

Newsletter of the English Speaking United Methodist Congregation in Munich: Easter 2020

Mary in the Garden

*Thinking that things are possible opens
entirely new ways of seeing life!*

Sisters and brothers,
there is a mystery at the heart of all things. The
mystery at the heart of John's story of the
resurrection is first a strange absence, and then a
strange presence.

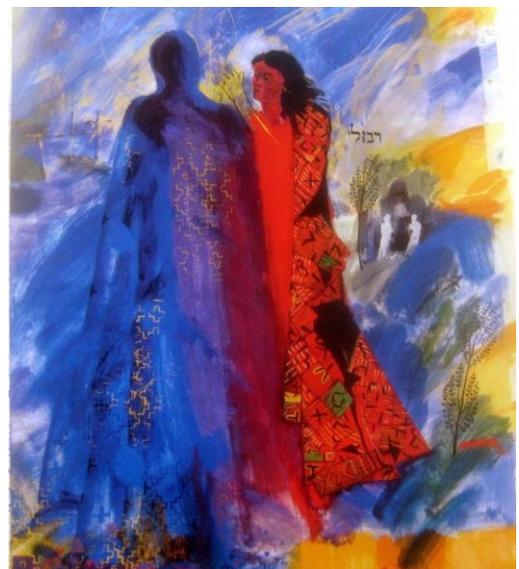
On the first Easter morning Christ was not where
people expected him to be. He was dead, and his
body had been laid in the tomb. Through the long
Sabbath day, Mary and the others who had been
Jesus' friends, who had watched him die in agony,
had waited to do for him the last service they could.
I doubt any of them had slept much that night.
Early the next morning Mary Magdalene went to
the tomb. And Jesus was not there.

Easter is a shock – not only to Mary. Easter begins
with the terror of an empty grave. Easter meant fear
and worry and an increasing number of rumours
that Jesus was not simply dead and disappeared, but
still within reach and still close to his friends.

Mary had left the house while it was still dark to get
to Jesus' grave. When she arrived at the tomb the
stone had been rolled away, and she set off
immediately to fetch the other disciples. She went
for Peter, who at once left the house together with
John and ran to the tomb. John just peered in, but
Peter, hasty as ever, rushed inside. Where Jesus'
body had been, they only found his grave clothes.
And we read that they went home again.

It is just Mary who stays. She remains – weeping.
Her grief and pain at the loss of her friend are now
being increased by the loss of his body. Yet, in spite
of her grief she plucks up the courage to look into
the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus
must have been lying. “Why are you weeping”, they
ask. And she answers, “They have taken my Lord,
and I don't know where they have laid him.” And
now imagine her: while she is still speaking, she
suddenly becomes aware of another presence. She
turns round and blind with tears, Mary thinks it is
the gardener. “Why are you crying”, he asks. “Who
are you looking for?” In despair she asks him if he
knows anything of the disappeared body.

She only recognises Jesus when he calls her by
name. But as soon as Mary turns towards Jesus,
maybe wanting to hug and hold him, he stops her
saying: “Don't hold onto me!” Don't touch me,
don't come close... Can you imagine Mary now?



How terrible! The one she thought was lost is standing right in front of her – and she is not allowed to touch. This is surely the moment when Mary must learn the hard way: Jesus has come back, but never ever will he be the same. Hardly has she thought she has him back when she must learn that it is not as simple as she had hoped. Mary must let her beloved friend go – in order to be able to hold onto him and find him and his presence anew. At the end of John's story about Mary meeting Jesus, it is significant to read that Mary didn't run away in fear and keep silent, but that she went and announced to the disciples that Jesus was alive!

All that we know about how the world works tells us that none of this story could have happened. And yet, we celebrate Easter. We celebrate the risen Christ!

Jesus is risen; the crucifixion is not the end of the story! Nor does the story end with Mary's in the garden. With the Easter narratives we are always reminded that the meeting in the garden is not just Mary's, but that it is for all of us. It is for all of us to proclaim: "I have seen the Lord, and this is what he told me."

The time of Easter is about proclamation, about passing on good news, about faith – about our faith now. The risen Christ brings us a new order which we live and experience, and which changes the way we see the world! Easter is about encounter and change – about how Mary's encounter in the garden can become our own life-changing encounter with Christ. It is about meeting a stranger and recognising in them the face of Christ. It is about grasping what is possible, if we'll just see...

It is easy to get distracted from this by concerns about what actually happened. But: in fact, the message of Easter has very little to do with trying to find out what really happened. On one level, the events told in the Easter story may not be likely at all, but does that mean that none of it is true? That none of it is possible?

