

***The Force of Nature* Rev. Thomas Cary Kinder**
United Church of Strafford, Vermont
March 31, 2024 Easter Sunrise Service
Luke 24:1-12

Greeting—Welcome to this Easter Sunrise service. My name is Tom Kinder, and I am the pastor of the United Church of Strafford. I am so thankful to get to share this service with you wherever you are.

We will be singing the classic Easter hymns at our 10 AM service and having the huge joy of the Cantornote Church Musicians and professional soloists singing a Bach aria and our choir singing a Bach chorale with them, so I hope you can attend that service as well in person or online, and we hope there will be a recording of it, too!

Call to Worship—The Anglican monk, Martin Smith, wrote, “Something has happened on the first day of the week, powerful enough to heal every wound, to recover every waste, to break down every barrier, to unlock every prison, to forgive every transgression, to unite everything at odds. There is love enough to flood every heart, to raise everyone dead and lost.”

How huge this power is that Smith describes, how incomprehensible to our limited human intelligence! In a few minutes a star will rise over this horizon whether we see it or not. It is only one of a hundred billion stars in our galaxy. And this galaxy is only one of a hundred billion galaxies in the universe. How vast it is, and how small we are.

And yet, on Easter morning two thousand years ago, a handful of people like us glimpsed the cosmic energy that created the entire universe coming out of an empty tomb. The power of that Christ-light, of that death-transcending life-force, can be felt shining through billions of lives today. This calls not so much for thought, because no intellect can fully comprehend it. Easter calls us to stand before God in awe and faith and joy.

Let us worship together in that spirit.

Scripture Reading: *Luke 24:1-12*

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in

dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflection: The Force of Nature

The women at the tomb asked themselves,
could it be true? The disciples
asked themselves, could it really be true?
Now we ask and our children ask,
is the resurrection true?

Find a windowsill where garden seeds
have been planted in milk cartons.
Ask the seeds.
You will find them down in the dark soil
cracking open, sending up green shoots,
dying as one thing and living anew as another.

Is the resurrection true?
Ask someone who was severely sick this winter
who now is well.
Ask someone whose heart was broken
who has just found new love.
Is the resurrection true?
Ask someone who has died for a short while
and then come back to tell of a great light.
Ask a hospice worker who has seen
dying people look lovingly and call the name
of a beloved dead family member or friend
who has come to help them cross over.

Could Christ be risen from the dead?

Is it not the nature of God's creation
to raise life again from the dead?
See grass coming up through cracks
in sidewalks and parking lots.
See potato and squash plants
leaping up in the compost heap.
The essence of nature is to do all in its power
not to let death have the last word.

Think about this. If a man
were the force of nature incarnate,
if the greatest life force in the universe
flowed into human flesh
so that the Spirit was as purely present
in that person as possible,
what would happen?
Would death have the last word?
He would do much more than a compost pile,
would he not?
He would raise more than potato and squash sprouts,
would he not?

Wouldn't a life force flow through him
powerful enough to raise the sick to health,
to raise the sad to gladness,
to raise the bad to goodness,
to raise the lost to the light,
to raise the greedy to compassion,
to raise the violent to nonviolence?
Wouldn't so much life flow through such a man
that he could touch a deadened heart
and it would beat again?
Wouldn't a person full of that force
rise and rise and rise again,
with the resilience of all nature?

Jesus Christ was that force in the flesh.
Now he is that force in spirit.
If we are in that force, and that force is in us,
then we, too, can expect newness of life,
we can expect the power of resurrection
to flow into us and through us into the world.

Is the resurrection true? Of course it is true!
Our being here is proof of its truth,
our rising from everything that conspires
to keep us down in darkness,
our making our way this morning to seek Easter light
proves it is true. Resurrection
brought us here, its force of hope,
it's great yes, rising in our bodies.
We wear the evidence of resurrection
in our skin, which is constantly dying
and being reborn. Resurrection beats in our hearts,
always emptying and refilling with new life.
Our every cell knows resurrection is true.

So on this glad day, let every cell and
soul of us sing with all creation,
the same song the birds and peepers soon will sing,
the same song each spring wildflower sings,
the same song the morning stars have sung
from the dawn of time!
Let us sing, too! Alleluia! He is risen!
We are risen! All nature is risen!
"This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Let us pray in silence and listen...