



St. John the Evangelist Church

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Dear Friends,

As our exile from gathering as the church continues it makes for a very strange Holy Week. This is a week to reflect on life, faith and the glorious good news of resurrection and Easter Sunday but I am left wondering still just when will it be that we can celebrate our great faith together?

And any reflection this week has to consider the sacrifice that front line health care workers are making on our behalf in these days and all those who mourn the death of loved ones due to COVID-19 and in our community we grieve with Val Clarke the loss of Jody. We are reminded once again that so much of our lives is beyond our ability to control.

For this week I've included sermons for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They're old ones that I preached in the past and the Easter one includes my favourite Easter story, like any good story it's always worth retelling again!

I hope that you are all keeping well and finding ways to make this time in our lives significant and life affirming for you and your families. And as we all celebrate a very strange Easter Sunday know that you're all in my prayers and that God does have a future in mind for all of us that is more than we could have ever asked for or imagined!

Rev'd. Mark +



After a long period of illness, The Reverend Jody Medicoff died peacefully at home on Friday April 3, 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, we will join in a Celebration of Life at St. John's. May she rest in peace and rise in glory!

Depart, O Christian soul, out of this world;
in the name of God the Father almighty who
created you;
in the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed you;
in the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you.
May your rest be this day in peace,
and your dwelling place in the paradise of God.

God grant us all to share
in the inheritance of the saints in glory;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Maker, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and always. Amen.

Loving God, whose peace passes all our understanding;
as we face this present pandemic, and experience fear and anxiety,
may we hear your voice, bringing calm to the storms of our time.

Strengthen those who work to limit the spread of infection,
and those who seek to care for the sick,
and keep us mindful of those most vulnerable.

May we shape our living to protect one another,
and may our changing habits, practices and sacrifices,
be for the greater love of our community and all your people.
Amen.



Readings for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday

Maundy Thursday

Exodus Chapter 12 verses 1 to 14
Psalm 116 verses 10 to 17
First Corinthians Chapter 11, verses 23 to 26
John Chapter 13, verses 1 to 15

Good Friday

Isaiah Chapter 52 verse 13 to Chapter 53 verse 12
Psalm 22 verses 1 to 17
Hebrews Chapter 4 verses 14 to 16; Chapter 5
verses 7 to 9
John Chapter 18 to Chapter 19 verse 42

Easter Sunday

Jeremiah Chapter 31 verses 1 to 6
Psalm 118 verses 14 to 24
Acts Chapter 10 verses 34 to 43
John Chapter 20 verses 1 to 18

The Collect for Maundy Thursday

O God,
your Son Jesus Christ
has left to us this meal of bread and wine
in which we share his body and his blood.
May we who celebrate this sign of his great love
show in our lives the fruits of his redemption;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Sermon for Maundy Thursday

In the Gospel reading for Maundy Thursday we heard the familiar words of the Eucharist. The bread and the wine blessed and given to the disciples, the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament of the new covenant. This gospel and these actions make up a holy mystery which we celebrate tonight, and every Sunday. With them Jesus subverted the status quo and pointed to a new kingdom, a new Hope.

In the Eucharist we stand on the middle ground between the world in which we live and the Kingdom in which we Hope.

The Eucharist is many things, but, at its simplest it is a community meal, a physical and visible sign of the kingdom. The single plate and cup on the altar - symbolic of the unity within Christ's body. The alter a table at which we are all welcome; regardless of our age, sex, social status, sexual orientation, or skin colour. A meal that forces us to get up from our place and to join with others around the table to share in. And if we are equal here, at God's table, then surely, we are equal away from here in the world. The Eucharist is about equality amongst us all, it is a taste of the kingdom. But is about more than simple equality.

The Eucharist is an act of remembrance. By it we remember the Love and Compassion of Jesus towards those around him. The many meals he shared with the outcasts of his day the tax

collectors, and sinners. And we remember his promise to again take his place at our table. By this memory, and by our participation in the Eucharist, we can live with Hope for the coming kingdom.

