



# Easter

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Anoka, Minnesota  
April 9, 2023 ♦ 8:30am & 10:30am



***We are an Open and Affirming Church.***  
***No matter who you are or***  
***where you are in your life's journey,***  
***you are welcome here.***



This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time. The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

**Welcome & Announcements**

*If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate). If you would like to join our mailing list, email [office@uccanoka.org](mailto:office@uccanoka.org) and ask to be added.*

**Introit**

**ELLACOMBE**

**D. E. Wagner**

*Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director*

**Scripture Reading – Mark 16:1-4**

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

**Psalm 18 (portions, adapted)**

One: I love you, Holy One, my strength.

**Many: The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.**

One: God is the rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and my stronghold.

**Many: I call upon the Ancient of Days, who is worthy to be praised!**

One: In my distress, I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help.

**Many: From God's temple she heard my voice, and my cry reached her ears.**

One: God reached down from on high and took me, drawing me out of the mighty waters.

**Many: God delivered me from the hands of those who hated me; the LORD was my support.**

One: God brought me out into a broad and safe place;

**Many: She did this because she delights in me!**

One: You light my lamp, Gracious One, and light up the darkness.

**Many: Your right hand has supported me, and my feet do not slip!**

One: The LORD lives! Blessed be the rock, the God of our salvation!

**Many: I extol you, Holy One, and sing praised to your name!**

## The Church Bell Rings

Bell Acclamation

EASTER HYMN

D. E. Wagner

*Anoka UCC Bell Choir; Don Shier, Director*

\* Opening Hymn

“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” #233 (vv. 1-2, 4)

**Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!**

**Mortal tongues and angels say: Alleluia!**

**Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!**

**Sing, glad heavens, and earth reply: Alleluia!**

**Let the Victor’s people sing, Alleluia!**

**Where, O Death, is now your sting? Alleluia!**

**Dying once, Christ lives to save, Alleluia!**

**Where your victory, O grave? Alleluia!**

**Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!**

**Following our exalted head, Alleluia!**

**Made like Christ, like Christ we rise, Alleluia!**

**Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!**

## A Time for Children (10:30)

*ADVISORY: The livestream of the service continues during the Children’s Time;  
if your child sits facing the Pastor their face shouldn’t appear on camera.*

Choir Anthem

“Everybody Rejoice” from *The Wiz*

Luther Vandross

*Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director*

*Rejoice, rejoice! Everybody rejoice!*

*Everybody look around, ‘cause there’s a reason to rejoice, you see.*

*Everybody come out and let’s commence to singing joyfully.*

*Everybody look up and feel the hope that we’ve been waiting on.*

Everybody be glad, because the silent fear and dread is gone.  
Freedom you see has got our hearts singing so joyfully.  
Just look about; you owe it to yourself to check it out.  
Can you feel a brand new day?  
Everybody be glad (be glad!) because the sun is shining just for us.  
Everybody wake up (wake up!) into the morning, into happiness.  
(Hello world!) It's like a different way of living now.  
(Thank you, world!) We always knew that we'd be free somehow.  
In harmony, we'll show the world that we've got liberty.  
It's such a change for us to live so independently.  
Can you feel a brand new day?  
Can you feel it? It's a brand new day. Yeah! I can feel it in my heart.  
Rejoice, rejoice! Everybody rejoice!

(10:30) Children ages 3 and up may return to their adults; the preschool room will also be open for their use.  
Activity bags are available in the back of the sanctuary for those who might enjoy them.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

We Come to the Table

The Invitation

One: This is the table of grace; the joyful feast of the people of God; a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Jesus invites us all to partake of this sacred meal, recalling as we do how he gathered with his friends and then, three days later, beyond all expectation or hope, joined them again to share a meal together.

**Many, singing** (“Now the Green Blade Rises” #238):

**Now the green blade rises from the buried grain;  
wheat that in the dark earth for many days has lain.  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green.**

The Peace

One: The peace of God be with you always.

**Many: And also with you.**

## Communion Prayer

One: We thank you, Holy and Mighty God, for not abandoning us when the night seemed longest. When the powerful had slain your Son and our hope seemed to dry like a streambed in the desert, you answered even more powerfully as you have always done. From the taming of chaos to the parting of the Red Sea, your breath has blown aside the waters of danger and torment. From the planting of Eden to the restoration of the remnant, you have cultivated a home for all your people. Today, we celebrate that love!

