

## EASTER MORNING CELEBRATION

March 23, 2008

GATHERING IN COMMUNITY

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SOUNDING OF THE CHIME

PRELUDE

### OPENING WORD

We are called you and I...Sisters and Brothers.

We are called by Life.

We are called to fulfill a destiny:

To cast light into dark places;

To bring warmth where there is cold.

We are called to serve a dream:

To discover the deeper meanings;

To celebrate the greater love.

In us there burns an ember- it glows red, deep inside.

And never dies.

It was kindled when the universe was born--

The great cosmic fireball,

Casting forth its Life force,

Which permeates all that was and is.

Blow now, on the coal of the heart.

In the name of human dignity,

For the sake of justice--

Blow on the coal of the heart.

In us there leaps a flame,

It shines a bright orange, deep inside, and never dies.

It came to life in blazing primordial fires of our infancy,  
As people gathered to do together  
What no One could do alone.

Blow now, on the coal of the heart.

In the name of redeeming Love, for the sake of Truth.

In us there burns a flame...white hot, deep inside.

Which never dies.

We are called, my friends...called by Life, itself

To be fuel for the burning flame.

On this Easter morn, we answer to that eternal call- and rise to Life

**UNISON CHALICE LIGHTING:** adapted from "Rising to Life " by Rev. David  
S. Blanchard

May the rising light of this flame  
Remind us of the message of Easter,

To rise to hope,

Rise to love.

Rise to heal.

Rise to forgive.

Rise to courage.

Rise to foolishness.

Rise to wisdom.

Rise, even to die.

Most essentially, to rise to life.

Not to die as a hero, but to live as one.

**OPENING HYMN #269 Lo** The Day of Days is Here

Sharon and Emily- who some of you may not know, is Gloria Shirley's daughter- will do the introduction- when they are through we will all join in with the opening verse.

**A STORY FOR ALL AGES: "Easter, Eoster and Eggs"**

The word Easter in English sounds like names of Goddesses in other languages like Eostra, from the British Islands or the Scandinavian "Ostra" and the Teutonic "Ostern "These Goddesses all were the thought to be the women who brought back Spring after winter and who made life come back when everything seemed dead. They were celebrated right around the first day of spring every year.

Some people believe that the word Easter simply comes from the word east and refers to the rising of the sun in the east. A lot of churches are celebrating Easter facing the east and watching the sun rise- they have sunrise Easter services.

The Easter Bunny was around long before Christians celebrated Easter- The Hare and the Rabbit were the most fertile animals known and they served as symbols of the new life during the spring season.

Universally a symbol of creation, renewed life, resurrection, fertility and the Easter egg or Hare that laid the Easter egg and it was the emblem and sacrificial victim animal of Eoster.

Easter Baskets symbolize nests where the Easter Bunny laid its Easter Eggs. Today, baskets are used for the Easter Bunny hide to colored eggs and other goodies in for children to find on Easter!

The blood of the Passover lamb caused the angel of death to "pass over" the Israelites. John the Baptist calls Jesus "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29

Many people around the world bake and eat hot cross buns during the Easter season. This is the only time of the year when these special buns are made. In the old days, people ate hot cross buns because they believed that the buns would keep them healthy all year.

The Chick is another Easter Symbol that represents new life or rebirth. The Chick breaking out its shell is a symbol for Jesus' resurrection, when the rock was moved and he emerged from the tomb.

The Cross, which is the most familiar and universal symbol of Christianity and the Crucifixion, is particularly associated with the Easter season. Jesus was nailed to and died on the cross on Good Friday.

Easter Sunday is a day for rejoicing. It was on Easter Sunday that the friends of Jesus learned that Jesus was alive again. They went to the cave where Jesus had been buried. They found that the huge rock, which blocked the entrance to the cave, had been rolled away. The cave was empty. Jesus was alive again! He promised new life to everyone who believed in Him.

