

A close-up photograph of several pink cyclamen flowers with white variegated petals and green leaves. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, some fully open and some as buds. The background is dark, making the flowers stand out.

# Easter

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ,  
Anoka, Minnesota

*Open and Affirming*

March 31, 2024 8:30am & 10:30am



**No matter who you are or  
where you are in your life's journey,  
you are welcome here.**



# **Christ is risen!**

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

The Church Bell Rings

Choral Call to Worship

“Introit for Easter”

*Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director*

Joel Raney

*This is the day of celebration, this is the day of goodness and light.  
Earth and sky and all creation celebrate the wonder of life!  
Christ is risen, sing hosanna, lift your voices to the sky.  
Christ is risen, alleluia! He is alive; he lives on high!*

\* A setting of Psalm 8 by Christine Robinson (unison)

**Many-Named One beyond imagining,  
when I contemplate the night sky,  
the cosmos which all unfolded from a speck,  
galaxies, stars, this beautiful earth—  
who are we humans, that you attend to us?  
mere mortals in our tiny corner, and you love us?  
We are life come to knowing and feeling.  
The whole world is in our hands.  
Plants and animals, oceans and ice caps, rain forests, atmosphere, and ecosystem.  
Touch our hearts, O God.  
Make us worthy of this trust.  
Help us to care for life on this beautiful earth.**

\* Opening Hymn

“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.

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.

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.

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.

A Time for Children (10:30)

Choir Anthem

“This Joyful Eastertide”

arr. Robert Powell

*Anoka UCC Chancel Choir; Don Shier, Director*

*This joyful Eastertide, away with sin and sorrow!  
My love, the Crucified, hath sprung to life this morrow.  
Had Christ that once was slain, ne’er burst his three-day prison,  
our faith had been in vain; but now hath Christ arisen.  
My flesh in hope shall rest and for a season slumber  
till love from east to west shall wake the dead in number.  
Had Christ that once was slain, ne’er burst his three-day prison,  
our faith had been in vain; but now hath Christ arisen.*

Scripture Reading – John 20:1-18

Lector, **Congregation**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to

them, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."** <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes. <sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, **"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."** <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, **"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."** <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, **"Rabbi!"** (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, **"I have seen the Lord";** and she told them that he had said these things to her.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Many: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn \*\*

"Morning Breaks, the World Awakens" (page 7)

Offering

Text-to-Give: **844-334-1477**

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*[www.raiseright.com](http://www.raiseright.com). Our unique church ID is 9WKLGX8TRZCN.*

Offertory

*Gaspard de la nuit, I: Ondine*  
*Koki Sato, Keyboardist*

Maurice Ravel

\* Doxology

NUN DANKET

*“Now Thank We All Our God” #419 v. 3*

**All praise and thanks to God our Maker now be given,  
to Christ, and Spirit, too, our help in highest heaven.  
The one, eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore!**

\* 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.**

\* Benediction

\* Easter Acclamation

*“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” #233 (v.1)*

**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!**

Postlude

*“Blackbird”*  
*Koki Sato, Keyboardist*

McCartney/Hiromi

**COFFEE HOUR IS SERVED BETWEEN SERVICES.  
Today, we will celebrate Koki Sato’s time with us!**

***Has your personal information changed? Keep us informed!  
There are information update forms on the bulletin table. Thank you.***

## Acknowledgements

\*\* The Rev. Hannah Brown, a UCC pastor, writes: “I asked some colleagues what kind of hymn texts they found themselves looking for but unable to find. The Rev. Chris McArdle suggested an Easter Hymn that did not focus on victory. I thought of the experience of the women at the tomb and all those who were close to Jesus on that first Easter day. It was not a day of victory for them, and the possibility that something good could emerge from tragedy might have even been painful. The refrain gives a nod to Saint Hildegard of Bingen, a polymath, prioress, and early environmentalist, who often spoke of God’s greening power.”

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## Sermon Text

When Mary saw the open tomb, it didn’t occur to her for an instant that Jesus had risen. It was too much to hope, too much to dream that what Elijah and Elisha had once done had happened again. Surely it was the soldiers who had rolled the stone away. Surely it was Pilate who had stolen Jesus’s body so that his friends, his family, and his followers would be demoralized all over again.

Rome was always doing things that way. The sight of crosses along the highways had long since ceased being novel. After your first few hundred, you stopped seeing the bodies. It was hard to shut out the cries of the carrion birds, but as for the sight? You just fixed your eyes to the ground in front of you and walked on by, perhaps silently offering a prayer to God that you would not be the next victim of the Roman propaganda machine.

Jesus was a victim of that machine. Surely they had taken his body. That was the only plausible explanation. She would run to the boys and tell them what she had found. Maybe one of them would know a centurion who might be willing to tell them where they had taken the Lord. Perhaps they could pay someone off and retrieve the body, so that they might honor him in death according to their traditions. Maybe.

\* \* \*

I’m not surprised that over two millennia, the Church lost track of what Mary was feeling when she saw that empty tomb. She wasn’t thinking, “Oh! Our Lord has achieved victory over death! The power of death is broken, and sin is no more! Hallelujah!” That was a belief that developed over time, in no small part due to the effort of some nameless preacher in the book of Hebrews who decided that Jesus had been a sacrifice to end all sacrifices. They interpreted his death and resurrection as a matter of conquest, of victory, of triumph over the grave. I believe the Church took that message too far, interpreting it as *Christianity’s* triumph over Judaism, over all other religions, and over the world. The ripples of that theology abound. In America today, Christians whose view of the faith is particularly triumphal, particularly king-of-the-hill, are seeking to ensconce in law a Christian, theocratic governance that insists the Church sits atop the social structure, just like Pharaoh and Caesar.

