

Restore us, O God! We live.

EASTER

Scripture

Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

Focus statement

When our hopes for what will bring life are shattered, we come to the tomb feeling lost, confused, disillusioned, and afraid. But it is precisely there that God meets us—revealed in the mystery of the risen Christ. God, the Author of life, empowers us to live fully and enables us to praise once again. We dance, we sing, we proclaim: Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Lenten ritual (part A)

It's a party! Fill the vase on the altar table with fresh flowers. Following the sermon, celebrate communion together as a joy-filled response to the resurrection.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 118 Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

HWB 267 Christ Has Arisen

HWB 269 Thine is the Glory

HWB 273 Low in the Grave He Lay

HWB 275 Lift Your Glad Voices

HWB 280 Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

HWB 283 Christ Who Left His Home in Glory

HWB 285 All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

STS 89 Christ Is Alive (and Goes Before Us)

STS 90 Oh, qué bueno es Jesús / Oh How Good Is Christ the Lord

STS 95 Jesus Has Done So Much for Me

“The River Is Here” by Andy Park

“The Wonderful Cross” by Chris Tomlin

Call to worship

Leader: When all hope seems lost, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: When fear hovers close at hand, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: When disillusionment and despair threaten us, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: Come! Celebrate the risen Lord! Alleluia!

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession of faith (based on STS 179)

Leader: O living God, who raised Jesus from the dead
we shout your great victory;
we sing hymns of praise!

**People: Even when our hearts are heavy
and our eyes are dimmed by sorrow,
you are faithful.
You wipe away all tears
and bring joy in the morning.**

Leader: Teach us, O God, to trust your gracious love,
to rest in your unfailing goodness,
to hope in your true promise,
that we may rejoice all our days
and share the good news:

**All: Alleluia! Amen!
Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!**

Sermon seeds

Easter morning begins in the grief of the tomb. In the very places of utter brokenness, God meets us in the risen Christ. It is in our times of deepest need, knowing that we cannot help ourselves, that God brings life and love that cannot be destroyed. All the Lenten glimpses of God's restoring power swell to full strength. Death is conquered! Sin is forgiven! Peace abounds! Love flows! We are alive!

Matthew's telling of Easter morning involves all creation! The earth itself quakes with the news that Christ is risen. This is a celebration of cosmic proportions. We scarcely can take it in! We contemplate this most astonishing news: resurrection. It shatters all our normal ways of thinking and invites a new way of living, beyond what we always thought possible. Now, by God's grace, and with God's limitless resources, we can dream farther, live abundantly, and love expansively.

One option for worship planning: Deliver the sermon in the first half of the Easter service, beginning with the grief of the tomb, and our deepest needs, being transformed by God's gift of resurrection life. Then, the second half of the service can be the congregation's response with many expressions of celebration and joy: singing, dancing, playing instruments, and praying with joy and thanksgiving. May this be a day permeated with genuine joy.

Lenten ritual (part B): Communion

If possible, you may want to have a more elaborate love feast/celebration with bowls of fresh fruit, chocolate, sweet rolls, and so forth. Play praise music or invite the congregation to sing together as they come forward to partake in the celebration.

Benediction

May the same power of love that raised Jesus from the dead fill you with *life*, empowering you to live fully, to love freely, and to praise God with your whole being. Praise be to God! Amen.