

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for Resurrection Morning, the twenty-first day of April in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen. The phrase "Good News from the Cemetery" is borrowed from Rev. Howard Habegger, a faithful minister of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Rev. Habegger completed the earthly portion of his baptismal journey on the twenty-eighth day of December, in the year of our LORD 2018 at the age of 86 years, 3 months and 22 days.

You are welcome to listen to the song *In The Bulb There Is A Flower*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDpByzZqeQ4>

Isaiah 65:17-25

65:17 For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

65:20 No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

65:22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

65:23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.

65:24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

118:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

118:2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

118:14 The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

118:15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

118:16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."

118:17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

118:18 The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

118:19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

118:20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

118:21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

118:22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

118:23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

118:24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

15:19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

15:21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being;

15:22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

15:24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Luke 24:1-12

24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

24:3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.

24:4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.

24:5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

24:6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,

24:7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

24:8 Then they remembered his words,

24:9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

24:10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.

24:11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

24:12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Our Bible story for today starts on the way to the cemetery.

It is a sober journey of love without hope,
and grief without understanding.

The women expect nothing;
the thought of facing the crucified body again must have been agonizing.
But their compassion prevails
and so they step and then step again,
trudging toward the tomb.

We call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John "Gospels". The word means "Good News";
but I doubt that what the women experienced on Friday was counted by *them* as "Good News".

But today's story is not Friday's story
and today's news is not Friday's news.
No, today is a Gospel day.

Today is a Good News day.

Today the Good News comes not from
a ball game
or an election
or hockey playoff
or concert hall
or a grade point
or track meet
or a promotion
or a ribbon cutting.

Today the Good News comes from the cemetery.

A place of death takes on life;
the tomb succumbs to triumph;
the disturbed gives way to the dazzling.

The women are so terrified their faces hit the dirt.

And then the question comes:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

You ought to be people who remember;

you ought to be people who listened
and paid attention
and pondered
and expected.
Jesus laid it out for you:
The Son of Humanity would
be handed over to sinners
and be crucified
and on the third day,
well on the third day,
there will be Good News from Cemetery!
On the third day he will rise.

Think about the cemeteries you have visited...

Perhaps you have seen some lovely, peaceful places tended with sacred affection like Jim Head tended Tontogany.

Perhaps you have seen some scraggly, unkempt grave yards with weeds and beer bottles and gates falling off their hinges...

Perhaps you have visited Normandy or Gettysburg or the killing fields of Cambodia.

Perhaps you have seen grave stones with little lambs where a baby has been laid to rest.

Bruce and Linda recently viewed a World War II memorial in Budapest, Hungary.
The memorial was made of shoes.
You see women and men and little children were told to take off their shoes
and then they were executed along the Danube
with the river being their only tomb.

We don't look for the living among the dead
and we don't expect Gospel stories to come from the morgue.
Unless of course, we remember Jesus promised
Good News from the Cemetery.
On the third day the Son of Humanity will rise!
On the third day death will be defeated.
You see, the Good news from the cemetery is not only that *Jesus* rose up from the grave,
but that in rising, Jesus defeated the power of death;

O yes, in his dying he suffered with us and he suffered for us, taking on the sins of the world.
The curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom and humanity was given free and unfettered access to the Mercy seat of God.
Yet what of this mercy if there is no Good News from the cemetery?
What of this mercy if the grave is our final destination?

Sin carries with it the power of lies.
The lie that there is no hope.
The lie that our souls are dead after all.
The lie that we are trapped;

buried alive in coffins with no way out;
blocked by stones impossible to move.

But with God nothing is impossible;
with Resurrection Love the stones cry out there is “Good News from this cemetery!”
Through the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ we are set free from the power of sin and death.
This applies to our own sins,
and yes, to the generational sins;
sins that convince us we have already been embalmed; that life is no longer an option for us.

But we are called to remember:
“In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed an apple tree”—and in you—
in you the hidden promise that the very image and likeness of God will immerge as a blessing of beauty to the world because Jesus made the news!
Jesus *made* the news.

This News is not yesterday’s news;
it is an everlasting news cycle.
You see, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the first, but not the only Good News from the cemetery.
We do not grieve as those who have no hope,
but on the last day,
when the trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ will rise,
there will be Good News from cemeteries in
Rwanda and Afghanistan,
from Hiroshima and Haiti,
from Sandy Hook and Memphis,
from Mount Pleasant
and Washington Township
and Tontogany.

Talk about unsealing the “Alleluias”!
When that morning breaks
the squirrels will stop their munching
and the lions their roaring
and the whales will swoop aside for the sea to give up her dead
and the birds will circle the saints as the angels sing with all creation

“Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”
Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed!

Now may our God of Resurrection Love
Fill your hearts with everlasting hope
Your minds with mysterious wonder
And your cemeteries with Good News
Of life, joy, laughter and peace
Now and for a thousand generations!
“Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”