

Sebastopol United Methodist Church
Sunday, May 3, 2020 – Fourth Sunday of Easter
Order of Worship, including Communion and Scripture

If you would like to participate in Communion, please have your bread and juice (or their substitutes) ready before beginning worship.

Seasonal Theme

Jesus is out of the grave and alive, and He is with us.

Theme for the day:

The Risen Lord is our provider. He is the Good Shepherd. We are the Easter people. We are the church in a community of faith.

Call to worship:

*(please say the words in **BOLD**, aloud or silently, as Pastor reads them)*

Pastor: Sisters and brothers, let us gather together with glad and generous hearts.

People: **For many signs and wonders are being done among us.**

Pastor: Let us break bread together and share our lives in common.

People: **Let us give what we can to all who have needs, so that all people, no matter who they are, may regard us with goodwill.**

Pastor: Let us devote ourselves to our prayers and to the gospel.

Unison: **For in this way God will add to our numbers every day. Amen.**

Prayer of Illumination:

(please read along with Pastor, aloud or silently as you prefer)

Good Shepherd, you call us by name and we know your voice. Open the gate for us so that we may come freely toward abundant life. We pray that your Holy Spirit will strengthen us to be devoted to the teachings of your Word, and that through your voice we may follow you into eternal life. In Jesus's way we pray. Amen.

Readings from Scripture: **Psalm 23** **Acts 2:41-47**

[texts of Scripture follow the service, beginning on page 5]

Message: **WE ARE THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH**

*An Affirmation of Faith for the self-exiled during the COVID-19 Pandemic **
by Glory E. Dharmaraj, Ph.D.

We believe in God the Almighty who hovered in love over the primeval chaos and uttered creation into existence out of a holy mess.

We believe in the One who breathed the breath of life into humans and engendered the primal family and community into being.

We believe in the magnificent signature of God's image in every human being, signed in infinite variety, and sewn in multicolored splendor, even when it is humanly difficult to experience it in our damaged bodies.

We believe in the self-revelatory signature of God in Jesus who came to restore healing and wholeness into every fiber of our existence.

We believe in Jesus Christ who came to show that salvation is healing and wholeness, and who opened our eyes that we may see each other in God's image -- beyond the troubling stereotyping and systemic use of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, and other identity markers to divide and fragment us.

We believe in Jesus who came to open our hearts to the God who-so-loved-the-world, and who calls forth discipleship from among us to the alleviation of human suffering. that we may see the whole world of ours, as never before, as a God-loved, God-breathed, and God – reconciled world.

We believe in the Crucified God who embraces with his wounded arms those who die alone at this time.

We believe in the Resurrected Savior who invites us to *touch* his wounds, if we lack belief during these times of paralyzing fear and numbing trauma.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who fosters connected relationships across the divides, while we sit with ourselves.

We believe in the Holy Spirit who always pushes the church to reach out to the margins, and who enters into the exilic homes through the gifts of technology, nudging each of us to birth hope and resilience. We also believe that the digital divide is human-created and greed-sponsored, and the frontline workers embody flesh-and-blood communication.

We believe that, beyond the ravages of time and this pandemic, we will be restored into wellness and wholeness, with different understandings of what it is to be the Church in the world.

We believe that, one day, we will be fully restored into God's image and God's healed Body. Then wholeness will be the theme of the great orchestral music of the Church and the cosmos.

Until then, we will build bridges of healing and reconciliation with each other and God's creation.

Therefore, we will commit ourselves every day to healing and wholeness *until that day*. **Amen.**

**Reprinted from United Methodist Insight, March 25, 2020 (um-insight.net).*

Pastoral Prayer

Virtual Sharing of the Lord's Table

In peace and love, in gratitude and faith, I invite you to have your bread (or chips, crackers, etc.) and juice (or water, wine, etc.) ready. Let us come together to Christ's table.

*(please read the texts in **BOLD** along with Pastor, aloud or silently)*

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 our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

O God, you are the creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image, to love and to be loved. You made a holy covenant with us and sent prophets to teach us your truth. When we turned away and were unfaithful, you kept faith with us.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we join in your praise, saying,

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Taking our form and flesh, Jesus came among us as a servant. He showed us the depth and power of your love. By his suffering, death, and resurrection you delivered us from sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us, he took bread. He gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of your saving acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us. We proclaim again the mystery of faith, saying,

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

O God, pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ. Let them empower us to live in the world as faithful witnesses and fruitful disciples.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church. All honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

Receiving the Bread and Cup

Prayer after Receiving

O God, we give you our thanks and praise. You feed us by your grace. You are with us in all our journeys. Give us courage and faith to serve you in all we do. Fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit. Enable us to be faithful and fruitful servants of the gospel and ministry to our community. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Without the breath of life, we are nothing; and without the word of God, we are dust. Let us offer our lives and offering to God (which you may send by mail, if you wish).

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Dedication:

Holy One, touch us with the awe that came upon those early disciples as they beheld the signs and wonders performed in their midst. May the gifts we offer this day be a remembrance of our commitment to share all things in common. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Blessing and Benediction

Be steady. Devote yourself freely. Pray unceasingly. Love intentionally. Share his love with others without worry; and be happy.

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Scripture Readings – May 3, 2020

first reading – PSALM 23

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff -- they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

second reading – ACTS 2:41-47

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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Thank you for worshipping with us today.