

## **Easter Sunday - April 12, 2020 - Saint David's, Halifax NS**

Readings: Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

### **Presbyterian World Service & Development Litany:**

*(Written by the Rev. Iona MacLean - The Church of Saint David, Halifax)*

God raised Jesus on the third day

**Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

Let us take our tambourines,  
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

**Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

With the Risen One in our midst,  
**the graveyard becomes a garden;  
grief turns to gladness, tears to laughter.  
There is a new creation!**

With the Risen One in our midst,  
**life defeats death,  
love overcomes hatred,  
hope replaces fear.**

This is the good news of the gospel!  
**Christ is risen! We are risen! Alleluia!**

Let us pray:  
**God our Creator,  
in raising Jesus from the dead,  
you have made the world brand new.  
We praise you with joy and thanksgiving!  
May we live daily as Easter people  
bringing life, love and hope to all the world;  
through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.**

### **Jeremiah 31:2-6 (NRSV)**

<sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD:

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;  
when Israel sought for rest, <sup>3</sup> the LORD appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

<sup>4</sup> Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!  
Again you shall take your tambourines,  
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

<sup>5</sup> Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria;  
the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.

<sup>6</sup> For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim:  
“Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.”

### **Matthew 28:1-10**

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

### **Reflection:**

Much of Jeremiah’s message pronounces Israel’s exile to Babylon as judgement for ignoring God’s truth and purpose. Cut off from their homeland, their holy city and temple destroyed, the people see nothing but gloom, despair and agony.

But in chapters 30-31, called the Book of Consolation, the prophet proclaims God’s faithfulness and love toward the people. God will in the end deliver them from exile even as God delivered the people from slavery in the past and led them through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. As they once found “grace in the wilderness,” now they will discover God’s loving presence even while in exile.

The prophet repeats like a refrain the word “Again” suggesting the restoration of celebrations not known during the exile.

“*Again* the city will be built. . .

*again* they will dance and make merry. . .

*again* they will plant vineyards and enjoy the fruits of their labours.”

New life will come through God’s surprising intervention and the people will join in “the dance of the merry-makers.”

Dance happens many times in Scripture when God delivers the people from bondage to freedom, from death to life.

Miriam and the women by the shores of the Red Sea celebrate their people’s escape from Pharaoh’s pursuing army by taking up tambourines and singing a song of triumph, “dancing a whirl of liberation by the sea.” [from *Clothed with the Sun* by Joyce Halliday, p. 140]

David the king, celebrating victory, brings to his city the ark of the Lord, that mysterious piece of furniture containing the covenant made with God on Mount Sinai and seen as the very dwelling-place of God. Along the way, “David and all the house of Israel [dance] before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.” And “David dance[s] before the Lord with all his might.”

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary hear the extraordinary news of the angel: "He is not here, for he has been raised." They leave the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and run to tell his disciples. They *run* "Dancing a whirl of liberation!"

"Dancing before the Lord with all their might!"

The dance of life and joy and praise and faith. . . . The dance of the merrymakers!

Jeremiah's promises a despairing people:

"Again you shall take your tambourines,  
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers"

The promise resounds through the ages wherever and whenever death and exile seem to have the upper hand. It resounds in our own ears and hearts with resurrection hope sorely needed in these days of trial.

We cannot yet during this covid19 exile let loose in celebration and it is hard to dance alone. We are weighed down by sadness and anxiety and loneliness.

And yet, Easter tells us "life wins!"

There *will* be a restoration of celebrations not known during the exile.

We are in this together with God and we will get through this together with God. In our anticipation of the good future, Jeremiah helps us even now turn the corner from lamentation to joy, from darkness to light, from certain death to unexpected resurrection, from dirge to dance.

We are invited to join in the dance of the merrymakers--maybe alone on our porches and balconies for now but together with all of our fellow humans--like the Brits who every evening bang their pots and clap separately but together by way of encouragement of health care workers. Even in exile there is promise and grace, life and hope, love and joy.

Whatever our own experience of death and exile, gloom and despair,  
at Easter we celebrate God's victory of life over death, love over hatred--  
the birth of the new creation in Jesus Christ, our Crucified and Risen Lord.

We are invited to be "merrymakers" and to join in the dance of liberation, for we have been freed from death and the things of death through Christ's rising from the grave. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Dance, is risen! Let us follow his lead. Alleluia!

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, by entering death your Son destroyed its power,  
and by bringing him back from the grave you have opened the door to eternal life.  
Thank you for calling us to yourself  
and showing us the path to life through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Thank you for the promise of a new heaven and a new earth,  
where the sound of weeping will no longer be heard, nor the cry of distress,  
where all people shall enjoy the work of their hands and delight in the fruit of the earth,  
when the whole creation will be transfigured by your grace.

God of all nations, bring peace and healing to the world.

God of healing and strength, we remember and pray for all who need your healing touch, all who need your strength in these trying days:

the front line workers in health care and essential services;  
the most vulnerable among us, those who have no home to stay in,  
those who have little to eat and are without access to clean water;  
young families trying to stay safe and living in close quarters;  
teachers and students trying to do education in a new way.  
all who are anxious, all whose hearts are troubled.

Be with the dying and all who grieve, and show them a vision of your eternal love, which is not ended even by death.

God of time and eternity, we remember your people who have left this life and now rest with you: faithful servants throughout history, and those who have been especially dear to us. May we remember them with gladness and hope as we look forward to joyful reunion on the day when all tears will be dried, all pain ended, and death destroyed, through Christ Jesus our Lord--who was dead but is alive forever. All glory be to you, O God. Amen.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.  
Amen.*