

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of Los Angeles

Reconnecting with Love

*Dreaming the Way Forward
Easter Sunday*

March 31st, 2024



Ice crystal cloud "rainbow" photo taken in Ireland by James Nasuta

540 S. Commonwealth Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90020
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The Gathering of the People

First Congregational Church of Los Angeles is a safe place for all people, and we celebrate our diversity of race, creed, age, ability, gender, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions...We extend a warm welcome to all this morning and especially those who are with us for the first time. Your presence both enriches us and this time of celebration together ~

Organ Prelude Concert

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence

Hymn Improvisation

Meditation on *Victimae Paschali Laudes*

Vic 1 (Christoph Bull)

Adagio from *Symphony No. 5* (Charles-Marie Widor)

Prelude and Fugue in Eb Major (Johann Sebastian Bach)

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome

Rev. Michael Lehman

Easter Words of Gathering

Lance & Brittany Skiles

Divine Creator of Easter promise and hope,
on this day, enter our lives with resurrection power;
grant to each of us gathered in this sacred place,
an exuberance for life,
and a desire to share the love of the Christ.

On this Easter day, we pray that many of the things
we are prone to disbelieve -
will be raised up as possibilities...

*Led by the power of the Risen One, may we be empowered:
to exist in harmony and balance with the natural world,
to share the good earth in peace as children of humanity,
to work together for the building of your dream for us all,
to care passionately for those who need your love and our care,
and to live our lives filled with gratitude
on this day, and every day,
with hearts overflowing with grace and joy.*

Let our love this morning burst forth like laughter,
and our gratitude on this day of new life grow within us
as we share this time of celebration!

May it be so.

May it be so for all of us!

Please stand in body or in spirit for our Easter Sunday Processional

***Easter Processional**

Christ the Lord is Risen Today

EASTER HYMN

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Mortal tongues and angels say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, glad heavens, and earth reply: Alleluia!

Let the Victor's people sing, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Dying once, Christ lives to save, Alleluia!
Where your victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids Christ rise, Alleluia!
God has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like Christ, like Christ we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

***Prayer of Awareness**

Rev. Lehman

Eternal God,
we have gathered on this Easter morning
to celebrate the life that is within us...
and around us.

Help us in these moments to realize once again
the incredible power that surrounds us –
power for new life,
power for healing,
power for dreams
filled with opportunity.

Help us, O God, to look to one another
as we gather,
that we may on this day,
know the truth of your great love
and the potential
of what we can be
as children of the living God.

In this time,
may our singing be filled with transformation,
may our words reflect the yearning of our hearts,
and may the Spirit that builds within us as we gather,
hallow each and every passing moment
we know in this place.

In expectation of what shall be,
we ask all of this
in the name of the One
we celebrate.

Alleluia!

Amen.

***Introit**

"Jubilant Day"

JUDY A. ROSE

Cathedral Choir, Dr. Fahad Siadat, *Assistant Director*

"Holy, Holy, Holy, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna!"

***The Lord's Prayer**

Rev. Chad Tanaka Pack

***Our [God], who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kindom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kindom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.***

***Gloria Deo**

Glory be to God, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end, Amen, Amen.

***Easter Passing of the Peace**

Rev. Tanaka Pack

On this Easter morning,
in this sacred time and place,
Peace be with you.
And also with you.

Life rises in our midst:
sometimes hard-won life.

It surprises us when it blossoms forth at unexpected times:
and in unexpected places.

It comes with power stronger than death:
***life born of faithfulness,
life born of courage,
life born of God.
Thanks be to God!***

[DMcRae-McMahon]

This morning, may the Peace and Love of God be with you.
And also with you!

You are invited to share this ancient greeting with a bow.

Please be seated

Children's Conversation

Claire Kelly

Following this conversation, children are invited to join us for our Easter Festival which will be followed by our Egg Hunts. If you were unable to check your children in prior to the service, please accompany them to our registration table and check them in before returning to the service. Parents, after service please follow signs according to your child's age group and join them at their age designated Egg Hunt. Immediately following the Egg Hunt, please join us at our Easter Reception where you will find refreshments and a photobooth!

