

Easter interactive worship. Theme: 'Indestructible'

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All-age worship Service with baptism

Sunday, 8 April 2018, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Christchurch, NZ

ORDER OF SERVICE:

Welcome to worship at Cashmere Presbyterian Church

Jesus Christ is alive! He is risen -

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

God's love is unbreakable, his power is unstoppable!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Hymn: I know that my Redeemer lives

Psalm 34: Always praising!

I will bless the Lord all the time!

We'll never stop praising our God!

Magnify the Lord with me.

Together we'll lift his name high.

Taste and see - the Lord is good!

Relax and rejoice - you are safe in him.

When trouble comes, cry out to God.

He is always around you, protecting you.

The Lord is near to the broken,

He saves those who are crushed.

God sees us, God hears us, God knows us.

He rescues us from all our fears.

Listen everyone – this is the way to live:

speak truth, speak kindness,

walk away from what is wrong,

choose to do what is right,

seek peace and follow peace.

We'll never stop praising our God!

Bible Reading: John 20: 11-18

We heard this morning the story from John's gospel of the disciple Mary meeting the risen Jesus early in the morning. She had earlier seen that the tomb was open, run back into town, got Peter and John, run back to the tomb, and after Peter and John left Mary hung around, distressed, not knowing what was going on or what she should do about it. In her distress she sees two angels inside the tomb, and then Jesus outside the tomb. Only she doesn't recognize Jesus until he says her name and then she embraces him until he tells her to not hold onto him, but to go and tell the others that he is alive.

It is an astonishing story rich with emotion and evocative detail.

It is a wonderful story for a baptism Sunday. Early in church history baptisms were always done at Easter time. Many of the early baptism pools were underground – those being baptized would go down into the cave, then down into the water, then up again out into the light. Baptism is in a deep way a participation in the whole Easter event. As Paul puts in the letter to the church in Rome "We have been buried with Christ through baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Father's glory, so we also will live a new life."

Baptism unites our life with the life, and death, and resurrection, of Jesus. From the moment of baptism our lives are patterned by Christ. Baptism is more than a symbol or a ritual or a tradition. It is a sharing in the greatest event of all time, sharing in the greatest story of human history, a story that goes on in each generation.

We are here because Mary told her friends that Jesus was alive, and they told others, and through all generations the life of Christ has continued and been passed on.

So this morning as we baptize little *nn* we affirm our own place in this story the little that we know about Jesus of Nazareth and what he taught and did and how he loved

our own experiences of dying, letting go and suffering

and our hopes and desires for life in all its fullness, life lived in the company of glory and towards an eternal vision of wholeness.

Baptism

Song on video: 'Indescribable' by Chris Tomlin, performed by Encounter, with video of galaxies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eK4NqGqmVt8>

Kids Box

In the Kids Box the children find a tablecloth, which we lay out on the floor.

Next we take out a brick, and wonder why there is a brick, and lay it in the middle of the tablecloth.

Lastly, a large china plate, which I hold up to show everyone.

Discuss:

Have you ever broken anything?

What will happen if I drop the plate on the brick?

Action:

Make sure that children are not standing on the tablecloth.

Drop the plate onto the brick.

(Note: I found this surprisingly nerve-wracking to actually do! I was shaking. But it worked really well. The plate smashed into a dramatic number of pieces and no one was hurt.

Safety risk: You never know how a plate will smash and some pieces do fly quite a distance. It is a risk that a child may get hit by a shard, or that someone could get cut picking up a shard. Do not use glass.)

Message:

The earthquake reminded Christchurch people that nothing lasts forever, every object will break sooner or later.

Even the entire universe itself won't last forever. Eventually our sun will get so big that it will swallow up all the planets and then collapse in on itself. Jesus himself said that one day the sun will become dark and the stars will fall. That's a few billion years away, but still. Nothing lasts forever.

Only one being lasts forever. Only one thing is outside of time, existing before the universe began and lasting even after the universe collapses. God. we know this God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The big idea of the Christian faith is that this universe-making God actually loves us and cares about us and reaches out to us. And when we say yes to God then we get wrapped up in the infinity of God. Your life gets remade in Christ. You become indestructible. Your life is unbreakable when you are part of Jesus Christ.

