

Not Ordinary Church

Easter: Wonder, Absurdity, and Holy Questions

Allyson Sawtell, 2022

Notes for the pastor and worship leaders

As one of the highest holy days in the church year, the celebration of Easter needs to really reflect the personality, faith, and values of each local church.

You know the needs and experiences of your own congregation best. And who knows what will be happening in the world, and to God's good Creation, by the time Easter comes around? The proclamation of Easter needs to speak to the here and now, to the wrenching pain, the tremulous hopes, and the incredible joy of your particular congregation and its work in the world.

The Readings

So, all that being said, I simply offer you a few readings for your use; two of them may be familiar if you've cruised my website.

These materials could be used in several ways:

- Read aloud in the worship service, with one or two readers (they are too wordy for congregational responsive readings).
- Printed in the bulletin for members of the congregation to reflect on.
- Printed in your newsletter.
- Read silently as your own personal reflection.

Use them as they are most helpful for you and your congregation. Just don't change or delete words, or rearrange the flow of each reading.

The Rituals

I also offer you suggestions for a ritual if you are so inclined. They relate back to the rituals from my Ash Wednesday and Lent resources.

If you were lighting candles throughout Lent, you may recall the candles primarily represented what separates us from ourselves, each other, and all Creation. For Easter, acknowledge those separations – carry the candles in at the start of the service, or have them on your Communion table/altar already lit at the start of the service. Then light some new ones – from the Christ candle this time. These new ones are in celebration of overcoming separation, of places where new life shines through, and hope is embodied. Be specific in naming what those places are.

If you planted seeds at the start of Lent, bring the bowl forward with the seeds and hopefully-sprouted plants. You could carry this in at the start of the service, during the first hymn, or you could have a brief ritual within the service of worship, where you bring the bowl forward to the Communion table/altar and talk about the planting of seeds. And if none of the seeds came up, that could be a valuable teaching moment, too! Sometimes, even with our best efforts, whatever

seeds we've planted may not sprout, so we try again in different ways, asking questions, making change; being an Easter people, we know we can do this.

Then, pastors and worship leaders, at the end of the service, rejoice! Go home and get some rest! You deserve it!

An Absurd Reading for Easter: Lather, Rinse, Repeat

Doesn't it strike you as odd, those open-ended instructions on the shampoo bottle that say "Lather – Rinse – Repeat"? For how long? When do you stop? It's like not being able to stop spelling "banana"!

"Lather – Rinse – Repeat." Our imaginative selves conjure a vision of some poor soul in an unending cycle of shampooing and rinsing, over and over, until their hair falls out.

Our rational selves chuckle and say "Oh for heaven's sake! It's obvious – repeat once, of course!" Absurd to think otherwise.

Our imaginative selves – who appreciate the absurd – wonder about it anyway. We ask those questions that may sound ridiculous, because our imaginative selves don't think the answer is obvious at all.

Easter is that time of celebrating the absurd: What?! Life overcomes death?! Proclaiming, celebrating this absurdity. And then doing it.

Easter is a "Lather – Rinse – Repeat" phenomenon, and it doesn't end:

Celebrate (our beloved Creation)

Acknowledge and lament our separation from it and our participation in causing its pain.

Reach out to each other and all the web of life.

Embody hope and don't give up (or, at least not often).

And do that all over again. And again. And again.

Celebrate joyously on Easter that life is triumphant. Then, leap back into the fray. Because we must, and because we can. And because that's where life and beloved community reside.

So in the midst of Lent, we plant seeds and sing alleluias. And on Easter we celebrate and jump back into the hard stuff. Together.

The Journey Leads Us To An Empty Tomb
(If you're expecting answers, you need to sing another song)

The journey leads us to an empty tomb
 Easter brings surprise
 Easter brings a shout and a sob

The journey leads us to an empty tomb
 Easter brings questions
 Who are we?
 Who are we to become?
 What do we do now?
 Where do we go from here?

The journey leads us to an empty tomb.

A beginning, not an ending

Life triumphs, life flourishes!

God picks us up, spins us around, and pushes us out, saying "Go! Love! Hope!"
 And, "When did I say it would be easy?"
 And, "Do you really think you're alone?"

The journey leads us – together – to an empty tomb.

Whatever happened then touches us now.

We are Resurrection people. And we are the body of Christ.
 We are called to embody God's love by what we do and who we are
 To hope and not give up
 To keep striving to heal all creation
 To reach out and transform separation to connection
 To build the beloved community and fight despair
 To confront, challenge, and struggle with all that would destroy and demean
 And to remember to laugh.

The journey leads us to an empty tomb.
 Easter is celebration and call, resistance and question, laughter and surprise.
 Easter is hope.

We came to the tomb expecting duty and grief

And we found...

Mystery Space Questions Joy
 Hope

Today, tomorrow, and always.

We Need No Poems For Easter

We need no poems for Easter. Easter just is. Exploding in light and wonder.

No words needed, no words contain.

No one really understands it, anyway.

What really came bursting, questing, leaping from the tomb?

What did the women really see?

More than a beloved:

Something that made sense in all that jumble of things, pebbles scattered, sharp and alone.

Something that put things together. Something of “Yes! That’s it!”

Something that made them live, tears still damp on their faces,
burial spices still scenting their hands.

Something that made them run and tell the others, who, predictably, did not believe.

But they ran to tell anyway.

In the midst of all the chaos: comprehension, and “Yes!”

We need no poems for Easter. It’s intuitively obvious!

Light bursting forth, with more questions than answers

Heartfelt energy that pricks at the lethargy of grief and endings.

Whatever it is, something more.

A tangled web of unknowing and questions, yet bright and shining,
as only something of joy and hope can be.

A web that connects us – to life, to each other, to all that is holy, to all Creation.

The story isn’t over, the work not yet done.

There are still more tears to be shed, more confessions to be made.

Pilate’s army does not “go gentle into that good night.”¹

Easter comes anyway, with power of its own.

Easter scoops us up into its bright and shimmering arms,

Scatters us like so many rose petals, calling to us: “Now then, go!”.

And somehow, when we’re at our best, we do.

We let ourselves be flung out into the world with what courage we can muster,

And what love we can embody.

We dare to believe another world is possible.

We dare to believe we can participate in its creation.

No, we don’t need any poems for Easter.

Easter is so simple, after all.

¹ Dylan Thomas



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