs that point us to resurrection. I sometimes imagine Thomas as a Vermonter who understands things best when they are in his hands. If resurrection is real, then it must be something to see and hear, taste and smell. It must be felt in the changing winds when the turning of the seasons evokes an answering cry in our souls. The signs of resurrection are here for the finding, tucked in neglected corners, shining in ray of sunlight, tugging at us in a child's crying, even in this difficult time, even now.

Rev. Noel Andersen - UCC and CWS Grassroots Coordinator for Immigrants' Rights:

My name is Noel Andersen, with the UCC National Collaborative on Immigration, and I'm sharing reflections on John 20: 19-31 this Easter. When we look at this scripture we think of doubt often as something to try to conquer, but what if doubt is not something to be ashamed of or to try to overcome? What if it is a critical part of our faith? What if when we are unsure is when we are forced to seek deeper? Is only when we're honest about our fears that we can actually face them? And when we give voice to the lack of faith that we experience that we're able to find Jesus in new ways? After a year of facing the pandemic, political turmoil, racial injustice, children in need at the border, how can we not have our doubts. But through all our fears, throughout the doubt, we find our faith and new voice to give witness. When we understand that the bodily resurrection is representative of our renewed commitment towards collective salvation, collective liberation, then we can recommit to fight for justice. And to walk hand in hand in this search for redemption.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund - Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice:

As the United Church of Christ Minister for Disability and Mental Health Justice, I like to say that I preach with the Bible in one hand and disability theology in the other. Disability and mental health justice theologies are the lenses for which I view scripture. And today's passage, thinking about Thomas and Thomas' encounter with Jesus, I am mindful of the powerful words of Jesus to the disciples. Peace be with you. Jesus said that the first time he appeared after the resurrection to the disciples gathered in the house. And Jesus says it again. The second time Jesus appears Jesus says, peace be with you. And the second time Thomas is there to hear these powerful words of peace. Where I see the power of God's love and liberation is in the encounter Thomas has with the risen savior, for through the lens of disability theology and through the interpretation of Nancy Eastland.

She tells us that there, Thomas and others encounter a God fully embodied in the experience of being a whole person, that there God in Christ is fully human, showing up with hands and feet that are impaired. Revealing to us the disabled God that Jesus the resurrected savior shows us marks of impairment, and that in this way, the disabled God is not only the one from heaven, but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disabilities. I see signs of the risen Christ in places in the United Church of Christ that are fully inclusive of people living with disabilities. When we turn to virtual worship and we thought about people who needed close captioning, there I saw the resurrected God.

And as we continue in our life together in this season of Easter time, I pray that all of our churches will continue to work for justice and inclusion for all, creating worship and experiences as a faith community that are accessible to all, making accommodations joyfully, and empowering leaders at every level of the church who live with disabilities and mental health challenges. Peace be with you. And may we continue to work together to build a more just world for all, especially people with disabilities and mental health challenges.

Closing - Rev. Elizabeth Dilley:

Dear ones, as I asked my colleagues in the nation setting and conference minister colleagues to share, now I turned to you and ask you, right now, when so many of us have been physically isolated from one another for so long, what physical, tactile signs of Christ's resurrection do you see this afternoon?

MUSICAL OFFERING: RISE UP, PEACE ETERNAL

Written and performed by The Restoration Project

Rise up Peace Eternal within our hearts; Rise up Peace Eternal on this city block.
Side by side we are waiting, be born in our song; we long for justice here.

Rise up Love Eternal within our hearts; Rise up Love Eternal on this city block.
Side by side we are waiting, be born in our song; we long for justice here.

Rise up Hope Eternal within our hearts; Rise up Hope Eternal on this city block.
Side by side we are waiting, be born in our song; we long for justice here.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND BENEDICTION

Rev. Dr. Chris Davies - Minister and Team Leader, Faith INFO, national setting of the UCC

God of Many Names,

Receive the words of testimony from all of your people. The words of knowing, the feeling in the gut, and in the winds of spirit. The stories of touching the wounds to know, of disbelief made into wonderment. God, we testify to the glimmers of glory, the sparkles of spirit and the thunderous trumpets of your manifestation in this world. We testify to the pain, the grief, the ache of loneliness in this year, and to the ways in which you call your people ever closer on the Way: to each other, and to you. And alongside the Risen Christ we testify that this world can move ever closer to the world we imagine for the sake of our ancestors and the hope of our children, Amen.

Go now, People of God. Witness to the Glory of the Risen Christ. And where the road is rough, when the doubt seeks to overcome all faith, Let's take turns to testify to the Love Eternal in the world today, and all days. Amen.

Thank you for joining us today!