

# Holy Week 2020



## Die Gute Nachricht

### Die Evangelisch-Lutherische St. Matthäusgemeinde

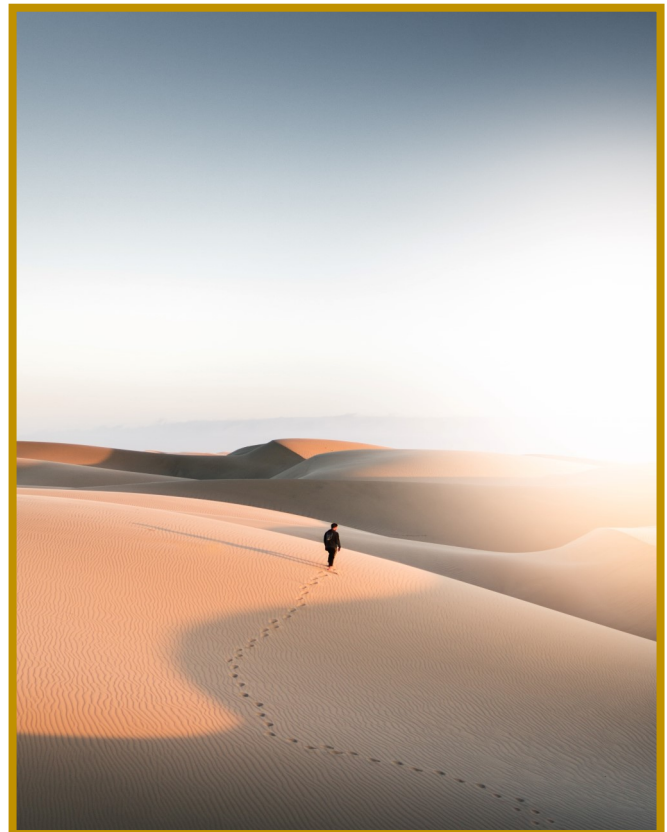
*Dear Members and Friends,*

As I am writing this, we are in the third week of the Bay Area's 'Shelter in Place' order because of the dangers of the novel Coronavirus. This order has just been extended to May 3<sup>rd</sup>. And who knows as to whether it will have to be extended again. At this point, predictions just can't be made. The virus is called 'novel' for a reason – this is something new we as the human race haven't experienced before. We don't know how this virus is going to 'behave', and how fast our immune systems will develop mechanisms to guard us against it. As Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, famously said, "You don't make the timeline, the virus makes the timeline."

We are not in control, and we don't know what lies ahead. All we can do is watch and pray and do our part to not spread the virus – by staying home as much as possible and avoiding physical contact with others – and all those things that are touched by us and by others (and wash our hands, of course).

This uncertainty is unnerving. In general, we like to know what's ahead of us, we like to be prepared as much as we can. Even adventures, like travels, these days are carefully planned.

But this is uncharted territory for all of us. This is wilderness, unpredictable and maybe even threatening.



We are still in the season of Lent, a time that is being called a 'journey through the wilderness'. The 40 days of Lent that start on Ash Wednesday and end on Easter Sunday and ends on Maundy Thursday (not counting Sundays) allude to the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness after his baptism, fasting and being tempted by Satan. The 40 days of Lent also allude to the 40 years the people of Israel had to wander through the wilderness after the escape from Egypt and before they could enter the Promised Land.

In more than one way, our journey in the times of the novel Coronavirus is similar to the journey of the people of Israel: we don't exactly know how long it's going to take. We face hardships along the way. We hunger and thirst for things we are used to. We long for times past and all they had to offer. We are frustrated and complain about the circumstances. We even may lose our faith in God's leadership and provision. But: we can also be confident that the journey through this wilderness will end at some point. The Promised Land exists. God's promises exist. We will get there.

A German acquaintance sent me an email with a link to a YouTube video with a moving song by the Italian singer/songwriter Roby Facchinetti, which he wrote in response to the toll COVID-19 has taken in Italy, and especially in the region of Lombardy: 'Rinascero, rinascerai' – 'I will rise, you will rise'\*. I couldn't help but be moved when I listened to this song – and saw the images of people affected by the endemic defiantly holding up signs with these words: I will rise. You will rise.

This song encapsulates our hope as we journey through the wilderness of these times: I will rise. You will rise. We will rise. We will reach the other side. Our ultimate hope is Easter. Christ is risen. And we shall rise also.

May God bless you all and keep you safe as we continue to journey through this unpredictable wilderness together – and with God before us and beside us and beneath us and above us.

