

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking here: [Sunday, April 19 video](#)

An audio file of this week's reflection is on the church website:

<https://charleswoodunited.org/media/sermons/>

Church School – Rosalie Finch and Laura Rousseau are holding weekly live Cool School on Zoom each Sunday at 10:00 am. If you would like to join or are not receiving our children and youth emails please contact Laura at lrousseau@charleswood.org to be added.

Dear Friends

The Sunday before last was the 98th anniversary of Charleswood United Church. Founded in 1922 on the first Sunday of April as a Union Church (Methodist and Presbyterian) we began by worshipping in a local school. Our first building was a small, white, wooded church, typical of the rural farming village Charleswood was at the time. We have seen a lot of changes. The A-frame sanctuary we know so well was dedicated in 1960. The large addition that greets us today was completed in 2008. This is a congregation that has experienced many changes over the years. The great Depression, World War 2. And a surprising number of epidemics, all of which has some tragic effects. But nothing has confronted the current generation of Charleswood United Church like that pandemic through which we are now living.

The question I have been hearing in a number of places is, "Do you think this will change us?" Maybe, maybe not. Certainly this is a broad and shared experience not only in our community but across the country and around the world. It is an emotional experience as fear and anxiety are as prevalent as the practical concerns. There is a new recognition that real heroes wear gowns and masks rather than play hockey or sing pop songs. There is a new consciousness around the vulnerability of seniors in care homes that we should not let go of. But transformation doesn't always arise simply as a by-product of experience. Transformation requires that we reflect on what we have been through in order to hold onto to what we have learned and let go of what is unnecessary when 'normal' returns.

Scripture speaks of transformation as the primary reason for the Christian life. After all, Easter is a celebration of new life. Let us be glad.

Prelude

Enjoy a musical greeting from Carla and Brendan by clicking here: [This Is the Day \(instrumental\)](#)

Bible Reading

The Gospel Lesson for April 19 is John 20:19-31: You can read it here: [John 20:19-31](#)

Reflection

For the most part we strive to live our lives with a certain equilibrium. When that equilibrium is upset we long for balance to return to our living. To say the least, a pandemic upsets the equilibrium where we find comfort resulting in fear and anxiety. A question I have had in several conversations is "Do you think this will change us"?

While I am in no better position to know that than anyone else, I would offer that even a difficult and challenging experience will only change us if we are open to reflect on the meaning of what we are going through.

There are a number of signs that creation itself is getting much needed rest and we may want to pay attention to that. The skies over Los Angeles are clear and free of smog. Within days of the end of cruise ship travel, the canals of Venice were running so clean you could see to the bottom. The particulate concentration in air in New Delhi has dropped 71% in three weeks. In New York City, CO2 levels (greenhouse gas) have dropped by 50%. Creation seems to be saying, if you leave me alone a bit more, I will take care of you.

Our student minister Laura has been working from home while caring for and teaching her two young children. The other day she sent me a reflection showing that she too has been thinking about this question of change. She writes, "I don't think we will come through the other side of this unchanged. We will, at some point, go back to some semblance of the lives we had before, but we will be changed. We have been wounded. God only knows how the breaking open of our hearts at this time might teach us of vulnerability, limitation, and beauty."

If we are to be changed then perhaps there is something to be learned from the Gospel story. It is a week after the day of resurrection and the disciples are still in Jerusalem, still together though sheltered in fear. Not because of a virus but for fear of the authorities. Jesus appears to them and volunteers to show them the marks in his hands where the nails entered and his side where he was pierced. Thomas, one of the twelve was not with them and only asks that he should be given the same opportunity, to see for himself, the hands and side of Jesus. When you take this story into your heart a small but important detail presents itself. How is it that the risen Jesus, healed, renewed, restored still bears any marks from the pain, and sorrow, and suffering which he had previously experienced?

Jesus has been changed. God has worked a miraculous wonder in him. But that doesn't mean he doesn't remember what he has been through or bear the marks of that indignity. There is a difference, is there not, between wounds and scars? Wounds demonstrate that we have been violated, that we are vulnerable, that we are in danger. Scars, on the other hand, say that we have been that way but now we are healed, restored, and made whole after the pain.

We will need to reflect on this experience we are living through if this experience is to change us. We will want to retain the things we have learned and we will want to release the things we have found to be unnecessary. God will make us new as God has again, and again, and again.

Hymn

Some of our church friends have made a video of the Easter Hymn "The Spring Has Come". You can watch it by clicking here: [The Spring Has Come](#)

Prayers

God of Earth and Heaven, we are an Easter people, raised on the first day to a life of abiding hope and unconditional love. We are an Easter people, setting aside fear in order to live lives of peace. We are an Easter people, filled with faith in the prospects and possibilities of all people. We thank you Holy One for creating us to be people of the first day, of the new light, of a forgiving love.

We praise you this day for the goodness that surrounds us and the grace to which we are witnesses. In the efforts of those who work night and day for our healing, our protection, our collective care we see your presence.

We thank you for the signs of spring, the lengthening days, the joy of sunshine. We praise you for the transformation we see around us in nature, a sign of the change you make possible.

Healing and Holy Spirit, we pray first to see the pandemic through which we are living come to an end. We pray that well-being should return to those who have been infected by this virus. We pray that comfort should come to those who are ailing and those who are grieving. We pray that health may be maintained by those who are curing, those who are researching, those who are testing, those who are working, those who are serving.

God of New Life, help us set aside our fears and embrace the fullness and abundance of life for which Jesus came and died and rose again. In his name we pray together when we say...OUR FATHER...

Be well, safe, and hopeful.

Michael

P.S. Enjoy one more musical video: [Amazing Grace](#)

P.P.S. We have added a story to our YouTube channel from Easter last year: [The Grinch's First Easter](#)