

# *Jesus, the Table Setter*

## *Easter Sunday*

*Release and Renewal*

*April 9, 2023*



A Beloved Community  
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Lucinda Alton, RScP, Sherri Dotter, RScP, Chris Johnson, RScP, April Jimenez, and musician Dalton Fitzgerald

### **Call to Awareness – 3 Bells**

**Lucinda – Opening Prayer**

**in2it – Opening Music**

 **Welcome to the Mystic Heart**

 **One Big Family**

### **Rev. Diana – Introduction**

Good morning and Happy Easter. If you're new with us today, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community. We teach Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. Welcome Home...Home to our Community, and Home to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

Let's begin looking around to see who is here with us today, celebrating this beautiful Spring day, joining in Sacred Communion and Community...take a moment to really see one another, and to feel the gratitude for these beings that make up your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems...people who care and want the best for you.

Now grounded in a deep sense of gratitude, let's settle into a moment of peaceful meditation...taking a couple of slow, deep breaths...letting go of all that has come before this moment...allowing the breath to dissolve any thoughts or concerns...relaxing the body...and on the next breath, allowing your awareness to move into the heart space...allowing yourself to rest there for a moment, giving yourself the gift of stillness...feeling content in this moment as you ground yourself in Spirit...feel the words and music wash over you...let yourself be refreshed and renewed by the Light and Love of Spirit...

**in2it – *The Garden***, written by Eddie Watkins, Jr.

Join me in taking another deep breath in, allowing yourself to feel the Presence of New Life moving into and through your body...and then gently breathing out, allowing your body to let go...Breathing in the Aliveness of Spring, and then letting that Life flow out

into the world around you, creating an atmosphere of Vibrant Energy, both within and without.

Taking another moment to follow the breath as it settles into its own natural flow...and then slowing the breath down just a little bit more. Now letting your awareness move away from the breath, trusting in the constancy of Spirit as it breathes your body...and turning inward to the Peace, the Love, the Beauty, and the Joy that are forever within you, settling into the eternal nature of your being, where you feel and know your Oneness with the Creative Intelligence of the Universe...where you feel at home in the here and now...as together, we attune ourselves to the high vibration we are co-creating with the Infinite. Feel yourself to be an irreplaceable strand woven into the fabric of Creation, perfectly and intentionally made...you are the very image and likeness of pure Spirit. You are pure Light expressing...

Slipping fully into the flow of meditation, we acknowledge and experience the Radiant Light of Spirit as it glows within us...we recognize and honor the same Light in everyone and everything. There is nowhere that God's Light does not shine. From the *Book of Matthew*, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine."

We take a moment to feel the Oneness of our global community...Sensing a web of consciousness that covers the planet, each of us a radiant point of Light...all beings who in this moment, are drawn to the Presence of the One...the very atmosphere in which we live, move, and have our being. The Holy Dance of Spirit...I in Thou, and Thou in me...inseparable...each bringing completion to the other. (Pause) As we envision all beings, all of creation, joining the web, we see that there are no spaces between us...

Our web has become the fabric of Life in which we find our place, our purpose, our unique gifts...our Authentic Expression.

Feeling the shared intention that brought us here, there is a deep sense of communion with that which is beyond time and space, beyond definition and description...and we feel the impulse to grow and evolve. As we consciously acknowledge our connection with all of life, our collective Work here is empowered... our collective prayer and meditation leave a positive imprint on the world...on the cosmos...transformation has begun...Wholeness is revealed. And as we begin to acknowledge our Wholeness, we are better able to allow our Light to shine in the world. Again, let the words and the music wash over you in musical meditation.

### **in2it – Let Your Light Shine**

If you haven't already done so, bring your awareness back to this space, to your body, to your senses...and as you feel ready, allow your eyes to open and bring your awareness back into Community. Welcome back.

Today is Easter Sunday. It commemorates the Rabbi Jesus's resurrection from the tomb on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day after his crucifixion. This story hails from the Christian tradition, but it is actually much, much older than that. Historically, the Easter Celebration began in pre-

Christian times in England, where a pagan festival was created to celebrate the great Northern goddess Eostre. April, would you come and share that story with us?

## April – Reading

It was pretty smart for the early Roman Catholic priests to adopt existing pagan practices to encourage people to ‘convert.’

When the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE decreed that Easter would be observed by Christians to honor the resurrection of Jesus, the Easter egg was retained as a symbol of the empty tomb of Jesus, from which he resurrected. Not sure what happened to the hare 😊

The Easter Story actually comes to us as a retelling of earlier tales. There was an archetypal story that was told in the ancient world...about the death of the son (sun) on a cross (the constellation of the Southern Cross) and his rebirth, overcoming the powers of darkness.