*Pr. Kerstin Weidmann*

\*He signed the rights to the song over to a hospital in Bergamo, the city that has been hit hardest. If you go to YouTube and click on the following link, royalties for the song will go to said hospital:

<https://youtu.be/D5DhJS5hGWc>

## **Reflections for Holy Week and Easter 2020**

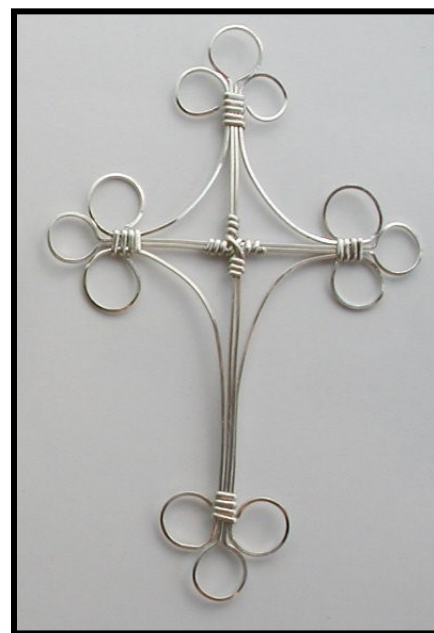
As I mentioned in a different place, St. Matthew's will offer recorded worship services on Good Friday and one Sundays during the Coronavirus shutdown. The services can be found on St. Matthew's website:

[www.stmatthews-sf.org](http://www.stmatthews-sf.org)

However, since many don't have access to a computer, I'd like to provide you with reflections for Holy Week and Easter via this medium. May your continued journey through Lent and Holy Week, which leads beyond the cross to the empty tomb and new life, be blessed! Pr. Kerstin Weidmann

**Maundy Thursday** (April 9<sup>th</sup>) – 'Just as I have loved you, you also should have love for one another'

'Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” *John 14:1, 3-5, 12-15, 35-36, NRSV*

Have you ever washed someone’s feet?

If I remember correctly, the first feet I washed other than my own were my children’s – tiny and tender baby feet. It wasn’t until I was a pastor at a congregation in the South Bay that I participated in my first ritual foot washing on Maundy Thursday, washing the feet of worshipers – calloused feet, weary feet, swollen feet – feet that showed some wear and tear, feet that have walked the road of life. I have to admit it: at first it felt strange to wash those feet. It almost felt as if I was trespassing. It felt very intimate (and it feels especially strange to think of this very sensual experience right now, as we are not supposed to touch anyone other than those living with us). I mean, when do we ever have the opportunity to touch someone’s feet?



But washing someone’s feet turned out to be much easier than to sit down myself and have someone else wash *my* feet. It felt embarrassing. To have someone kneel before me, in this subservient position, just didn’t feel right. It was easier for me to serve than to be served. I don’t think I was able to relax, to accept this gift and actually enjoy the experience. In Jesus’ days, bringing water for a guest so that they may wash their feet after walking on dusty and maybe even mucky roads, usually in sandals, was a basic display of hospitality. A wealthier host would not only provide the water, but also a servant to wash an esteemed guest’s feet. Washing someone else’s feet was among the lowliest task you could demand of someone.

It is the night of Jesus’ betrayal. One more time, he shares a meal with his disciples. And all of a sudden, he takes off his outer robe and wraps a towel around him. Jesus, who, we can assume, is the honored guest in the house, degrades himself by shedding his clothes – and by washing his disciples’ feet. Jesus is their master, the one they follow – and he becomes a servant to all.

This is scandalous. It is most likely also very embarrassing to the disciples – Jesus, you, kneeling before me, washing *my* feet? I can imagine that they couldn’t really appreciate the gesture, the service, the gift. The radical love.

It is no coincidence that Jesus’ mandate for the disciples (the strange word ‘Maundy’ comes from the Latin word for ‘mandate’) to love one another is connected to the foot washing. Jesus shows how much he loves his friends by humiliating himself, giving up his ego. Love is not just an abstract concept or a romantic ideal, but connected to radical action. Jesus’ mandate to love, which is spoken to disciples of all ages – to us – reminds us of Jesus’ love for all that led him to the cross (and how humiliating is that? And not just for Jesus Christ, but also for us as we are the recipients of his gift of life, poured out for us.). It also reminds us that we are to love and serve one another and our neighbor – and not only that, but also to accept love and service ourselves. To acknowledge that we can’t do it all by ourselves. That we need each other. That we need saving. That we need Christ. And that may be the hardest part. Have you ever let someone else wash your feet?

## Good Friday (April 10<sup>th</sup>) – ‘What Wondrous Love Is This?’



‘Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew<sup>[d]</sup> is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them... When Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I

am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.’ *John 19, 14-18, 28-30, NRSV*

It was in the spring of 1991. The wall between East and West in Europe had just crumbled and fallen. A friend and I decided to take advantage of the situation, and flew to Moscow for spring break.

What a trip! Yes, everything had broken down. There were long lines in front of stores that barely had any goods to offer (right now, the lines in front of our stores remind me of that). But there was hope. We entered churches that had been closed for decades, and found throngs of people praising God. Faith, despite a long period of oppression, had survived.

One day, our tour guide led us to an artists’ market. People offered beautiful arts and crafts there, at ridiculously low prices. We were especially thrilled when we saw beautiful pendants, delicate Russian orthodox Crosses, made out of silver plated wire, similar to the one you see in the picture. My friend and I indicated to the artist that we wanted to buy two of those pendants - and we were amazed and quite taken aback when the artist refused to sell them to us. My Russian wasn’t good enough to figure out why. The only reason I could and still can imagine is that this man saw us as silly Western tourists, who don’t or can’t appreciate the meaning of the cross.