### Many, singing:

**In the grave they laid their Love whom hate had slain,  
thinking that their Love would never wake again.  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green.**

One: Again and again we gather around this table at Jesus's invitation to celebrate life and love, like the spring that arrives after every winter. We ask now that you send your Holy Spirit to breathe its blessing upon this table, that as we partake of the bread and the cup, Love beyond all reckoning might take root and grow within us until that day when you gather us in and make all things new. Now hear us, we pray, as we join our voices together as Jesus taught us:

### Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).*

*We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

## The Sharing the Bread and Cup

One: During that final meal which would become the first of many, Jesus took bread. After blessing it he gave thanks, and then he said, "This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

**Many: We remember you, O Christ.**

One: In that same meal he took a cup. With thanksgiving, he offered it to his friends, saying, “From this cup you drink of the new covenant. Do this, too, in remembrance of me.”

**Many: We remember you, O Christ.**

One: The bread is baked. The cup is full. Sing, O people of God!

**Many (singing):**

**Christ came forth at Easter, like the risen grain,  
Jesus, who for three days in the grave had lain.  
quick from the dead the risen One is seen:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green.**

*The Deacons will pass the elements through the pews.  
Partake of them as you receive them.*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

One: Let us give thanks.

**Many: We thank you, O God, for the hope that washes away all our fear and dread and moves us to sing so joyfully. Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! You have given us a reason to rejoice, and ever since it's like a different way of living now. We can feel it in our hearts, in our bodies, in our Spirits. How can we keep from singing?**

**Many, singing:**

**When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
Christ's warm touch can call us back to life again.  
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
Love is come again like wheat that rises green.**

Offering

Text-to-Give: [844-334-1477](tel:844-334-1477)

*Thank you for your gifts to our ministries!*

*If you are watching from home (live or later), please consider adding to the Offering by sending your gifts by mail, text, or online ([uccanoka.org/donate](http://uccanoka.org/donate)).*

*You can support the church further through the RaiseRight program:  
[www.raiseright.com](http://www.raiseright.com). Our unique church ID is gWKLGX8TRZCN.*

Offertory

Koki Sato

“Christ the Lord is Risen Today” #233 (lyrics adapted by CGM)

**Love’s redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Let all joyful bells be rung, Alleluia!  
Let all songs and joys arise, Alleluia!  
God to all gives Love the prize, Alleluia!**

\* Scripture Reading – Luke 24:4-9 (*alt*)

While the women were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

\* Easter Blessing

“The Day of Resurrection” #245 (v .3)

**Now let the heavens be joyful, let earth its song begin,  
the whole world keep high triumph, and all that is there in.  
Let all things seen and unseen their notes of gladness blend,  
for Christ again has risen, our joy that has no end!**

Postlude

Koki Sato

*You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time, please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.*

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

Easter isn’t a musical. The scriptures don’t paint the scene with notes on a staff. Mary and the other women don’t carry the Good News to the rest of the disciples in song. But every time I read the story, I can’t help but think: **how did they keep from singing?** How did they not just burst into joyful melody and harmony to sing out their amazement and ecstasy that Jesus had risen? They were of a people who already had done so in the Psalms, just as we do in our hymns. Why not one more right at that

moment, when they ran back from the tomb to where the other disciples were gathered? Miriam and the other women broke out the tambourines and dances when they sang of God's liberation at the Red Sea. Wouldn't Mary and her friends have done the same?

You all just heard the song they would have sung if that had been the case. **Rejoice, rejoice! Everybody rejoice! Can you feel a brand new day?**

Mary and the other women awoke that Easter morning filled with silent fear and dread. Sorrow and pain. Anguish. Despair. Their friend, their brother, their son, their loved one was dead. Did it make any difference that he had told them it was going to happen? Maybe. Maybe that helped them cope with it, in that way that sometimes happens when someone is dying of a long-term illness and it gives people some time to prepare themselves. But only a little. When they gathered their spices and ointments and set off toward the tomb, that fear and dread was still there. They didn't know what their futures held. Would the Romans come after them, too? Would Pilate crack down on those who had followed Jesus, as the Romans had so often done before when someone challenged the might of the Empire?

But when they arrived at the tomb, the stone was rolled away.

The tomb was empty.

What did it mean?

In each gospel the messengers vary. In Luke, it's two men in dazzling clothes. In Mark, it's one man in a white robe. In Matthew, it's an angel of the Lord, and in John it's two angels in white, followed by Jesus himself. All carry the same news, though: Jesus had risen from the dead. Rome had failed to break Love.

**Everybody be glad, for the silent fear and dread is gone.**

Naturally, there was yet much to fear. The resurrection of their friend didn't mean that Rome was deposed. It didn't mean that there wasn't still hate and discrimination and cruel oppression in the world. But in that moment, the women had been given a reason to rejoice, a reason to sing joyfully. The hope that they had been waiting upon had come to pass, and they ran to tell everyone else: "Check it out! It's a brand new day!"