When we look, we find a number of parallel, resurrected saviors. One of the *oldest* resurrection myths is the Egyptian god, Horus. Born on 25 December, Horus (protector of the ruler of Egypt) and his damaged eye became symbols of life and rebirth. Mithras, the Roman god of friendship, was born on what we now call Christmas day, and his followers celebrated the spring equinox. And so, as an extension of these ancient celebrations, we can see why Easter typically falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring on or after the spring equinox.

The fact that our modern-day Easter has its roots in earlier traditions, and likely has mythological aspects, in no way denies the Truth or message it has to offer. Each day of Holy Week holds guidance for us in our modern world if we can look past Christian dogma to the example Jesus set, to the message he was spreading.

We spoke last week about Building a Bigger Table, and how the Rabbi Yeshua was an example of one who invited everyone in. He ate with poor people, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and Pharisees (who were outwardly very critical of him).

As Chris reminded us, they thought him unclean because he spent time with the untouchables of society...they judged him by the company he kept. This still happens today, yes?

It took great courage for Yeshua to minister to those on the fringes of society... to risk his reputation as a rabbi in the eyes of the religious elite... But he also modeled radical inclusivity by dining with his harshest critics...

Yeshua’s table ministry honored everyone as spiritual equals...as offspring of the Divine...worthy of the same respect and esteem...even those for whom he had hard words always left with their dignity intact...

Looking at the story of Holy Week, the week prior to Easter Sunday, might we find a message or two for our times? I think so. Consider these possibilities...

What if Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, was actually a peaceful demonstration, staged by Jesus...a way of showing people how to peacefully stand up for what they believed in? That humility is a more powerful stance than forcefulness? There is evidence to show this is true...and that the Roman Cavalry was processing into Jerusalem on horses at the very same time from the opposite direction.

What if Holy Monday, the day when Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers, was not actually about the master teacher losing his cool over the selling of animals in the Temple for sacrifice? This was an accepted practice in the Jewish tradition. What if it was another staged demonstration in which Jesus was protesting the collusion of Jewish Priests with Roman political leaders in a system of domination that kept the rich *rich*, and the poor *poor*? What if his message was one of activism? Again, there is evidence...

What if the tale of Maundy Thursday...the Last Supper, the washing of the feet...has a message for us...that being in Service enriches us beyond measure? That mastery and leadership require us to be in service?

What if the practice of Communion was intended as a symbolic way to represent the embodiment of Truth...the bread and wine, a metaphor to show that we are best served by taking into our hearts and minds only that which feeds the soul, that which nourishes the spirit?

There is a message contained in the story of Good Friday, as well...that we must allow our stinkin' thinkin' to be crucified (crossed out). And no matter what we experience in life, we must be willing to forgive. It is only through forgiveness that we move forward. We forgive ourselves for past thoughts, words, and actions that have not served our Highest Good. And we forgive others so that we can cut the chain that binds us to them, and to the hurt.

It is these lessons that we put to use as we prepare for our Release Ceremony. It takes active involvement to release something or someone from our lives. It takes forgiveness of self and others. And it takes the willingness to truly let it go...no more thinking about it, no more talking about it, no more engaging with it in any form.

I'm sure you are all familiar with one of the last things Jesus is attributed with speaking as he lay dying... "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." In our process of letting go, we might be forgiving another person, or forgiving our own thoughts for leading us into unpleasant conditions.

And then, the final words Jesus speaks, at the close of his mission in this life, before he takes his last breath is this: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." These words imply a supreme confidence in the universe and in the immortality of the soul. What does it mean to commend? It means to *entrust*.

This story is teaching us that in order to be resurrected, to rise above previous conditions, to realign ourselves in thought, word, and action, we have to release

whatever is holding us back to something bigger than ourselves...call it Spirit, God, Infinite Intelligence, Higher Power, Universe, or the Force. It makes no difference.

We have to let it go, in complete faith that all is unfolding for our Good. Unclench the grasp...put down the self-righteousness. It doesn't serve us. Before we can cultivate a new tomorrow, we have to let it go.

All of our past thoughts and experiences serve as nourishment...they lay the ground for new seeds to be planted. But sometimes compost gets kind of stinky...if we're not turning it and working it...practicing forgiveness, non-judgment, surrender, gratitude, compassion. These are some of the ways we work with our past experiences so that they can offer us nourishment and insight moving forward.

And so I invite you into a musical contemplation. Call to mind a habitual pattern of thinking or being that is getting in the way of new life unfolding in your experience. Having spiritual community to witness as you commit to letting go of an old pattern is like having help in pulling up a great big weed that was choking out new growth. Set your intention...see whatever it is being carried off by the hand of the Divine...write it down on the small white sheet of paper...then fold or crumple it up and bring it forward, consciously releasing it to the Mystery, in faith that you are being transformed.