The cross is serious. It is not just a brief stop on Jesus’ way to eternal glory, but a means of execution and death. Jesus died for us. God’s love for a twisted and confused humanity is primarily displayed in the death of Jesus Christ. The cross is a reminder that God is willing to make this sacrifice in order to reconcile the entire world with God-self. In this sense, it is a symbol of a passionate and desperate faith, hope, and the wondrous love that God has in us and for us.

This love is at the heart of Good Friday.



## Easter Sunday (April 12<sup>th</sup>) – ‘While It Was Still Dark’



‘Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb... As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom

are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>14</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher)’. *John 20, 1, 11b-16, NRSV*

Each of the gospel writers tells the Easter story a little bit differently. But they all agree on the following: Mary Magdalene plays an important role in the discovery of the empty tomb. The stone is rolled away. There are angels. And the message is that Jesus is risen from the dead.

This is the central message of our Christian faith: that death doesn’t have the last word. That God is a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of grace, a God of life. That life has a way to prevail, even under the most challenging and seemingly hopeless circumstances. That there is hope. Always.

The gospel according to John is the only one that places the events of Easter morning before the break of dawn. ‘While it was still dark’, we hear, ‘While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed’. While it was still dark, the unbelievable happened: Jesus rose from the dead. Life burst from the tomb.

Right now, we are experiencing dark times. The Coronavirus is infecting hundreds of thousands in this country alone, killing thousands. There is death all around us. People are grieving. We all have to do our part to keep the virus from spreading. This is the first time in my lifetime that I can’t go to church on Easter Sunday and celebrate Christ’s resurrection with my siblings in Christ – with you. I am grieving all that. But in these dark times, we also experience how life breaks through.

While it is still dark, people all over the world share their gifts with others, especially over the internet. While it is still dark, there are many people who selflessly serve their neighbor in need – doctors, nurses, janitors, care personnel, first responders, store clerks... While it is still dark, people reach out and check in with each other. While it is still dark, companies change their production to provide much needed medical equipment. While it is still dark, scientists work tirelessly to find a vaccine and a cure for the novel Coronavirus. While it is still dark, politicians take extraordinary measures to protect the weak in society.

While it is still dark, Christ rises and overcomes death wherever and whenever there are words spoken in love, wherever and whenever there is compassionate action.

While it is still dark, we see how life breaks through in seemingly lifeless and hopeless places. While it is still dark, there is that glimmer, that spark. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not and will not overcome it. Life has a way. It is stubborn, it is persistent, it finds new ways to break forth, out of darkness, out of death, into the light.

While it is still dark, there is the Easter story and the Easter promise. It turns you and me into Easter people, liberated, embraced by grace, filled with love, and sent into this world to be the light of the world, a light that no darkness can overcome.

For: Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



## **Announcements:**

### **Coronavirus Update:**

Due to the ‘Shelter in Place’ order by several Bay Area counties, in-person worship services and meetings at St. Matthew’s will be canceled until further notice. We don’t have regular office hours, but you can reach our office administrator, Angie Holt, by emailing [office@stmatthews-sf.org](mailto:office@stmatthews-sf.org). You can also reach Pr. Kerstin Weidmann by either emailing her at [pastorkerstin@stmatthews-sf.org](mailto:pastorkerstin@stmatthews-sf.org) or calling 925-330-2289.

### **Recorded Worship Services:**

**Each Sunday by 10 a.m., a recorded worship service will be available on St. Matthew’s website: [www.st.matthews-sf.org](http://www.st.matthews-sf.org). We will also a recorded worship service on Good Friday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, which will be posted by 12 noon that day. Please join us, if you can!**

### **Continue to Support St. Matthew’s through Your Prayers – and Financial Contributions!**

We may not be able to gather in person right now – yet we continue to be the people of St. Matthew’s, united in Christ. Please keep this community of faith in your prayers. Call someone you haven’t talked to in a while. And, please, continue to support St. Matthew’s through your financial contributions, since we continue to have operational costs – you may mail your check to St. Matthew’s, 3281 16<sup>th</sup> Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 (our mailbox is checked regularly). Your thoughtfulness is deeply appreciated! Thank you for keeping the congregation going!

### **It’s a Boy!**

Erika Spaet, who was ‘our’ Parish Teaching Student from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley in 2014/2015, gave birth to a baby boy on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. We rejoice with her and her husband. May God bless Erika and her family!

### **Notice:**

For those receiving a printed copy and would prefer to receive the newsletter online, please send an email to Angie at [office@stmatthews-sf.org](mailto:office@stmatthews-sf.org) with your email address. The online version has much better photos in color and saves the Church postage. If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, please email the office at the above address. Thank you.

**Our In-Church Services are cancelled until further notice.  
Recorded services can be viewed at our website  
[www.st.matthews-sf.org](http://www.st.matthews-sf.org) or on our Facebook page.**

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