

# CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

April 12, 2009



## Easter Finished & Raised

The flash of lightning and the roar of thunder on Good Friday served as a tangible reminder that darkness had truly veiled our savior as he cried out “why have you forsaken me”. To have somehow stepped into this moment on Friday evening was an undeserved reward that helped all of us realize that the story of the cross is the greatest dark comedy of them all. Disappointment and disillusion must have plagued the disciples as they returned to their homes. How in the world could they have followed a messianic pretender? Surely they were smarter than that? But love for this person Jesus remained in their heart and perhaps even hope. This was at least the reality for the women who followed Jesus even to his tomb. For on the first day of the week, at the earliest possible opportunity the women appeared carrying spices for the decaying body of Jesus. They never had the chance to use these embalming oils for a new day had dawned in the history of the world. Jesus had *risen from the dead*. If he really did this, it changes everything. As the misfit

in O’Connor’s tale states, “he’s thrown everything off balance”. But still many of us struggle to believe that he really has risen. There are often several objections along these lines. First, twentieth century scholarship portrayed an inaccurate reality regarding the oral traditions of the gospel noting that accounts of the resurrection did not appear until the first or second century. The reality is that the works of Paul which appeared 20 years after the death of Christ discussed the resurrection at length, providing ample opportunity for refute by the larger cultural context. Moreover, contrary to cultural and legal practices of the day the gospels list women as the first eyewitnesses. If this was a potentially damaging claim why include it if it weren’t true? Finally, the modern thinker would possibly claim that the gospel writers were simply not as rational as we are today. But the reality is that they too never expected the resurrection and saw it as an unprecedented event both physiologically and historically. The

resurrection is not simply challenging to our minds, but it is also a word of grace to our hearts. Much of our culture, even within the walls of the church, has a karmasque view of redemption; “my good efforts will establish nirvana in the end”. But very practically speaking this truly leaves us stuck and in demanding justice we cannot exclude ourselves. Jesus’ words “it is finished” are surely the only way in which we can hold to a posture of mercy while at the same time supporting a standard of justice. Finally if this bodily resurrection is true, then it radically alters how we live on the streets of our communities. The resurrection was not something simply spiritual, but something physical. Life in light of the resurrection then cares for the physical. For the ultimate goal of redemption is that heaven and earth would kiss, not that we would pass into some ethereal bliss. The resurrection calls us to feast over the victory of Christ to whom we owe everything.

# Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

## Application Questions: John 19:28-30; 20:1-9

1. In the backdrop of so many other cultural narratives why is it that the resurrection changes everything?
2. Growing up what did you know and think about the resurrection of Jesus? How has your thinking changed and what does it mean to you today?
3. Some would say that the gospel accounts, particularly of the resurrection, cannot be historically trusted because of the origin as oral legends. How do the circumstances surrounding the creation of New Testament texts counter this critique?
4. What interesting role do women play in defending the accuracy of the gospel narratives regarding the resurrection?
5. Based on the response of the disciples why can we not say that the disciples and the subsequent gospel accounts of the resurrection were not rational like we are today?
6. What is the difference between karma and grace? Even if you're a Christian what karma-like tendencies do you live out in your own faith? Discuss what difference Christ's words "it is finished" makes in your life right now.
7. How does belief in a bodily resurrection and not merely a spiritual resurrection influence how you treat neighbors and fight for justice?
8. As we move forward in the celebration of Easter what is one thing that will be different for you this year than in previous years?

"I really believe that we have moved out of the realm of Karma and into one of Grace. You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,... It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the Universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, you will so" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very news good indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff."

Bono  
A Conversation in His  
Own Words

## Easter

by Jim Dolas

**1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." (Matthew 28:1-7 ESV)**

As with the women at the tomb that first Easter morning, we have met One with an appearance like lightning and unutterable whiteness. Jesus Christ has risen, and our wilderness journey through Lent has reached its completion. Here, on the other side of the cross, we are ministered to; not by angels, but by God the Holy Spirit himself. We are consoled and comforted as adopted children of the Father. We are released from the penalty of our sin, the sin that Jesus bore on our behalf. And we are reminded that as we die with Jesus, even so we are raised with him.

This is why we are able to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow him, because he has died our death and given us his life. This is why we can love even our enemies, who often don't know what they are doing, because he forgave the ones putting him to death. This is why we can walk with power in love and justice and mercy, because justice and mercy were accomplished in the greatest act of love the world has ever known.

It is that power, the power of the resurrection, that should shape and direct our lives. Shortly before his death, historian and scholar Jaroslav Pelikan is reported to have said, "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen -- nothing else matters." Here, after the wilderness, in the shadow of the empty cross and the empty tomb, may the resurrection of the Son of God fill us with the power to live our lives as if nothing else matters.