The faithful memory of Christ at supper with the likes of you and I, promises to open up a vision of new possibilities for this world, it also nourishes our Hope and longing for a better future for all of God's people.. But there is more.

We also remember Christ's suffering, his blood poured out on the cross for you and I. And when we remember Christ's suffering on the cross do we not also remember the hosts of others who have suffered and died? The innocent victims of history, the people of the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the women, children and men of Iraq, Afghanistan, and on goes the list. If we allow ourselves to feel the force of this accumulated pain we can be moved to act on behalf of those who suffer amongst us. The remembrance of Christ's suffering can create within us a new moral imagination, a new partnership between ourselves and the weak and those who have no one else to represent them. It is as Jesus said what you do to the least of these you do to me.

Jesus' presence in the Eucharist, is as real as his presence in the suffering of this world. And by our participation in the Eucharist we are tied to that suffering. But we can still go deeper into this holy mystery.

The Eucharist also recalls Christ's sacrifice for us. God, through Jesus, acted to bring creation back into fellowship with Him. So bound by our fear, and self enclosed by our pride, we cut ourselves off from God. But in Jesus God came to us without power or threat. Jesus shared in the vulnerability and darkness of human life and brought us the gift of his unreserved compassion and unrestricted Hope. And by this act established communion with us. A communion consummated on the cross. And we who would walk the way of the cross with

Jesus tomorrow are drawn by the Eucharist into Christ's sacrificial love for the world. The sacrifice in the Eucharist opens up for us the way to communion with God and our neighbours in the midst of the brokenness of our lives and of this world. And yet we can still go deeper.

The Oxford Movement, of the 19th century, recovered for our church the notion that there is a strict identity between the earthly body of Jesus, his risen body, and his sacramental body. The only difference being the manner or mode of the presence. And so in the Eucharist Christ's presence, while spiritual, is as real to us as His presence was with the disciples in the upper room when they celebrated the last supper. The presence of Christ with the disciples changed their lives forever. Simple fisherman became apostles and helped to change the direction of our world.

And so it follows that our lives are also to be changed by our participation with Christ in the Eucharist, because his presence with us is no less real, it is only different. But to celebrate and mark Christ's presence in the Eucharist is not enough – there is still more.

If we are prepared to see Jesus in the Eucharist, then we have got to come out from before our Altar and walk, with Christ mystically present within us, out into the streets, and find the same Jesus in the people we meet. We can not claim to worship Jesus in Church and sacrament, if we do not help Jesus in the slum. We have our Eucharist, we have our Church and Altar. Now we must go out into the world to our homes, work, and daily lives and look for Jesus in the ragged, in the oppressed, in those who have lost hope, and in those who are struggling to simply make good.

Look for Jesus. And when you see him, offer Him something of yourself and life - after all he has already sacrificed his for you.

Such, and much more, is the mystery of the Eucharist that we celebrate this night. Amen.

The Collect for Good Friday

Almighty God,
look graciously, we pray, on your church,
for whom our Lord Jesus Christ
was willing to be betrayed
and given into the hands of sinners,
and to suffer death upon the cross;
and who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Sermon for Good Friday

It's hard to preach on Good Friday. The temptation is to leave the raw pain and shock of it behind and run towards Easter. Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of Christ*, had lots wrong with it, but on an emotional level he may have hit the mark. To enter into the pain of Good Friday is to risk being changed. It is almost too much.

We can be forgiven that. Good Friday was too much for the disciples – they denied and ran away from Jesus. It was not, however, too much for Mary. And so she might be our guide this day. Jean Vanier writes of her:

Mary was there,
standing at the foot of the cross,
a sign of hope, of trust, of love,
she stood firm.

This silent woman of compassion
not crushed,
not fleeing from the pain.