I admit that I never thought about it that way when I was a child. My theology was deeply formed by the hymnody of Easter that leaned heavily into triumphalism:

**Love's redeeming work is done / alleluia  
Fought the fight, the battle won / alleluia**

**Jesus Christ is risen today / alleluia  
Our triumphant, holy day / alleluia**

**Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death has won.**

**All hail the power of Jesus's name, let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.**

I never questioned these things in my youth. I didn't question them in my adulthood until I went to seminary, where my professors opened to me new ways of understanding the meaning of the Cross and of Easter that didn't rely on what I've already called the King of the Hill (a name that becomes less than coincidental if we think of it in light of Good Friday). Because make no mistake: the Church has inflicted untold pain with that point of view. We can so easily see the roots of anti-Semitism in the language of triumph, particularly in how the Church sometimes intentionally and sometimes lazily pressed upon us the notion that the Jews had it wrong, Pharisees were evil, and Jesus was the First Christian. None of that is remotely true! But wait, there's more! Christians took the Biblically-sound notion that there were many Gods in the universe and decided that there was only one God, and that Jesus was God, and therefore all nations should bow to the victorious Christ who is here to save everyone from their sins... even if that salvation had to be violently beat into slaves, Native Americans, women, LGBTQ+ folks, and non-Christians all over the world.

All of that is why I answered the Rev. Hannah Brown's question the way I did. She was planning to attend a hymnwriting symposium, and she wanted to know what kinds of hymns we preachers were craving but couldn't find. I specifically asked for Easter hymns that didn't lean into victory, and evidently that hooked her. She wrote a hymn in that spirit, "Morning Breaks, the World Awakens."

In that hymn, Rev. Brown focuses on the grief of Mary and the others upon the death of Jesus. What were they to do but keep pressing on? Brown writes, "Aching hearts must face the day." So Mary and her friends go to the tomb to do the things Jewish folks did when someone died. To their great surprise, the stone is rolled away. Christ has risen! But when they meet him again, their thought wasn't about victory over death. They experienced healing of their trauma and loss. In the hymn, Rev. Brown likens it to the movement of the seasons: "here among us greening power... here around us growing promise." I hear in those lyrics the promise of spring, much as ancient Greeks imagined the cold of winter fading when Persephone returned to the overworld after six months down below with her husband Hades. When she sprang forth again from that shadowy realm, the earth awoke in joyous, greening power.

Brown writes, "In a garden, met with wonders, tender hearts seek what is true... what is this strange revelation, planting seeds of hope anew?" Perhaps it's only strange because the Church has added so many layers of meaning upon the Resurrection, so many insistent demands that the Resurrection and the Crucifixion were about Adam and sin and death being an enemy.

What if we got that wrong? What if the meaning of Resurrection is as it has always been: that death is a natural part of the cycle of life, and that just as death follows life, life will always follow death? Wouldn't that be the greening power of God, a power that breathes life into soil, waters and feeds the tender sprouts, creates seeds for the future, and then returns the growth to the soil upon death, that it may become new soil from which life rebounds? Doesn't that give an ineffable yet certainly biological truth to "here within us, love will rise?"

I'm so grateful for my seminary preparation that gave me the tools and the courage to examine the things that I learned in the Church and discern whether they were theologies of life or theologies of death. By that I mean any religious belief, any Biblical interpretation must inevitably be examined to see if it is causing or alleviating suffering in the world. If it perpetuates or even invents suffering, then its power lies not in greening, but in agony. Too many people in the world have been harmed because they weren't taught this: Jesus died because Rome killed him. They weren't taught to interpret Resurrection like this: Rome's effort to kill the messenger failed because the message was too strong, too glorious, too filled with love. They failed because Jesus had already planted seeds of hope, seeds that death could not stop from germinating and sprouting and growing thirty, sixty, a hundredfold until the birds of the air made homes in their branches.

On this Easter Sunday, a Resurrection filled with greening power reminds me that in the end, life will always find a way. Though war and famine persist, though pain and injustice endure, though corruption and evil continue to spread their influence through the world, there is a quiet, greening power that cannot be fully extinguished. Here, today, we name that Love. We name that Jesus. We name that the Holy One who steadfastly loves us to the thousandth generation and beyond. No amount of salting the earth can stop that greening power. Life is the true victor. It's only waiting for its moment to arise.

Amen.

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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.*



# MORNING BREAKS, THE WORLD AWAKENS

Hannah C. Brown

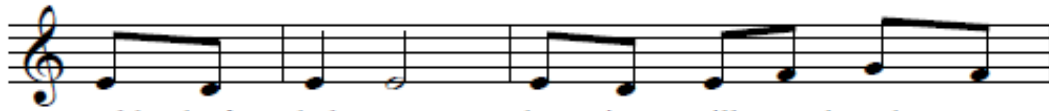
GREENING POWER  
Sally Ann Morris



1. Morn - ing breaks, the world a - wak - ens,  
2. In a gar - den, met with won - ders,  
3. You bear wounds yet com - fort oth - ers,



ach - ing hearts must face the day, brav - ing now a  
ten - der hearts seek what is true. Emp - ty, long - ing,  
shar - ing peace and breath and bread, car - ing for the



world that's shak - en, dar - ing still to breathe, to  
gripped with hun - ger, we reach for a touch from  
ones who suf - fer, call - ing us to give and



stay. Who are we with - out your pres - ence?  
you. What is this strange rev - e - la - tion,  
mend. How can we be - come your bod - y



Who will move our stone a - way?  
plant - ing seeds of hope a - new? Here a - mong us  
here on earth as you as - cend?



green - ing pow - er, here a - bove us dawn - ing skies;



here a - round us grow - ing prom - ise, here with - in us love will



rise.