**in2it – Into Your Hands**, written by Jami Lula

Are you ready to let them go? Are you sure? (Light the match)

How does that feel? Let yourself smile...you're free.

We are cultivating a new way of being in the world, both individually and collectively. What does that word mean...*cultivate*? Anybody know? The Latin roots of the word *cultivate* point toward *making ready for habitation, preparing for new life*. This doesn't happen overnight... cultivation is a multi-step process.

Anyone who has ever worked the ground for planting knows that we begin by breaking up the soil. In this way we make water, nutrients, and oxygen available in soil that has become compacted. Then we get rid of whatever weeds have taken root, making room for new seeds to be sown. We add nourishment to replenish what has been used up. Then finally, we sow the seeds and tend the plants until they have grown strong enough to stand on their own.

So, how does this apply to our spiritual life? We can use prayer and meditation to break up, or interrupt old, rigid, calcified ways of thinking and acting. Supporting one another in prayer and spending time in group meditation is a powerful way to nourish our new seeds. "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Our daily personal Practices are also powerful tools for transformation. Of course the form that prayer takes is an individual thing. The intention, the conscious connection...that's what is important.

Let's move into Renewal, New Life...represented by the Resurrection. Unity Founder, Charles Fillmore said this:

The resurrection is the raising up of the whole [ person] – spirit, soul, and body – into the Christ Consciousness of life and wholeness...every time we rise to the realization of eternal, indwelling life, making union with the Father-Mind, the resurrection of Jesus takes place within us. All thoughts of limitation and inevitable obedience to material law are left in the tomb of materiality.

What the heck does that mean? Every time I take the time to connect with my innate Wisdom, I am realigned with my Spiritual Nature. Every opportunity I take to breathe in the Peace of the Divine and breathe out Love, more of my Christed Self is revealed in the world.

Every time I remember the Truth of who I Am and why I'm here, and think, speak, and act accordingly, I transcend all that I have been before. I am raised up to a new way of living. I move through the world as the Divine Human I was meant to be.

Prayer and Meditation are foundational practices at Mystic Heart. We practice the Possible through Prayer. As we contemplate the story of Jesus rising from the tomb, we see a metaphor for moving past limitation and stepping into Freedom. This day of resurrection, this season of renewal, reminds us that anything is possible...anything is possible. What if we lived our lives as though this were true?

What if we were to move through life, grounded in the faith that whatever we are looking for is also looking for us? What is it we are we looking for? Greater meaning, Purpose, Peace, Joy, and Compassion? It almost sounds like we're looking for God.

What does it mean to be looking for God and to have God looking for me? Maybe it means that Infinite Intelligence is waiting for me to live the authentic life I was made to live...maybe It is awaiting Its opportunity to live Its full expression in, through and AS me...for me to be all that I might be. What does that look like? What affirmation might support you in being the best version of yourself?

## **Renewal Ceremony**

Let's get quiet for a moment...take a couple of deep breaths...and in the silence, ask the Spirit within you to offer an affirmation that will support your journey. Not something that comes from your head, something that comes from your heart. What simple Truth would support your Journey as you step into the best version of yourself? Allow the Guidance to come...when you're ready, write it down.

### **Silence – 2 minutes**

To complete our ritual of Renewal, we invite you to come up as the music plays and speak your affirmation to a Practitioner or Minister... receive a blessing and a gift...trust that new life is unfolding through you.

**Recorded Music – from *Speechless*, by Gary Lynn Floyd**

I invite you to sit or stand, whichever feels better and more empowering to you, and take a moment to feel the Presence of Spirit in your body...knowing that as you step into your best version of yourself, you are helping to create a **Love-Soaked World**.

...where all humans are embodying and living from Peace, Joy, Abundance, Generosity, Justice, and Freedom as Living Principles that guide our lives...where all humans practice Loving Kindness and Compassion, honoring and caring for one another, and for our beautiful planet as the Sacred Home that she is.

We are creating a world where all needs are met...where all beings have plenty of nourishing food, the safety of a warm and comfortable home...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are ensured by social systems grounded in Compassion and Wholeness...where right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging are known as Gifts of the Spirit and experienced by all...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their inherent Goodness and Light...where the Peace we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

We are creating a world that knows no greed, where there is abundance in having *enough*...where every being *deserves* and *receives* all that is needed for a full, rich, and contented life.

In this new world of our creation, every person is a caring and conscious vessel through which Generosity flows. By the Power of our collective intention, we write a new story...we create a world that works for all beings. We know that our Good Work is bearing fruit.