Her experience of Jesus was so different
from that of Peter and the other disciples
who had seen his miracles
and witnessed his power and greatness.

They had followed Jesus because of his
strength.

Mary's first meeting with Jesus
was in the littleness of his body,
and in the littleness of her body.



Her experience of Jesus was so different.
Our way into this day may be through the broken
heart of a mother.

Let me take you from the scene of Mary at
the foot of the cross to another place and time;
the early 1990's and a jail in Southern California
for young offenders. It's Good Friday and the
chapel is full of the life and energy of young men,
each dressed in the same bright orange coveralls.
The prison chaplain stands up and the room
slowly falls into silence. And she begins to read;

“Today I invite you to picture yourself in
Jerusalem on top of a hill. The sky is dark. It is
cold. There are three crosses. Jesus is hanging
with a rope around his waist to keep him from
falling. Blood drips from his body, which now
hangs limp. And Mary turns to you and says, “It
is over. I saw my son breathe his last breath. I
saw so many hours of torture. Now he hangs
there without breath. Now I understand what
death is.”

A story of desolation, agony, and
abandonment; told from a mother's perspective.
It's a story all too familiar to the young men
assembled in the chapel. And a question surfaces
in the room: “how did my own mother feel when
she saw me arrested, sentenced, and taken away
to prison?” For a long while the question hangs
in the room, awaiting a response.

Then a young boy walks forward. His head
shaved. He has dark brown eyes and sharp, high
cheekbones. Clearly nervous, he shifts from side
to side. But he wants to say something. And out it
comes; “I put my mom through a lot of things.
She was sad to lose her son. I always used to be
around her. She used to be like my big sister.
That's how we used to kick it. Everything has

changed now.” Suddenly he stops talking. His eyes are filling with tears. “Man! I look at my mom’s face on Sundays. I don’t know, I’m starting to get heartbroken!”

He beats his chest with his fist trying to catch his breath, push the lump back down his throat, his eyes dart about the room looking for some kind of help. Finally, he gives up and sits down.

Another boy walks forward. His voice cracks as he begins to speak, “I can’t describe the pain my mom feels. Her pain to me is like no other. The pain my mother feels is the same pain that is killing me. I see my mom go through some kind of agony every visit. I can see it in her eyes even though she would never tell me. Now that my life is in someone else’s hands it’s worse... I wish I could take away her misery, put happiness and joy back in her dreams. But all I can see is her pain – and it is killing me.

And on and on it goes, one by one, they sound out the empty places within themselves. For almost three hours these kids stream forward, crying out their loss, regret, and sadness. And then just as suddenly as it started the room falls back into silence. And after a time the chaplain says a simple prayer and then walks over and kisses the cross – and the orange suits begin moving one by one. With endless gestures – touching, caressing, kissing – they reverence the cross. In this place of abandonment and desolation they linger. And then it’s over.

The young men move from the Chapel to the yard under close escort from the guards. After all some of them are there because they have been charged and convicted of murder. In silence they eat their meal from plastic trays. In silence the chaplain drives home – witness to something immensely sad and yet beautiful, a moment in time that touched the mystery of the crucifixion. The healing pain of the cross.

There is piece of art, a statue of the crucified Christ done in copper and stone. The single sculpture contains two crosses. One cross is small, a stick figure Jesus on it, done in weathered copper metal.

The other cross is of dark stone, it stands behind the little crucifix but is six times larger. A cross behind the cross. The crucified God, the suffering God of Good Friday and Christian theology, but not only of Christian belief.

In Jewish theology as well, there is the image of a God who suffers. Rabbi Haim, a 19th century Lithuanian rabbi wrote that one ought to pray not so much to alleviate one’s own suffering as to alleviate the immensely greater suffering of God, who suffers in all human misery, and in the general brokenness of the world. In the rising into God’s suffering that occurs in prayer, the human finds his or her own suffering soothed in the divine suffering that is so much greater, so that our suffering becomes a “bitterness sweetened by bitterness.”

