

# South Elkhorn Christian Church

## Digital Liturgy

*EASTER*

*April 12, 2020*

### **PREPARE**

*Locate a candle to light and communion elements to use (bread/juice or whatever is available to you).*

*Find a quiet place by yourself or with others.*

*Read through the instructions, prayers, scripture, and questions below. You can also find a guided, voice-led version of this digital liturgy at [southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy](https://southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy)*

### **WELCOME THE LIGHT**

Welcome to worship with South Elkhorn Christian Church. Light a candle if you are able and receive these words:

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Christ is risen!  
He is risen, indeed!  
Christ is risen!  
He is risen, indeed!

## CENTERING & LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray:

Amazing and wonderful God, we thank you for the joy of Easter morning. We celebrate that the day is finally here. We have been on quite a journey. On this long road to Jerusalem, we gave up more for Lent that we could have ever imagined, and we have learned how fragile life really is. We have experienced the solemnness of the Last Supper and the darkness of Good Friday.

But now the light breaks in and the darkness is no more. For new life begins at Easter. The old has passed away and the new has come. The tomb and the cross are empty. Christ is not there anymore. He is above us; he is among us; he is within us.

Hallelujahs cannot fully express our joy. Easter songs cannot completely share our deep praise, but we lift our grateful hearts to you in the ways we know how. We are indeed thankful and celebrate your Son, not only on this Easter morning, but every single moment of our lives.

God, remind us this day, and in the days ahead that we are your Easter people. In the dark places of our lives, help us to experience a resurrection moment. Remind us of new beginnings when we give up hope. Walk with us in our pain and help heal the broken places in our lives and in the world and lead us to healing and wholeness.

We praise you on this Easter Day. Change our lives and change our hearts to be messengers of Easter joy to the world, even from being within our homes, may our Easter light radiate so bright that it touches those around us with hope and peace.

And now as Easter people may we come together to say the prayer that you taught us saying

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

## SCRIPTURE

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. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

## SERMON

"It's the end of the world as we know it... I feel fine."

Those haunting words from a song by REM has been playing on repeat in my head for about three weeks now.

During this strange season, as the corona virus spreads and communities across the globe, including ours, shut down and do what is needed to slow down and get through this pandemic, it kinda feels like the end of the world... except I feel many different things, not always fine:

I feel a dull but persistent hum of anxious uncertainty;

I feel headaches and eye strain from looking at my computer screen and phone way, way too much;

Restlessness;

Fatigue from infant-induced, and news-saturated poor sleep.

Annoyance with the inescapable presence of little ones who are restless themselves.

Unabating concern for those who are contracting the virus, and for those most vulnerable to its worst consequences, and for all those medical workers who are

courageously caring for the sick.

Heart-broken for those who lose loved ones and cannot grieve them and turn to friends and family for support as we would any other time...

Fear of the economic downturn and the long-term viability of institutions, businesses, and causes I care about.

No, I don't feel fine all the time.

I guess I know a little what it's like to feel the grief and shakenness of the Marys who went to the tomb. I guess I know a little what it's like to feel the fear and uncertainty of the disciples huddled away in that room, mourning the death of Jesus. Maybe you do, too.

The more I talk with people on the phone, the more I think we each have a sense, some sense of what those Marys might have been feeling...

Of course, there are also surprising moments of amazing insight, connection, and resiliency I experience in this strange time. Church family calling and checking on one another. The sending and receiving of unexpected mail, cards, notes, and gifts. Children making chalk obstacle courses and messages of love on the sidewalk. People stepping up to donate much needed medical supplies, food, and paper products. Video-based bible studies, check-ins, and digital gatherings extending social connection and spiritual development.

Even as I was preparing this sermon, the sound of church bells beautifully interrupted me, reminding me to take a break, and that I am not alone, even now in this time of so much isolation.

You know, I am home almost every night now for dinner with my family. I cherish it.

I talk on the phone with my extended family.

I take long walks in the fresh springtime air, marveling at the colors of trees and the strength of flowers pushing through the earth.

I even finally finished reorganizing the filing cabinet.

I deleted unused subscription services.

I am eating more fruits and vegetables than I can ever remember.

I found toilet paper at the store and bought an extra pack to give away.

Yes, sometimes, I do feel, well, fine, even joy and generosity and trust; or at least like this season isn't all bad... it might even lead to something new.

I'm reminded there's no way we are "supposed" to feel right now. Those leaving the empty tomb felt both fear and great joy. We can and do feel many things, sometimes at the same time. And we will likely cycle through a great range of emotions--grief about what we've left behind, gratitude for the slow down... up and down, round and round, it's all okay. Because it's the end of the world as we know it, and we are invited to be present to it, to feel it, to look into it and through it for what God in Christ can do, is doing, will do with it.

Because God is always up to something. Even here, especially now.

Yes, the words of that song remain true and perhaps we need to acknowledge that, especially this Easter in the midst of the coronavirus: it is the end of the world as we know it. Even as we slowly emerge from our homes, as businesses reopen, as gatherings get going again--whenever that day finally comes--still there will be no returning to the world before. That world is receding, indeed, gone, over, ended--and this experience will forever change us and the world we knew.

And that's okay, too.

Here's the thing, indeed, the good news: Easter has always been about "the end of the world." To celebrate Easter is to recognize, grieve, and also welcome the "end of the world."

Matthew's gospel captures that in a distinctive way. Did you catch it? The earthquake. The shaking of the foundations.

It happened first a chapter before what we hear read today, at the cross. At the moment Christ breathes his last, the temple veil is torn in two, the earth shakes, and the rocks split open. Then the earth shakes a second time, when the stone is rolled away from the tomb, and the emptiness of death is revealed. Crucifixion and resurrection, two sides of the same world-ending reality.