Reading from the Gospel from John, Chapter 20

Lance & Brittany Skiles

This is the Gospel of Love and Grace.
Thanks be to God!

Prayers with the People

Invitation to Silence and Prayer

Rev. Lehman

a strong rainbow sky pours itself out,
bending the sky with glory,
it brings with it a powerful beauty
to soothe our needy hearts with hope.

and I do believe I hear the sun
wild with wonder and rejoicing,
laughing at the once-darkened sky
now parted in colored splendor.

I remember then the One who came,
who broke our stormy night apart,
and shook despairing hearts with hope;
this One told truth of things beyond
and gave us more than gold.

when these rainbow filling skies appear
they touch more than just the earth;
they makes their mark within our depths
and let our heart look up in hope.

-adapted from a poem by Joyce Rupp

Silence

Prayer of our Hearts

Gracious and Loving Creator,
on this day, we long to reach out
and touch the sky, to be in a place
where we can be reminded of your love.
On this day, we want to offer our tears
and ask they be held deep within the heart of life,
knowing they represent the struggles
we still endure.

On this day, we need to be embraced
by loving arms telling us again and again
that in this place we are loved
and we belong to you, and to each other.

On this day, we hope that from this place of love,
we may open the eyes of our hearts to all that is around us
and see those who need your love,
and ours today,
and in all the days to come.

*On this Easter day, we ask all of this,
and so much more,
as we give thanks, Gracious and Loving God,
for your love that never ends.
Amen and Amen.*

Meditation Anthem

"Alleluia"
Cathedral Choir, Dr. David Harris, *Director*

EURYDICE OSTERMAN

Sermon

Dreaming the Way Forward

Rev. Laura Vail Fregin

Invitation to Generosity

Lance Skiles

Through the spirit of new life, God has expressed a love grand and generous,
and affirmed the value of life in a manner both gracious and bold.
As recipients of this love, we are given the opportunity to develop a generosity
that is life changing for us, and for all God's children.

On this Easter morning, we invite you to join us in giving generously
for the work of diversity, inclusion, and welcome
in this sacred place, in our city, and in the world.

*At First Church, we consider every pledge, tithe, offering and contribution a gift for the life of our community of faith. No matter how it's given, our gifts show gratitude. You are invited to visit our website at fccla.org/give.
Our hospitality team will also be at the exits when the service ends with baskets to collect gifts.*

Offertory

"Lobet Den Herrn"
Laude

J.S. BACH

*"Everyone praise God and celebrate the divine! For God's grace and truth
flow around and through us all forever. Alleluia !" ~Psalm 117*

***Doxology**

From all that dwell below the skies,
let the Creator's praise arise!

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Your name shall sound and praises soar
till suns shall rise and set no more.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

[adapt/Isaac Watts, 1719]

***Prayer of Offering**

Lance & Brittany Skiles

God of endings and new beginnings,
this morning we came to give our thanks for this life we are privileged to share.
We came wanting to give up our pretenses and to offer up our hopes and dreams,
so that you could breathe new life into them.

In these precious moments, we have been shaken from our sleep
and awakened as we are recognizing the life from death,
we are experiencing, in this, our time and place.

As we prepare to leave this service and celebrate this community together,
we ask that you open our eyes to the new day that is dawning in our hearts.

For all that has been, for all that is, and for all that will be,
we offer our thanks as we celebrate the life, death, and life from death
of Jesus the Christ.

Amen and Amen.

Please be seated

Life at First Church

Rev. Fregin & Rev. Lehman

Words of Blessing

Rev. Fregin & Rev. Lehman

Remembering the story of Holy Week
we gathered this morning
sealed in the deep shadows of despair,
remembering the death of Jesus.

It was a place where we were unable
to see the possibilities
a new day might bring.
Our hearts were on their way to
contracting, withering, and dying.

But this day, death dared not seek to bind us
for we heard again the sweet song of hope
and we heard again
the rolling away of rocks --
rocks that locked us in our former sorrows.