Mary's story is a confession of faith. And when we talk about faith, we must constantly remind ourselves that things are not always as we would so very much want them to be: Obvious, nice and easy. What strikes me about Mary in the garden is that she does not stop a second and think "All of this can't be true." She does not stop and worry that

there is no way that this can be Christ; she simply recognises him and is joyful.

Thinking that things are possible opens entirely new ways of seeing life! It was partly Mary's trustful approach, her spontaneous believing that made her proclaiming possible.

Just try to remember: There are occasions when what we expect, what seems likely, is simply not what happens. We can probably all think of times in our lives when our expectations have been entirely misleading, when things turned out much better – or much worse – than we had ever expected; times in which our limited faith determined what was possible and what was not; times when joy broke through, even in moments of the most shattering despair; times when the sun rose again after endless struggles in pain and darkness...

Mary's faith allows her to see and to recognise what she had not expected – what she knew could not be – the living Christ. Her faith allows her to look and see, and then bear witness. Her faith enables what is possible. Her willingness, her openness, her honesty, even her showing-the-pain... all these make resurrection possible.

Part of celebrating Easter is a reaffirmation that reason is not all of what faith is about. Our reason tends to lead us to expect the world to be an orderly place in which patterns which have worked in the past, will also work in the future.

For Mary the astonishing truth was that she met Christ in the garden, in spite of a death that should have proved final. The deep truth is in the actual meeting, rather than in arguments about whether or not it could scientifically have taken place. What is important is that we enter into it – acknowledging that our thinking does not comprehend everything.

Our meeting with God takes place in the world we are rooted in. Our encounters with the risen Christ happen in contexts and places in which we live, and with people we know. In faith we may recognise, and at the same time be utterly surprised; we may find the unfamiliar breaking through the familiar.

Mary in the garden met a gardener who was not a gardener at all, but her beloved friend whom she mourned. And she listened to what he had to say, and she brought the news to her fellow disciples.

In her mourning, in all the pain of death and sadness, she was still able not to cling to what had been before, but to grasp something entirely new. Would we be able to recognise that which God makes possible beyond all the limits of our expecting and understanding? Are we open to meet God in new and surprising ways? To encounter the risen Christ, an experience that changes our lives so much that we too, can bring the message to others? I truly hope we can.

And I also hope that we can resist the great temptation at Easter to not believe, to ask for proof, to seek explanations, to want to make

everything safe and nice and easy; to bind God's actions to the way the world works, and to seek the risen Christ only in the places we expect him to be.

The message of Easter is: The door is open. The stone is rolled back. The absence of the dead body allows the surprising presence of the risen Christ. There is a mystery at the heart of all things. May we let go of the old and embrace something new that we would have never thought possible - just as Mary did.

God bless you.
Yours, Pastor Christine

News from Peace Church Life

Nico's Sermon: *God Wants Us to Help and Support Others*

By Cathy Williams



It was Sunday 26th January and as we approached the Ostbahnhof by train it suddenly and (relatively unusually) stopped. Annoying!! Our connection was tight and we knew we would be late for the service. It was Nico's service and I wanted to be there!

We arrived just as the All Age Story was finishing. The congregation had been asked to stick post-its at the front. On these were written many different things to be thankful about. It is such a good idea every so often to take time out and realise how lucky we are to have food, water, health care and many other blessings. We then sang one of my favourite hymns, "What a friend we have in Jesus". It really is, "a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer."

We then had a reading from the Psalms followed by the New Testament story of the healing of the crippled man from Acts 3. I must admit to being slightly surprised by the text Nico was preaching on. Was the sermon going to relate his disabilities to those of the man? This didn't seem likely but....? I was looking forward even more to the sermon.

What a good idea for Nico to build upon his strengths in the sermon and look at the story through the eyes of a psychologist. Listening to him gave me a completely different perspective on the passage and yes how difficult it must be for someone suffering from depression to pick themselves up and move forward with life.

It was really interesting to hear a little about how depression affects people and also to see the symbolism in Peter offering his right hand to the man. Peter offered support to the man rather than pushing him into accepting help, a strategy Nico knows from his work as a psychologist. Nico finished his sermon by suggesting things we can learn from the text. As he says, "Both as Christians and as members of a society God wants us to help and support others," however he acknowledges that this is not always easy either for supporter or receiver. I recommend everyone to look again at the sermon on the website where you can either read or hear it.

A really big thank you to Nico for the excellent sermon and also to Konrad, Jonas and Izzy for their important roles in the service.

****NEW EVENTS****

...Hopefully starting in the near future!

Midweek Prayer:

time to pause, space to breathe

By Kat Wagner

Many Christian communities draw together for regular times of prayer throughout the day or week. It's an opportunity to pause from our daily tasks and re-focus our gaze on our loving God.