“Bitterness sweetened by bitterness.” is surely an image for Good Friday. Jesus’ suffering is not simply his own, but that of all humanity; and it is the also the suffering of God. And by some mystery that we will never fully comprehend, the suffering of Jesus is full, perfect, sufficient, and somehow complete. And by it we are restored and remembered as children of God and of one another. Perhaps it is only in the pain of this day that we truly recognize ourselves and one another.

We are God’s imperfect creatures - born capable of great beauty and wondrous deeds – born to pain and suffering – often beyond our understanding - often experienced in the very same life. We are mysteries even to ourselves. And into the mystery of life God has placed a cross - bitterness to sweeten bitterness – meaning, hope, and symbol of a love beyond and greater than us A love so raw and shocking that it can even heal the likes of you and me.

Hope born where in the eyes of the world there can be none – at the foot of the cross – in the face of death – Hope and faith are born – faith so strong that nothing can contain or overcome it - not even death.

But that of course is a sermon for another day!



The Collect for Easter Sunday

Lord of life and power,
through the mighty resurrection of your Son,
you have overcome the old order of sin and death
and have made all things new in him.
May we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ
reign with him in glory,
who with you and the Holy Spirit is alive,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Sermon for Easter Sunday

Well, here we are Easter Sunday. It's a great day for the church – an all out celebration – even better than Christmas! Church just the way we like it confident, assured, basking in the power of resurrection. Heck if you close your eyes it almost feels like the good old days again (you pick the year 1950, 1975 which ever). Trouble is we've changed. The world is different, the church is different, and like it or not, admit it or not, you and I are different.

Take the resurrection for instance. If the polls are right most of us in this room don't really believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. Oh, maybe we have bought into some sort of 'spiritual' survival model

of resurrection that allows us to harmonize our world view with the biblical witness of resurrection. But not bodily resurrection – we're too sophisticated for that – spiritual survival maybe, something happened maybe - we're not sure – and we sure don't want to offend anyone, so we leave it at that.

We think we've made a nice neat tidy job of it. Balancing our faith with our secular world view and our place in it. But have we really? I mean when push does come to shove and life gets tough what is going to survive; our faith or the cold rational view that we're on our own – just so much biology piled up to make a body and a brain – an accident of evolution?

Tough question – and for the most part most Easter sermon material doesn't seem to help much. We preachers not wanting to upset anyone say things on Easter Sunday about the rejuvenation of nature, or the romantic reappearing of blossoms. A sort of Butterflies, Bunnies and Bouquets kind of Easter that really does nothing more than confirm ours and the world's suspicions about resurrection being just some hopeless romantic Christian notion that we've outgrown. And not a Butterfly, Bunny or a Bouquet has much of anything to do with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Mary and Jesus. The God whose world view, unlike ours, includes dare I say it, bodily resurrection.

But how do we meet God on such a romantic morning as this, how does God find her way through the chocolate and lilies and rock our world so that we might comprehend the absolute miracle that is resurrection?

We've heard the resurrection gospels enough times now to make them almost instantly forgettable. Like a re-run on television we hear the beginning and say yup remember that one – and flip the channel. After all we've got a lot of stuff to get done today.

So let me share another resurrection story with you that I once had told to me. I remember, it was early summer and as we sat in a street side restaurant in Toronto taking in the sun and the

gaggle of humanity that strode by, a friend told me this story.

I remember, it is about Kathy and John and their two kids, Sally who was nine and knew everything and Danny who was just six. Danny had one of those horrific debilitating diseases that affected his bodily motions. The doctors had said that he wouldn't live long; in fact he'd already outlived the most optimistic of their predictions. Because Danny had been so sick, and because they'd moved to Toronto to be closer to the doctors on whom Danny was largely dependent Kathy and John hadn't been to church much.

