

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #8

April 11, 2020

This is the eighth issue of our E-newsletter, “Gather ‘Round,” to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue!

*As the church through the ages has proclaimed:
Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!
Happy Easter, Everyone!*

Easter Sunrise Service

Moosup Valley Church invites everyone to our annual *Easter Sunrise Service on April 12 at 7 a.m. at Green Acres* behind the church. Carl is going to stand by the cross with his mobile phone when he joins us by Zoom! The bulletin for the service is attached, below, so you can participate; bring a piece of bread when you sit down at your table. (*Pastor Bob just asked people to post favorite sunrise pictures on the Mount Vernon Larger Parish Facebook page.*)

Join Zoom meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/103098713>

Or if your computer doesn't have speakers and a microphone, dial in (301-715-8592).

Meeting ID:103 098 713

Easter Morning Worship & Reflection

After we have joined together for Easter Sunrise Service on Zoom, Pastor Bob is going to flood the Mount Vernon Larger Parish Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit) with Easter music and inspirations. At 10 a.m. (EDT), he will share an Easter Reflection on Facebook Live on the Mount Vernon Larger Parish Facebook Page followed by more music and inspirations! We will continue Mount Vernon Streams on Sunday, April 19.

Unbinding Love: Rev. Betsy Reflects

The Sabbath is over; the Galilean women who have been traveling with Jesus, are anxious to come to the tomb to anoint his body with spices, the custom after the death of a loved one – one last loving touch. In John’s account, Mary comes alone. How could she not? He was her best friend and she, his closest disciple – until the politics in the early church pushed her to the background, scorned her as a harlot.

And so she comes, brokenhearted, to be near her beloved teacher, to stand at his tomb, to witness to love. Jesus had taught them a new way of being, of caring for one another, of serving the least and the lost. They had had such hope. How can they possibly go back to a life without him? Just hours ago when they celebrated the Passover in that upper room, Jesus had talked about love, demonstrated his love for them by washing their feet, commanded them to love one another. And now it is over.

Imagine her shock, her confusion, her disbelief, when she arrives at the tomb and finds the stone rolled away. Has she gone to the wrong tomb? Has his body been moved to another? Even worse, stolen? Does Peter know something she does not? She runs to tell, the first witness to the empty tomb. We can imagine her, breathless, heartsick, “Help me find him!”

Peter and Thomas come running. They enter the tomb but find it empty – except for what Jesus has left behind: The burial linen that had bound Jesus is laid there by itself, alongside the strips of cloth that had bound his head. Grave robbers wouldn’t have taken the time to unwrap the body, surely. Jesus is not only *dead* – but now he also is *gone*.

What happened at the tomb? We don’t know. Had it been a struggle to work his way out of the grave cloths? There is no videotape of a resurrection. No public factual account. No witnesses to the actual event. Jesus is in the tomb one day – and gone the next. Yet, he’s *not* gone, he’s everywhere. His *love* is everywhere. After the resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” “Look at my hands and feet; see that it is I, myself. Touch me and see;...” And they find him on the road to and cooking for the disciples on the beach after they have gone back to fishing. The one who commanded his followers just three days earlier to “love one another as I have loved you,” cannot be kept in the grave. Love loosens the bindings and sets him free.

What if the mystics are right? Can we conceive of love as the foundation of the universe? That we are made for love, the ultimate reality? I wonder if we are all so “bound up” that we are blind to the love that surrounds us, that we live in a darkness of our own making and can’t imagine a light to unbind us in that darkness. The mystics tell us that the way to become enlightened is not to dwell in the light but to carry the light into our own darkness. “O, death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Easter is not only a story about an event that happened on a hill far away, it is also a story about love and you and me, and rolling away the stones in our own lives, and loosening the guilt and grief that bind us so that we can really live and love. Easter is a story about unbinding the strips of sorrow, peeling away the layers of anger, loosening the grip of fear, so that we can be free – free of everything that binds us and walls us up in the tombs of our own making. It’s easy to roll the stones in place, but it’s hard to roll them away.

We have been created for resurrection, but first we have to let love unbind us from whatever we cling to that does not bring us life. For most of us, it is a struggle to work our way out of the grave cloths. But that's what Easter is all about: We are called to be God's resurrection people! Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Day One

By William Jones

An imaginative poem of Jesus' awakening:

wondering what next after this,
he woke to cave's pierced-darkness
edged by light stone sought to block,
but could not this bright morning

loosing the wrappings death held close,
falling to floor he reaches his hand
un-bent, un-bleeding, into cool air
and, risking life, begins breathing

slowly it dawns it has been undone,
bruised yet healing from wounding
wondering what next after this,
he rises and eases through walls

clinging close the still-moist earth,
upending the plot tended by mourners
stumbling, tripping what they hadn't sought,
newly un-dead, rooting deep seed

pulling himself up into the living,
harder than dying his hand gripping mine
dried blood and cooling the fever his brow,
he rises and eases through walls.

(William B. Jones, "Day One" (Maren C. Tirabassi & Maria I. Tirabassi, eds., *Before the Amen: Creative Resources for Worship*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 80-81.)

Special Prayers: Please remember...

- ❖ Claire has asked for prayers for her son, Jim, who is showing signs of COVID-19.
- ❖ Rose and Herold's son Chris is still coping with the COVID-19 virus, and he and his fiancée need our prayers. Also, prayers for Rose's Aunt Ermite Pierre whose husband Lisaito died this week.

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading Bible Study by Zoom. To participate, **ask to be invited** with your email (or phone number) to be included in the meeting notice.

Psalms: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms. Continues Tuesday, April 14. Contact (by Monday) BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Gospel of John: Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. with Bob. Continues April 15 for a discussion of chapter 19. Contact (by Wednesday morning) Bob at revbobh@gmail.com.

Window on Wildlife

In this season of transformation – in the woods, in the gardens, *in the tomb* – I welcome Sonja’s question, “How do birds change color?” She writes, “We are watching the male American goldfinches transform from drab olive in color to bright yellow. The color in the feathers of many birds becomes more distinct during the breeding season. The goldfinches molt (shed their feathers) twice a year, once in the spring and again in early fall. In the spring, the males grow black feathers on their foreheads and bright yellow feathers on the rest of their bodies as they shed the drab olive ones. However, they do not shed their primary wing feathers. Those are the long black feathers used in flight. Then in September they again molt, this time shedding the primary black feathers as well as the bright yellow ones, changing back to drab olive which helps protect them from predators. The black primary feathers grow back black. All birds molt, for feathers wear out and must be replaced.”

Easter Prayer

Long after the lilies have bloomed and the alleluias have faded away, grant us, O God, the grace to remember this day and the promise of new life Easter celebrates. Because you are with us, we gain courage to meet the challenge of the day, everywhere we go, choosing life and not death. Help us to be your signs of life in all the places of death in this brokenhearted world of ours. May we answer each crucifying doubt, fear, and pain with the cry of the faithful: “He is risen, indeed,” *because he is risen in us*. Amen.

Weekly Offerings may be mailed for:

Mt. Vernon to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

Moosup Valley to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825),

Rice City to Phyllis Dexter (53 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825).

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.

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