



EASTER

Encounter Prayer:

Dear Loving God,

We give you thanks for your sacrificial love expressed in Jesus' death and resurrection. We give you thanks for your resurrection power that gives us the ability to do the work you have called us to do in the world. Please heal our world so that we may gather again in your sanctuary and show the world that you have the final say, not any sickness or disease. Please forgive us for all the times we have fallen short. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!

Encounter God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Encounter Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Encounter Scripture: Matthew 28:1-6

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the

stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

The journey through Lent and now Easter has been a three-part harmony of preparation, reflection, and celebration. During Lent, we prepared ourselves by giving up something or denying ourselves. We saved room for reflection, and hopefully, we all took a good long look at ourselves in the mirror. Good Friday was a time of solemn reflection as we remembered the brutal torture and death of Jesus on the cross. We remember that Jesus' false accusers, the religious establishment and elites, attempted to put an end to Jesus because he was a threat to their power. However, God worked through it for our good, turning crucifixion into redemption for the world.

Jesus, sinless, took our place on the cross. He took the punishment that we deserved and made forgiveness available to us. Jesus being both fully Divine and fully human served as a bridge between

humanity and God. Jesus crossed the gulf that existed between God and humanity due to our sinfulness. All we need to do accept the gift. In response, we should live a life of gratitude through obedience to the will of God. The Spirit of God empowers us to live as God requires.

On Easter Morning, we celebrate the truth that He is Risen, He is risen indeed. The crying on Friday is replaced with praising on Easter Morning. However, this Easter is different from any other in recent memory due to the shelter in place order to help stop the spread of COVID-19. The Easter celebration did not take place in the sacred space of our church building. When we sang our Alleluias, we did it in our homes as we watched from our phones, tablets, computers, and smart TVs. Naturally, there is grief associated with not being physically in the sanctuary, the good news is that the celebration of Easter happens in the sacred space of our hearts.

We celebrate Jesus' victory over death. The implication is that death does not have the final say and because Jesus rose from the dead we too will rise (Revelation 20:12-13, Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, 1 Corinthians 15:52). So, we are reminded that COVID-19, unemployment, and economic insecurity do not have the final say. God has the final say. Fear is running rampant across the globe. Death tolls are rising. We pray for the healing of our land. Although we grieve the loss of life, there is good news for those who have died. The good news is that death is not a final goodbye, it is a see you later. There will be a day when we will be given our new glorified bodies, ones that will not grow old or become sick and we will praise God together eternally.

Because of the Resurrection of Jesus, we have something to look forward to and we can approach death with hope, but what about the here and now? We are Resurrection People, in fact, in the early church, each Sunday was regarded as a mini-Resurrection Day. As Easter people, we die to sin, and we are born anew or from above. We are called to look for people and places that are in need of restoration and renewal, so that we can bring to bear the resurrection power to resurrect spiritually dead communities, people, and churches. Wherever the people of God are at work, there is life. We need to share the good news through actions and words that we have access to forgiveness and eternal life. In response to the love that has been given to us, we are called to address both the spiritual, social, and physical needs of those who are hopeless and hurt in a dying world.

Encounter Heads:

What is the resurrection?

Can it be both physical and spiritual?

Encounter Hearts:

Do you see yourself as an Easter/Resurrection person? If so, what are the implications of seeing yourself in this way? What does that mean for your life?

How can we use the gifts that have been given to us to share the Good News that Jesus is alive and salvation is available to all who believe?

What can we do to remind ourselves daily that we are resurrection people?

How should Easter/Resurrection people respond to people in need?

Encounter Hands:

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?