So last fall they set out to find a church to call home. It wasn't easy. Finding one that would accept Danny turning into a bit of a trial. Wheelchair access was the easiest hurdle, it was the attitudes, lack of welcome, and whispers that were not so easy. But after a few visits they found a parish that welcomed them and Danny into their life and midst. There wasn't anything special about the place really – just the people.

John, Kathy, Danny and Sally grew to love their church. Oh, Danny had his troubles, especially with young Johnny Cook and there was the occasional teasing or misunderstanding about his condition, but all in all everyone was supportive.

In the Spring of the next year Palm Sunday rolled along. The Sunday School teachers dreamed up a cute little project for the children. They purchased dozens of plastic eggs, large ones, like the ones you used to be able to buy nylons in. The children were to paint their eggs in preparation of Easter Sunday. The youngsters took to the idea like ducks to water. Soon they had fashioned some pretty spectacular creations. Purple, yellow, blue and red eggs, some with delicate designs. All of them were wonderful except Danny's. His disease had progressed to the point where he could no longer control a paint brush. His egg was a wet, sticky, mess of colours all run into each other to form that sort of green/brown colour that only the military dares to use. The rest of the class had a good laugh when Danny, arms shaking, held up his egg for

the teacher to see. Johnny Cook led the chorus of laughter as he often did. But, really it was just one of those instinctual reactions that all children make and immediately regret. Danny just sat there and added a few more tears to his already wet egg. After apologizing all around the teacher explained that the project wasn't finished. They were to take their eggs home after church and spend the next week finding or creating things to put in their eggs; symbols to remind them of Jesus.

And while a week is a long time in a child's life, Easter came quickly. The church was full, everyone in their Easter best. Little boys with their hair wet, girls in their dresses. And after "Jesus Christ is Risen today," the children were invited to come to the front of the church with their eggs. One by one they opened their eggs to reveal the treasures they'd placed inside. Some had that green plastic stuff that you only seem to see at Easter. Small crosses, flowers, all were produced from inside the brightly coloured eggs. Young Johnny Cook somehow even managed to let a real butterfly out of his. In turn each child shared their egg and its contents.

Sally pushed Danny to the front, she had painted a delicate water colour Jesus on the inside of her egg. And then it was Danny's turn. With great determination and a touch of the dramatic Danny opened his egg – it was empty.

The children and even a member or two in the pews laughed as Johnny Cook barked out, "Poor Danny, he's not even smart enough to put something in his egg." The minister quickly bounded over to the boy – "Danny is there a reason for your egg to be empty?"

In a quiet voice, just loud enough to be heard, Danny replied, "Well, because he's not here – he's risen." And nobody laughed.

The congregation left that Easter morn with the image of Danny, his pathetic little egg empty in his shaking hands. Mr. Cook apologized. And Kathy and John were never so proud of their little boy – even the other children had a newfound respect for Danny.

Sadly, it wasn't to last. Danny's health took a turn for the worst and by the 4th Sunday of Easter, Danny had died. His funeral was on a Sunny May afternoon. The church was packed. Six boys from Danny's Sunday School class – the only school mates he ever had, were in the front pew, spit and polished – their Easter best hauled out again. The funeral was heart wrenching. Although Danny was six his body wasn't much larger than a four-year old's. The tiny white coffin sat at the chancel steps too small for a funeral pall.

Everyone cried, the family, the minister, the kids. The six boys in the front row were honorary pall bearers. They made quite a sight marching behind the little white coffin on the way out to the waiting funeral coach.

They buried Danny next to his grandpa. The ground was still wet from spring rains. The hole was framed by green indoor/outdoor carpeting. And the white coffin sat shining in the sun suspended between heaven and earth by two brown straps attached to the chrome frame that rested just underneath the carpet's edge. The minister's words were thankfully short. He held Kathy and John in turn; tears stained his vestments.