Many Christians celebrate the promise of Jesus by going to church on Easter Sunday. They wear their best clothes. Churches are filled with flowers and candlelight. Bells ring out the happiness people feel. Everyone sings joyful hymns.

Easter is a time of love,  
Of family, and of peace.  
It is a time when  
We say a quiet thanks  
For all that we have

And for all that  
The future holds.

Easter is a feeling in our hearts  
Of hope and faith and trust.  
It is a day of miracles;  
A day when our dreams seem  
A little closer; a time of retrospection  
For what has been  
And anticipation of all that will be.  
And it is a time for remembering  
With love and appreciation  
The people in our lives  
Who make a difference...  
People like you. - Anna Marie Edwards

**CANDLES OF JOY, CONCERN, AND COMMEMORATION**  
**(Sung Response #123 Spirit of Life)**

**OFFERTORY:**

For the hope released with the abundance of rain scented with Spring we give our thanks- For the memories and generosity of so many that fill this sanctuary with the colors of Love- we give thanks- for your offering given for the work of this church we give our thanks.

**READING:** Easter Is Breaking by Katherine Rolenze

**SPECIAL MUSIC**

**REFLECTIONS: *Redemptive Truths***

Rev Elaine Beth Peresluha

Better look around here and see whom I am going to disappoint- or offend by this but- I don't believe in resurrection- I don't believe that Jesus came back from the dead. No I do not believe that any one of us is going to live again after we die- but it is Easter- and we are here so there must be something we believe in; this story-something that matters about living and dying and being born again- I believe that this is it- this life this breath this consciousness- this is it. What comes next is at best a mystery- and lies in the hearts and the minds of the living to be imagined- because to this day, no one, except in myth or poem, has returned after a certifiable death and burial to definitively reassure us.

We need that this time of year, a season, a holiday, to grapple with how we really feel about dying, about what comes next. It is not a topic we talk a lot about- but it is a subject that has plagued us since we crawled out of the ocean

We need a holy day that speaks to us of life and death. Our need for reassurance of the persistence of a spirit, our Souls, the shape and essence of our being beyond death, is much more ancient than Jesus. It motivated Jews to find their way into the bosom of Abraham- and The Egyptians to build their extraordinary monuments to an elaborate life beyond.

Easter, sapphire eyed and daffodil haired Anglo Saxon goddess had been delivering the earth from death for many Springs before Jesus walked with the cross upon his back. Persephone has been returning from the underworld to her mother Demeter since fables have been told...

We think of Easter like those Egyptian monuments or the sound of an anthem- brilliant, bold dramatic- that is the same way we wish war- or winter would end

At the same time, we know that this day's sun can and will probably step aside for another delivery of cold, clouds, rain and the need for heat.

Take a minute to smell the lilies- search out the pure white of the blossom- the delicate beauty – They offer a universal interpretation of new life, resurrection and redemption- maybe not as safe or reassuring as a savior- but their story offers something of what our impatient spirit's long for this time of year -when we are so desperate to get a grip.

So with your generous remembering, we have filled the sanctuary and our hearts with blooms- and music and poignant majesty - to touch and heal our human need for a safe sure answer to our fears.

Since the beginning of time, lilies have played significant roles in stories about motherhood. Ancient fables tell us the lily sprang from the milk of Hera, the mythological Queen of Heaven. The lily is mentioned many times in the Bible. One of the most famous Biblical references is in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus told his listeners: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Lilies were found growing in the Garden of Gethsemane where drops of Christ's sweat fell to the ground in his final hours of sorrow and deep distress.

The pure white lily has long been closely associated with the Virgin Mary. In early paintings, the Angel Gabriel is pictured extending to the Virgin Mary a branch of pure white lilies, announcing that she is to be the mother of the Christ Child. In other paintings, saints are pictured bringing vases full of white lilies to Mary and the infant Jesus.

The legend is told that when the Virgin Mary's tomb was visited three days after her burial, it was found empty save for bunches of majestic white lilies. Early writers and artists made the lily the emblem of the Annunciation, the Resurrection of the Virgin: the pure white petals signifying her spotless body and the golden anthers her soul glowing with heavenly light.