Even when fear and dread are still rampant, getting some Good News is still cause for celebration. Cause for rejoicing. A rejuvenated hope can still bring about a brand new day. We see it happen all the time. Brand new days are always erupting around us.

In *The Wiz*, that brand new day happened when the Winkies were finally freed from the Witch's oppressive rule. In *The Wizard of Oz*, it's the Munchkins.

It was a brand new day on June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court decided in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that there was a fundamental, Constitutional right in our country for same-sex couples to marry.

It was a brand new day in 539 BCE when Cyrus the Great of Persia released the Israelites who had been held in captivity for 70 years.

It was a brand new day when the convictions of the Central Park 5 were finally vacated.

It was a brand new day when Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt.

It's a brand new day every time someone who is trans is able to finally start using their name and pronouns of choice and hear them echoed back in the words of their neighbors.

It's a brand new day every time the Ukrainian Army liberates another village or town.

Can you hear it? Can you feel it? Can you feel a brand new day?

Our faith, and no less Easter itself, is fundamentally rooted in liberation: the idea that God saves us from dread and fear and for hope and joy. Naturally, the Church has diverse points of view on what that liberation was. Some say it was liberation from sin. Others say that no one went to heaven until Jesus came along and released them from captivity. My perspective is that the people who had lived under Roman occupation had for so long been told that they had to bow to the power of Caesar. But while Rome killed the messenger, they couldn't quash the message. They couldn't silence the Good News that



good is stronger than evil, that Love is stronger than hate. Though there is always reason to carry silent fear and dread, in the end, Love wins, and every time goodness prevails in the world, it's a brand new day.

It has been such a privilege over the last couple of years to be part of someone else's brand new day, all because this church is so generous and loud with its love in ways that are as yet too rare in the north metro. These are but a few examples.

Several years ago, a young man and a young woman appeared at the front doors of the church on a weekday. They had just come from the county with a marriage license in hand, and they wanted to know if we performed marriages for nonmembers. They explained that he was facing deployment in just a few weeks, and they wanted to get married as soon as possible. When I asked them, "Do you want to do it now?" it was a brand new day.

Sometime in the last year, two women reached out, asking for the same. They were deeply rooted in the Seventh Day Adventist tradition where they were prohibited from marrying, but they wanted a Christian wedding. We said yes, and for them, it was a brand new day with a sanctuary filled with their loved ones, new wedding dresses, a reception, and the works.

As so many of you already know, it was just a couple of weeks ago when I traveled 45 miles away to officiate the wedding of two more young women who wanted a Christian service but had no nearby options. The church to which they belong calls it sin. But there was no sin on that brand new day. Everybody rejoiced in the covenant commitment they made together!

Also in the last year, two more young women reached out to the church asking if I might officiate their wedding. They both came from north metro churches that forbade their marriage. We said otherwise, and they were married in the sight of God on that brand new day. And there is yet more Good News, for tomorrow, I am meeting with them again to sign their newly-acquired marriage license. Everybody rejoice!

In the Church, every Sunday is considered Easter, a day to proclaim the Good News of God's unending love. But it isn't just on Sundays that we do that; any day can be a brand new day. It just takes the courage for each of us to inject some love and joy into someone else's fear and dread. Again, I'm so privileged to be able to do that. People come to me sometimes, filled with fear. They come, anxiously intent on revelation and confession. Often, what they want to share is something that the Church has told them is sinful, or something that the world has told them is shameful. Usually they've been beating themselves up because they think they've been impatient or unkind, irritable or resentful, or have insisted on their own way when they should have been more accommodating. When those confessions come and I'm able to respond with something like, "Oh yeah; that makes sense," or "That's not cruel; that's just setting a good boundary." It's especially wonderful to be able to say, "That's not sin; that's just human." I'm almost shocked that no one has kept from singing in those moments!

I have seen so many brand new days begin. I have seen so much fear and dread wither away in the face of newborn hope. Have you felt it? Have you seen it? Have you been part of passing along the Good News? Have you been part of someone's brand new day? Have you shown someone Easter on any other day of the year? The liberation doesn't have to be this big thing that affects thousands or millions of people. It can happen with just one person. Just one person who, because of you showing them a little bit of love, realizes that they have a reason to rejoice when they thought they had none.

On Easter Sunday, God did that for everyone, and Mary spread the news. Let's all join them in that neverending song, that reason to rejoice. Everyone rejoice, for Christ is risen! (Christ is risen, indeed.)

Amen!

♦ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ♦

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*First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one's essential being.*