The funeral home director had been touched by the death of Danny and earlier that morning he had stopped and picked out twelve particularly beautiful roses. He gave one each to Kathy, John and Sally; each in turn laid one on the white coffin. As Sally laid her dark rose, the director looked at the six young boys all standing there in such a fine line, shoes polished, hair freshly cut. And he offered one to Johnny Cook. Johnny just shook his head no.

One by one the boys reached underneath their jackets and brought out hand painted eggs. And slowly, in turn, they came forward, opened their empty egg, laid each half on the white shiny lid and walked back.

As the last boy was stepping down from the green carpet – the funeral director bent down and asked – why – why the eggs? And young

Johnny Cook looked up and said, "Because he's not here – He's Risen!"

That's hope – born not of butterflies, bunnies or bouquets, but of a world view in which resurrection is surely the basis.

You see in the end resurrection is a Holy Spirit – inspired decision of the mind and the heart. It is a choice. You can believe the witnesses who say that a unique and remarkable liberation occurred that has gone on recreating the world ever since, by the triumph of life over death, of love over hate, of light over darkness.

Or you can believe that the witnesses were mistaken and that life and death, love and hate, light and darkness are evenly matched: and that there is no ultimate power for good that is stronger than the grave.

You simply have to choose – you can't explain resurrection. You witness it. And once you've witnessed it – you'll never be the same – the world will never be the same. The churches prayer for us all this Easter Morning – is that we'll leave the church this morning and walk into God's beautiful, life giving, hope filled, amazing world and witness to the love that we know powered the resurrection of Jesus – and that will one day take us all home.

That is the faith of the Church, the witness of Easter, and the basis of our hope that the world and all of us can be as beautiful and grace filled as God dreamed we'd be.

It's a hope that can - has – and will change you,
me and the entire world.

Amen.

Easter Prayers

Maker of light, yours is the morning and yours is the evening. Let Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, shine for ever in our hearts and draw us to that light where you live in radiant glory. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the **Anglican Cycle of Prayer**, we pray for the Peace of Jerusalem and the People of the Land of the Holy One;

For our **Bishops** Linda our Primate, Mark our National Indigenous Archbishop, Anne our Metropolitan, and Susan bishop of Niagara.

In the **Diocese of Niagara**, we pray for St. Alban, Beamsville, the Reverend Robert Towler, Rector, the Reverend Mary Kimberley, Associate Priest, the Venerable Lynne Marchant, Honorary Assistant, and the people of that parish;

For all the clergy and people who share in the ministry of this St. John's.

Today we pray for the following **people and their families**: Marvin & Jane Bosetti, Rosemary Bowen, Shelly Boyer, June Bradley, Craig Bradley.

And in our **community** we give thanks and pray for those who volunteer and offer leadership to Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre.

We remember those who are close to us, for **those who are ill**: Lucas, Maria, Kelly-Lynne, Michelle + Karen, Jan, Aisling, Helen, Bev, Kathy, Adam, Wendy & Gary, Maryse, Gary, Cassandra & Max, Shirley, Lee, Mary, Jody, Carldavid, Barb, Mylee, Betty, Patti, David, the Guerin family the Sorley family, baby Parker, Betty, Margaret, Janice, Pat, Val, and for others who need our prayers, ...

And we pray for Jody that she may rest in peace.

Creator of the universe, watch over us and keep us in the light of your presence. May our praise continually blend with that of all creation, until we come together to the eternal joys which you promise in your love; through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

A Prayer for Easter

Jesus, you are making all things new,
A new heaven
A new earth
A new way of thinking
A new way of being.

Jesus, you are making all things new,
No more death
No more mourning
No more crying
No more pain.

Jesus, you are making all things new,
Renew our minds
to renew the world
by living our your
commandment of Love.

Jesus, you are making all things new.
Amen.

A Blessing

May the God of infinite goodness scatter the darkness of sin and brighten your hearts with holiness; and blessing of God almighty, the Maker, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

