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Apr

Astounded Us

Stories That Matter

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

Resurrection unsettles our certainty and invites us into astonishment. This week's worship explores how joy and disruption coexist as we live into the astounding news that Love has conquered death.

REFERENCES

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 34:1-10

1 Peter 1:17-23

Luke 24:13-35

COLORS

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How often are we surprised anymore? I think about this from time to time when I watch how my child reacts to seemingly simple things with so much surprise. I pick up salmon to make for dinner—"Mom, I didn't know you were getting salmon!" I plan a playdate with a friend—"Mom, I didn't know we were having a playdate!" I declare that it's bathtime—"Mom, I didn't know that it's bathtime!" (To be honest, that last one is not considered a pleasant surprise, but somehow it still seems to be a surprise every time a bath night rolls around.) As an adult, my world is filled with much more certainty because I'm the one shopping for groceries, planning playdates, and keeping track of the schedule, among other things. And while there are many things in this world I cannot control, I've been alive long enough to respond to many things—from weather to politics to the latest celebrity news—with "I'm shocked, but I can't say I'm surprised."

In today's scripture, the travelers on the road to Emmaus declare that they were astounded by the news from the women who were the first witnesses to the Resurrection. "Astounded" is like surprise-plus. The Greek word translated as "astounded" is ἐξίστημι, which includes a sense of "to throw out of position; displace." Here are these disciples who are displaced; they've gone off on their own in response to news that is so surprising, so astounding that it has thrown their certainty into chaos. These disciples remind us that Resurrection is unsettling.

Now, I know, none of us wants to plan a whole worship service around unsettling our congregation. That is neither helpful nor pastoral. And I don't recommend planning a big surprise in worship, either. Rather, find ways to wrestle with the "unsettledness" of Resurrection. How do our lives change in light of the Risen Christ? There's a beautiful hymn, "Christ Is Alive" (United Methodist Hymnal 318), that you might use as an opening hymn to set the scene, to prepare the congregation for reflecting on and answering the question: "What does Resurrection require of us now?" Consider, too, how to lead your congregants in prayer. What are the unsettled places in your community where new life and new possibilities engender both excitement and uncertainty? Name them in prayer. What are the uncomfortable places where God is calling you to seek Resurrection? Confess the challenge of choosing Resurrection over the status quo. What voices astound you with their declarations of good news? Listen to them. Eastertide is a time of joy, joy that sits alongside the astounding, displacing news that Love has conquered death. Invite your congregation to live in the tension between joy and astonishment, because this is how we learn to live as Easter people.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children.

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