Matthew doesn't want us to miss it. And we need to see it this year, especially this year.

In the ancient world it was long thought that the sky was held up by the mountains--they acted as the foundational pillars structuring and securing creation; keeping the watery

chaos of the skies in place, keeping them from falling mercilessly upon the earth and destroying it. They also extended downward beneath the surface, anchoring the dry land, keeping the destructive flood waters beneath from bursting upward.

The worst thing that could happen was for the earth, especially the mountains, to tremble, to shake--creation itself, the world as we know it, threatened to implode.

Matthew wants us to see, in no uncertain terms, that for Christ to be crucified, and then raised, is nothing short of “the end of the world.”

Yes, there is chaos, fear, uncertainty, and anxiety when the way the world worked passes away... when the world ends...

But Matthew wants us to see all this precisely because it is also the beginning of a new world--a new age, a new era, a new way of being in and through Christ. It is nothing short of earth shaking that “thunderous yes” of God’s resurrection life.

So when we joke now about the coronavirus apocalypse, usually in a tongue-and-cheek kind of way, well, perhaps we are more right than we realize. And when I hear people, most usually Christians of a particular persuasion, talking about how what we are going through is the ‘end of the world’ and a ‘sign of the times’... well... I think they are right; just not in the way they might think.

No, God is not punishing us for our sin, or punishing a particular people for their sinfulness. No, God is not destroying the world, vindictively killing people, or about to rapture up the faithful while the rest wither. The bible is not meant to predict the details of the future--it’s meant to equip us with the spiritual resources we need to orient ourselves in the present.

So no, the “end of the world” is not that fear-mongering, wrath-touting, religious ridiculousness that misses the message and the moment of Easter...

Easter reveals that the “end of the world” is what we see in the person of Christ--God’s radical, steadfast love for all people, all the time, no matter what, that will not be removed, not even by our own rejection, ridicule, and betrayal, not even by death.

And that in place of punishment and transmitting pain is the thunderous yes of grace and the transformation of pain into spiritual healing that yields new possibilities.

You see the word “end” has two meanings--it can mean something is finished, over, ended... it can also mean a goal or purpose.

The end of the world, the goal or purpose of the world, of God's creation, is what we see in Christ crucified and risen: love, redemption, healing, and liberated life.

When the world seems to be shaking, crumbling, imploding all around us, that is when God is at God's best, showing us the meaning, purpose, and goal of life itself. That's what we see at Easter, that's what we see in the risen Christ, that's what we are invited to experience right here, right now.

Apocalypse simply means to uncover or reveal. Easter was the apocalypse, the great reveal, the holy uncovering of God's very best--that thunderous yes of a love more powerful than all the hate, shame, oppression, and injustice the world could muster.

It remains the apocalypse to frame every apocalypse, every world-ending moment we will ever encounter. Including this one.

When God is at God's best, when we discover the meaning, purpose, and goal of life itself; it will spark our usual ways of being in the world to come to an end, to terminate: our apathy and indifference, our selfishness, our suspicion and bitterness, our self-pity, our denial, our social systems that are busted, broken, unjust and unsustainable...

"Do not be afraid" the risen Christ says. Even as the old world recedes and the way things will one day be is not entirely in view... Jesus invites us to go ahead to Galilee to see him; you know, Galilee, the very places and spaces where the disciples used to walk, talk and work; Jesus invites us to ready ourselves to return to the very same places we used to walk, talk, and work, and join the risen Christ there, where we belong to each other in ways we've forgotten and ignored, missed and marginalized; indeed, finding fresh footholds for God's kingdom to inch closer through a more just, peaceful, forgiving, heart-healing, spirit-mending, all-inclusive love.

It's the end of the world as we know it... and so I feel, and so I grieve, and so I trust, and so I love, and so I hope, and so, with joy in Christ, I am remade again by the apocalypse, by the earth-shaking revelation of what really matters, the thunderous yes of God's eternal love.

Yes, I am remade... and so are you.

## COMMUNION

*Place before you bread and a cup of juice (or whatever you have on hand to use). If you are*

*with others, serve one another with the blessing, “The bread of life, the cup of hope.”*

The Lord be with you,

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

**It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

The communion elements before you unite us in Christ’s Spirit one to another. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection unite us to God’s infinite and all-inclusive Love. All are welcome to the Table, and all are invited to remember...

### *THE BREAD*

“The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it...”

*Hold the bread and, if possible, break it.*

“...and said, ‘This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.’”

### *THE CUP*

*Hold the cup. If you have not already, pour juice (or whatever you have on hand) into the cup.*

“After supper, Jesus took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’”

### *PRAYER*

Gracious and Loving God, You have made us for connection. In this time of separation and isolation send to us your Spirit. That we might experience your sustaining presence and be encouraged with hope through the fellowship of your love. Amen.

*Receive and prayerfully enjoy the bread and the cup.*

## **GENEROSITY**

*Prayerfully consider someone to reach out to with a word of love, encouragement, or*



*prayer. Write a card. Make a phone call. Or identify a time to do so today (or in the week ahead).*

Tithes and offerings can be mailed to South Elkhorn or you can give online at

[southelkhorncc.org/give](https://southelkhorncc.org/give)

## **CHANGING THE LIGHT**

Now it is time to change the light. The light that was in one place at one time, is now in all places at all times.

In this very room and everywhere we go. And all God's children said, Amen.

*Extinguish the candle and watch the smoke rise.*

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## **UPDATES**

Visit [southelkhorncc.org/blog](https://southelkhorncc.org/blog) to learn the latest on worship, building usage, and more.

Digital Worship & Wonder videos available at [southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder](https://southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder).

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