We *will not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearance, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*. We know that as we align our actions with our intention, it is coming into being now...and we trust that this prayer is an integral part of its Graceful unfolding.

We open our hearts, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. We create an open and loving community to which all are invited, and *in* which all have an equal voice.

We live into this amazing Vision, allowing it to bring a smile to our face and a song to our heart...raising our vibration. We carry this Powerful Prayer through the coming week, trusting that it is moving into form and experience in every moment, and so we simply let it be. And so it is...Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

Holding a shared Vision is a powerful form of prayer.

**in2it – Hallelujah**, written by Leonard Cohen; additional lyrics by Chris.

In the final few minutes of our gathering...together, we continue the Practice of Gratitude and Joyful Expression as a way of celebrating one another in Community.

We are so grateful for this joyful and prayerful experience; we feel so absolutely blessed to have loved ones to share our Spiritual Journey with.

We are each contributing to a new story. *Mystic Heart* is made up of people who are seeking to *be* the Love and the Peace that we desire for all people...learning to be the change we wish to see in the world.

I invite us to use the celebration of Easter each year as a reminder of how we might promote peaceful, grassroots, social change, empowered by faith and guided by prayerful communion. Let it remind us that natural law is always at work, that we can channel and direct it as the Good Rabbi did, consciously using it for our own Good and the Good of others.

May we remember that faith and expectation make a difference in outcomes, and by placing our faith in what is life-affirming, miraculous things happen.

John 14:12 tells us that Jesus spoke to his disciples this way:

Truly, truly, I tell *you*, he who believes in me, the works that I *do*, he will *do* also; and he will *do greater* works than *these...*

It seems the people of his time were not ready to hear...I have to wonder, as a human family, are we? I think we are...I think it's time...big change is happening. We are not sure how fast it will happen, or what it will look like, but over 2000 years after this teacher's powerful message, we are waking up in powerful ways. It's like we have been in the dark ages and a new Enlightenment is occurring. We are learning to Build a Bigger Table...to acknowledge the sacredness of all of life.

Are we ready to wrap up and continue our Celebration next door? Celebration is a vital part of our Spiritual Practice. As a community, we celebrate by giving thanks for all of life's blessings.

Together, we express our gratitude to God and to one another. We view celebration as a holy act, a creative act, an act of worship and devotion to the One Source of all of Life. By celebrating, we feel and express our inherent Joy, which brings more to feel Joyful about! And so, in celebration and deep gratitude, I thank you for joining us this morning for our time of devotion and celebration. It is in community that we come to know who we are.

### **Rev. Diana – Affirmation for the Offering**

Each Sunday, we also offer you the opportunity to celebrate the work we are doing in the world by sharing your financial Good.

If you're joining us online, you can go to **[mysticheart.org](http://mysticheart.org)** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth and our monthly spending. I would be happy to give you more information.



As we move into this time of giving, please feel the Truth of these words, and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

**As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I bless this gift, sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!**

in2it – *Oh, Yes, I'm Free!* written by Diana Johnson

**Sherri – Blessing for the Offering**

**Invitations**

**The regular Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday activities are all happening this week. Check your bulletin or the website for more information.**

**Mark your calendars...**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Spring Retreat at Coram Ranch in Shasta Lake April 20-23, 2023.** If she hasn't already, Rev. Diana will be in touch this week regarding payments due, stuff to bring, arrival/departure times, etc. Sunday Service will be held at Coram with **no gathering here on-site**. If you're not attending the retreat and would like to come to Church in the Wild, you must let Rev. Diana know. **The guard will not let you cross the dam unless your name is at the gate.**

**Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 – 4:30 pm** – Calling All Who Are Willing and Able...Join Rev. Diana in preparing fun giveaways for our summer booths. Help put together seed packets, cut bookmarks, create Sweet Affirmations, fold flyers...everything will be provided. We just need your hands and hearts!

**Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup> , 6:00-9:00 pm, *Our Annual State of the Heart Gathering.***

This was once known as our yearly *Congregational Meeting*. But what fun is that? We'd rather gather around food, fun, music, and dancing. Join us for a brief yearly update, then a potluck dinner, and music jam, graciously hosted by Gary and Angela French. Find out where we have been this past year and join in the fun of looking into the new year. What lies ahead for Mystic Heart? And how can you help? Contact Rev. Diana to reserve your space.

**Prayer Requests, Practitioner available after service, Information Cards if new people**

We want to share what we have with others, so please invite folks to check out our website. The power of invitation is one of the ways we grow our community. There are invitation cards you can take to share. Now please join us in our closing song, and then on to Food and Fellowship next door.

**in2it – Love Be with You** , written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP, & Gary Lynn Floyd



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