We say with one voice:
Life must win!
Even in the face of death
we must ever look for its face
and know that love lives on!
As those who live
with love engraved upon our hearts,
we rejoice on this Easter Day
and we go from this place saying...

Christ is Risen!
Christ is Risen indeed!

Choral Response

"Hallelujah Chorus"
Cathedral Choir, Dr. Ianthe Marini, *Assistant Director*

G.F. HANDEL

***Easter Hymn for the Journey**

Celebrate a New Day Dawning

HYMN TO JOY

Celebrate a new day dawning,
sunrise of a golden morn;
Christ our Savior dwells among us,
glorious visions now are born.
Equal partners 'round the table,
we make dreams reality;
Calling out our gifts we nurture
hope beyond all we can see.

Christ our Savior lights the pathway
to a world of harmony;
all our siblings' love surrounds us,
nourishing our synergy.
Earth joins in our rich communion,
grateful for our healing care;
Leaping deer and soaring eagles,
all Earth's fullness now can share.

Sing a song of jubilation,
dance with joyous revelry;
Clapping trees and laughing rivers
join our call to liberty.
Freed at last to blossom fully,
flowering forth in beauty bright,
We become a new creation,
bursting open into light.

- lyrics adapted from Jann Alredge-Clanton

Please be seated for the Postlude

Postlude

Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence
Toccata in F Major from *Symphony No. 5* (Charles-Marie Widor)

Inside The Music

“As we celebrate Easter we also align with the end of Women’s History Month. Today we begin with two pieces by African American women. I was reflecting on the fact that publishers today tend to primarily publish spiritual arrangements by African American women today. Rose and Osterman, both living composers with prolific output, have made significant contributions to the spirituals repertoire. Their larger contribution, however, lies in the ways that they are helping to shape new themes and conversations within vocal music, and within society. Judy Rose is a friend of FCCLA, and sang here as a part of the 2023 N.E.O. Voice Festival. Her “Jubilant Day” is a tour de force of stylistic integration. She is a master at seamlessly bringing together elements of African American musical styles, a cutting-edge development in vocal music. Thematically she wrote “Jubilant Day” as a reflection on having been put in a life threatening situation because of the way she looks. After making it out of the danger, she paused to decide whether the racism she experienced would mark her negatively, and chose to write music instead. The first line she wrote was: “Each day begins and ends with me. I’ve found me a jubilant day.” I find this to be a distinctly Easter-themed, and inspired sentiment. Osterman was the composition teacher at Oakwood University for most of her career. She has also written extensively on rethinking music within worship spaces from a progressive lens. Her “Alleluia” was premiered at her 1981 DMA concert at the University of Alabama alongside works of Bach and Handel that she conducted. It is a fresh and festive declaration even to our ears today. In the early 1980s, the use of rhythmic ostinato in vocal music wasn’t as prevalent as it is today. Her use of ostinato comes from the breaking /looping tools developed in mid-century African American musical genres. She helped to bring these elements into classical music spheres. Layered on top of the ostinatos, she uses metric shifts and key changes to build energy on itself. Short phrases build and then extend or shrink by a beat, creating a whiplash effect that launch us into a new thought. It inspires an overall elation, a “joy in the morning” alleluia! J.S. Bach wrote six motets. They are celebrative pieces that praise humanity’s connection to the divine. Psalm 117 centers BWV 230. It sings of celebration for all people in a ripping double fugue. The slower middle section lays out gracefully with longer notes and phrases saying “God’s grace and truth flow around and through us forever.” He saves “forever” (Ewigkeit) for the end, and introduces with one of the more beautiful melodies ever written. As it migrates through multiple key centers, the singers illuminate the love of the divine in more subtle counterpoint. An “alleluia” punctuates the end, flowing freely as it builds toward a rousing, Easter-like finish. Easter is a time of celebration. The familiar music of past masters brings us into connected spaces. The vision of new composers reminds us that we celebrate not only what has happened, but what we can become together.” ~ Dr. David Harris