In yet another expression of womanhood, lilies had a significant presence in the paradise of Adam and Eve. Tradition has it that when Eve left the Garden of Eden she shed real tears of repentance, and from those remorseful tears sprung up lilies.

The spiritual principle is that true repentance is the beginning of beauty. A mark of purity and grace throughout the ages, the regal white lily offers a universal symbol of the greater meaning of Easter. Gracing millions of homes and churches, the flowers embody joy, hope, and life. And isn't that what we all arrived here this morning the discovery and reassurance of hope?

The story of Easter- and the story of lilies are about tombs- tombs as symbols of death's hold on us and the victory of Jesus- or Mary over their tombs.

Well, haven't we each got our own tombs?

Those place where our small selves hide in fear or disillusionment?

We go to those places – our tomb, drugs, alcohol, food, unhealthy or satisfying relationships looking for an escape, relief. We all do it- we look to money- to some external affirmation of our success- a car- a home- a trip to the mountains- the sea- the doctor- the lawyer- looking- scanning, reaching searching for what

we long for- meaning, purpose, reassurance, love, unconditional acceptance of who we are- resurrection from our disappointments or foibles.

Easter is the universal human hope that we can rise and roll the stones away from our tombs-

*Easter has no patience with death- or fear- or longing.*

*Easter is the assurance that whatever we fear- there is a miracle waiting to resurrect us*

*No matter what death we have lost ourselves in- Life can find us.*

*We are not lost- we are simply looking for life in all the wrong places*

For those of us who have thought through and rejected the existence of a savior that will rescue us, the hope of Easter- and lilies lies within each of us. If there is ever to be an Easter dawn, breaking peace, peace, peace over this earth then it is yours and mine to assure it.

We are the ones who must rise to life- rise to the call of that indomitable human spirit that says "No!" to death; to the fear of falling;

Mary Oliver asks:

Did you too see it, drifting, all night, on the black river?

Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery air -

An armful of white blossoms,

A perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned

Into the bondage of its wings; a snow bank, a bank of lilies,

Biting the air with its black beak?

Did you hear it, fluting and whistling?

A shrill dark music - like the rain pelting the trees - like a waterfall

Knifing down the black ledges?  
And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds -  
A white cross Streaming across the sky, its feet  
Like black leaves, its wings like the stretching light of the river?  
*And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything?*  
*And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?*  
*And have you changed your life?*

We don't know when it will happen or how- but we know it will. We are all going to die- enter that deep sleep that knows no end and we will be no more. And between then – and now- only we can change our lives.

So blow on that coal blow on this life as if it really mattered as if it was your one and only chance to give meaning in this world and resurrect something of truth- of meaning of purpose.

Resurrect love.

Resurrect that burning molten ember into a mighty flame that roars with the holiness of being alive, of being able to give and receive, of being able to repent, forgive, and depart the tombs of our winters.

## **PRAYER/MEDITATION**

God of all people- Spirit revealed in the hope of Easter. Help us to Rise to the beauty of creation- to all the occasions for joy and delight we have missed in our hurrying breathless quests. On this Easter morning we ask that our senses come alive, ready to respond to the color, the harmony, the fragrance, taste and texture of life around us, bursting into bloom or song.  
May we feel the spirit of life flowing and pulsing within,  
May we open ourselves to a courageous and joyous faith in our power to become our best selves,

On this day of resurrecting life- may we be reborn to new possibilities. O Spirit of life be with us in our reaching- lift us. As we reach for Easter- we rise to life, rejoicing in ongoing creation around us and within us we rise to hope; leaving the tomb behind

**CLOSING HYMN:** #29 Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee

**EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE:**

SHALOM

(Please join hands, as you are able) Shalom, my friends, Shalom, my friends, Shalom. Shalom. 'Til we meet again, 'til we meet again. Shalom. Shalom.