

What was I thinking?

April 18, 2021



It's still Easter

Not long ago, I saw where a young and unknowing organist had written something beginning with the words, “Now that Easter is over . . .” The poor kid. As expected, the liturgically correct quickly (and not so kindly) set him straight. Easter is not over! Yes, Easter is a day, but it’s also a season, sometimes called Eastertide. On our Presbyterian planning calendar, it says this Sunday is the 3rd Sunday of Easter. As usual, the church is counter-cultural. That’s not a bad thing. We see it more at Christmas. While the church desperately tries to observe a quiet time of reflection and preparation called Advent, we get beat over the head with Christmas from Thanksgiving on, if not earlier. But, once Christmas day (which is actually the first day of 12 in the Christmas season) comes and goes, much of the world moves on. It’s over. It seems like it never happened. Easter is not as big in the secular world, but it still happens.

Why are we so impatient and quick to forget? Our culture builds up to big events. For some reason the only thing I can think of now is sporting events like the Super Bowl or the World Series, but those are good examples. There’s a big buildup of excitement and “hype,” of course much of it involves advertisements and selling things (sort of like Christmas?). Then the big day comes, and it’s over. If you’re part of the winning team there may be some celebration and a parade, but you don’t hear much about that. It’s done and we go on as if nothing happened.

Coming back to Easter, we’re talking about celebrating Jesus being risen from the dead, and some of us want to go on as if nothing happened. I have a hard time with that. Just as we had the Christmas cycle with Advent – Christmas – Epiphany,

(preparation – celebration - summation), now we're in the Easter cycle: Lent – Easter - Pentecost. Easter is the big day and also the start of the Easter season which lasts until Pentecost. We'll talk more about Pentecost next month, but of all the special days and seasons we celebrate in the church, Pentecost seems to get the least attention, which is ironic. Pentecost is the only one actually named in the bible! People sometimes say "on that first Christmas" and "on that first Easter." Nope. The words "Christmas" and "Easter" are not in the bible, but Pentecost (50 days after Passover) is. More on that later.

Last Sunday, the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Carol Strickland read the story of what happened on the road to Emmaus. It was after the resurrection and the disciples weren't thinking "well, that's over with, let's get back to normal." No, it was more like "what the heck happened?" They were trying to sort it all out and make sense of it. Then a stranger who joined them on the road and began to explain everything to them, but they didn't know who he was, and he didn't say. Then he joined them for a meal and when he broke bread with them, it dawned on them. "Wait, it's you, you really did rise." This Sunday, the 3rd Sunday of Easter, Ryan will read to us another story of Jesus suddenly appearing in the midst of the disciples and saying, "Peace be with you." They're scared, thinking he's a ghost. They still don't get it. He shows them his hands and feet, his wounds. Then, (and I like that he shows his true humanity this way), Jesus says, "Have you got anything to eat?" He must be tired and hungry, and he must be thinking, "How many times am I going to have to explain this?"

I don't know what Ryan's going to say tomorrow, but I'm looking forward to it. The point is, Easter isn't over. Actually it's never over for us if we call ourselves Christians. We often call Sunday the Sabbath, and that's a little confusing to me. God made the seventh day of the week the Sabbath, that would be Saturday, and in the Jewish tradition they still observe that. Jesus rose on the first day of the week, Sunday. That's why we worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of Resurrection. We're Resurrection people. We celebrate that every week.

What's all that got to do with music? We're still telling the tale. And as during Christmas, when I'm planning, I'm trying to decide which carols or hymns to sing when. As I'm planning for the "big" services like Easter, I'm also planning for the continued celebration of Easter. I look to see what Easter hymns can be sung during Eastertide. So, if you've missed *The Strife Is O'er* and *The Day of Resurrection*, you'll get to sing them this Sunday. (You are still singing at home, right?)

You'll also hear some "new" or possibly unfamiliar music. There's a beautiful Welsh folk tune, a lullaby that you may know or may recognize when you hear the melody, called *Suo Gân*. The original words are a typical lullaby, and it wasn't hard for some to

make that into a sacred lullaby for the Christ child and it became a Christmas carol. It has also been paired with an Easter text written by John Bell and Graham Maule, Scotsmen associated with the Iona community. John Tsao is going to sing it as the solo in Sunday's service.

Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers 231
JESUS CHRIST: RESURRECTION

1 Christ has ris-en while earth slum-bers; Christ has ris-en where hope died,
2 Christ has ris-en for the peo-ple whom he died to love and save,
3 Christ has ris-en and for ev-er lives to chal-lenge and to change

as he said and as he prom-ised, as we doubt-ed and de-nied.
Christ has ris-en for the wom-en bring-ing flowers to grace his grave.
all whose lives are messed or man-gled, all who find re-li-gion strange.

Let the moon em-brace the bless-ing; let the sun sus-tain the cheer;
Christ has ris-en for dis-ci-ples hud-dled in an up-stairs room.
Christ is ris-en, Christ is pres-ent mak-ing us what he has been:

The text begins with conventional Easter imagery, but it goes on to say that Christ has risen for “all whose lives are messed or mangled, all who find religion strange.” I think most of our lives are at least somewhat messed and mangled right now. The Resurrection isn’t just an event in history, a reason for us to get extra dressed up, eat chocolate, and hear Widor’s *Toccata* once a year. It really does mean something more than that, and I think it takes more than one day to figure it out. It takes a lifetime and then some!

Since John is singing *Suo Gân*, I’m going to play an organ setting of it for the offertory. I played this piece for the first time around Christmas this year, so I decided to “resurrect” it again for Eastertide. It’s a beautiful piece that I think can accurately be described as ethereal. Since the last time I played it, we’ve added on to our organ.

It's easy to think more organ stops means "louder," and it can, but there are also some beautiful new soft stops to choose from, so I adjusted my registration, my choice of stops, to include some from the Antiphonal. At first, I was only thinking of using new sounds, but as I experimented, I realized something else was happening. If you are lucky enough to be sitting in the pews, you will hear that these soft, heavenly sounds are coming from both ends of our sanctuary, and the result is that these sounds meet and mingle in mid-air in the middle of the sanctuary. You have to be here in person to get the full effect.

I'm also playing a piece written by my organ teacher, Dr. Marilyn Keiser from Indiana University. In the summer of 2019, shopping for music at a conference, I picked up an anthology of pieces and found this composition of hers in it. I had no idea she had written anything! She's very talented and very humble. So, you'll get a cheerful organ setting of an Easter hymn we rarely, if ever, sing (and that's a shame), *Good Christians All, Rejoice and Sing*.

for Karen Holdkamp
Variations on "Good Christians All, Rejoice and Sing"
GELobet sei Gott by Melchior Vulpius, 1609
Marilyn Keiser
Pos.: Fl. 8', Oct. 2'
Sw: Oboe 8'
3=00
21
Pos.
Sw=104
Sw

Several people have said to me, “I can’t wait to hear the new Antiphonal Organ.” As I wrote above, you really have to be in the room to get the full effect, so if you can, come to a service. Or, better yet, set up a time to come get a private demonstration. I’m happy to do that. Every day, we’re getting closer to the time when we can all be back in worship, back in choirs, and singing our hearts out. We’re not quite there yet but we’re getting there. I miss making music with all of you. It’s not the same right now. I’ve continued working through this whole pandemic, coming into church, planning for worship, practicing the organ, writing, etc. I’ve been rattling around on the second floor mostly by myself for over a year and I’m tired of it. Make an appointment to come see me and hear the organ and spend some time in our sanctuary. We’ll both be glad you did.

Until then,

God be with you till we meet again.

John