Action Song: Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty

Activity for the children: Make your own Unbreakable plate.

Buy a selection of white cups, mugs, saucers or plates (2nd hand is fine).

Have vivid markers.

*Help the children write on a plate/cup: **"I am unbreakable in Christ"***

(they could also add their name, drawings etc.)

Give each family a note to say that if they bake the plate/cup in the oven for half an hour (170 degrees) the vivid marker will set and not wash off.

Bible Reading: Romans 6:3-11

Reflection

One of the most fascinating parts of my job as a minister is to sit with people facing death. I get to talk to people when they know that they are going to die, and with people when someone they love has died. These are vivid, extraordinary moments. And in those hard places people tell me what they think about life and death. Some people are very afraid in those places, and don't want to think or talk about it at all. Some people are hardly concerned for themselves at all; they want mainly to care for others. Some people have a clear expectation about what happens next after death – whether there is another place or whether death is a final end. And some people are confused by competing ideas.

My mother is quite clear for herself that death is death, that's it, and she is quite fine with that.

My son was for some years deeply afraid of dying, wanting to believe in a life beyond but not able to.

This time last year I was heading to Italy and Israel. One of the most obvious things when you visit ancient places of spiritual significance is the role of death in it all. Much of Jerusalem itself is taken up with graveyards, rows upon rows of white stone, crusaders, Muslims, Christians, Arabs, all wanted to be buried in the Holy City. Christians wanted to be buried there because on the great day of the Lord's return they would have 'front row seats'. In Rome I went into the catacombs; mile after mile of underground tunnels where Christians were buried. Christians believed in ancient times that the dead must be buried intact, not cremated, so that they could be resurrected with Christ whole in body. Funny how our ideas about death and eternity have changed over the centuries.

My own beliefs about death and eternity are shaped by a vision I had at a youth camp when I was young ... I promise there were no hallucinogenic substances involved! There was a large group of teenagers in a big tent and we were praying and it was quiet and dark, and in my mind's eye I pictured myself as a drop of water, becoming a small flow of water, and with a heart longing I saw myself flowing down into a great blue ocean where I mingled in with the vastness.

It was a simple vision, but it stayed with me and formed me, as visions from God do. It spoke to me in the simplest of ways about my truest identity and ultimate destiny. For me there is no fear in becoming part of something so much greater than I am. I do believe that there is life for eternity with God but I don't, for myself, need or expect this to be a continuation of my own mind and personality. I don't expect that human relationships and roles formed on earth will continue in heaven. I may well be wrong; you need to work out your own hopes and expectations.

What I do preach is what the Bible teaches, which is that there is a dimension to life that is utterly different from what we can see and hear and touch. The Bible uses the words 'God'

and 'Heaven' interchangeably to name this other reality. The Bible claims that this other reality exists outside of time and space, and yet enters into time and space. Most religions would agree with this basic premise. What is distinctive about the Christian claim is the scandal of the cross. The Bible claims that on the cross the eternity of heaven collided with the brokenness of earth and smashed through the wall between heaven and earth.

The Gospels describe this when they say that at the moment of Jesus' death the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Paul describes this when he says that we have died with Christ, sharing with Jesus in his crucifixion, so that we now live with Christ, sharing in his resurrection. Paul describes normal human life as being enslaved. Without the cross, he claims, we are slaves to sin and death, trapped in futility and brokenness. In Christ, he claims, our truest identity and ultimate destiny is held within the freedom of heaven.

verse 9-11: we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, no longer dies. Death no longer rules over him. He died to sin once, for all, and he lives to God. So you too know are dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So we can live out our earthly lives in a completely different way, less tied up with fear, less concerned about pain and suffering, unafraid of death, because our identity and destiny is indestructible.

Offering

Prayers for others

Hymn: Thine be the glory

Blessing

God's love is indestructible.

You are indestructible because you are alive in Christ

Go now in the company of the living risen Christ
standing firm on his peace, standing tall in his life.

Amen, amen, amen (sung)