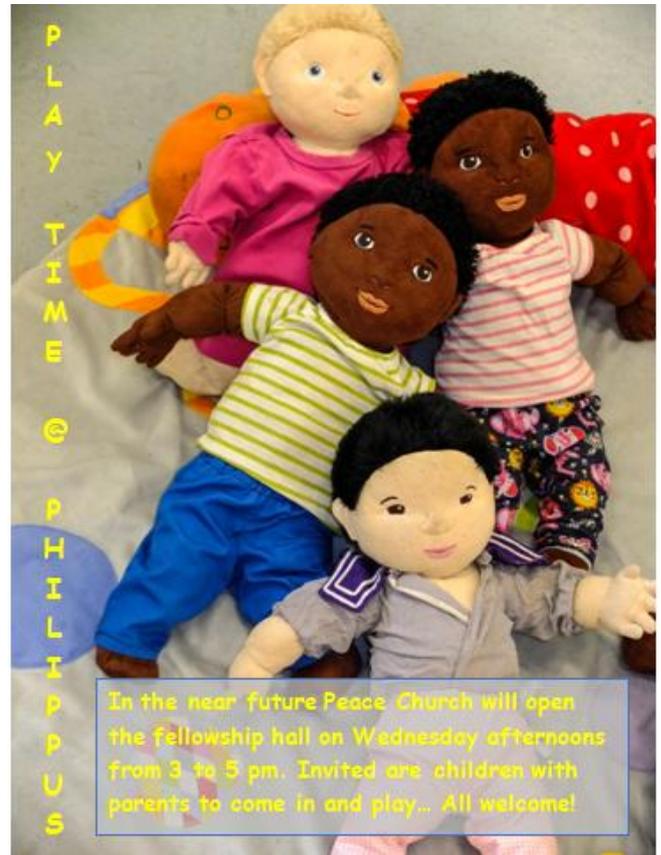
Last year, I was a member of the Scargill Christian Community in the UK's Yorkshire Dales. We followed a daily rhythm of prayer, meeting for 15 minutes every morning before breakfast, after lunch, and at the end of the working day. It was a chance to purposefully be together, to creatively reflect on Scripture and to bring to mind our thanks and concerns before God.

At Peace Church we'll be starting a Midweek Prayer gathering on Wednesdays at 2pm in the Philippuskirche chapel.

Midweek Prayer will be 30 minutes of prayer drawing on Christian contemplative practices. It will include simple liturgy, short readings, times of stillness, and quiet music.

If you have time in the middle of your week, why not come along and take part in this shared space of peace and prayer. Everyone is welcome!

Play Time



Midweek Prayer: Wednesdays 2-2:30pm
Play Time: Wednesdays 3-5pm

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

By Megan Bedford-Strohm



Our family was blessed to get to spend 6 months (July through December 2019) in Africa. Our son Amos was 3-9 months old during this time and my husband took paternity leave in order to make it possible for me to conduct research for my PhD dissertation in theology. The working title is: (In) The Image of God: God, Gender and Dignity in East African Women's Theologies.

In Botswana and South Africa I was talking with women who are theologically trained (pastors, professors, lecturers), while in Rwanda I also did a case study, using interviews, where I spoke to lay

women (so women without theological training, but to whom faith is important). This plan was driven by a desire to hear from both perspectives and thus be able to compare. I ended up conducting about 70 interviews and attending many church services, conferences and other Christian gatherings. I learned from and was inspired by conversations with so many amazing women. There is much that could be said about that, but I want to share with you here about the inspiration for the project and how we started off our time in Africa, in Botswana.

During several visits to E. Africa between 2013 and 2017, I had been very inspired by experiencing the vibrancy of church life and how central it seemed to many communities in E. Africa. Eventually I also noticed how woman made up the majority of church goers and began to wonder what African women themselves were writing/saying about Christianity, the Church, their faith experiences and how those things related to their day to day lives. As soon as I began to research African women's theologies, I came across the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (or, The Circle). Most resources one can find in the area is, in fact, connected to this group of women.

The Circle officially begun in 1989 with its first Pan-African gathering in Accra, Ghana. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a Ghanaian theologian, is the founder. At that time, finding a way to gather meant communicating by letters that could take weeks to arrive, somehow scraping up funding for the travel, and setting aside time from very full schedules. But they found a way to come together around a vision of writing, publishing and generally spreading theologies that came directly from African women themselves.

They were *concerned* about the fact that most information that could be found about African women in libraries across the world tended to be written by white women or African men. Oduyoye jokes that she would turn to appendixes in such books by men about Africa and see: "witchcraft, widowhood, women"... She felt this needed to change.

Furthermore, they were *concerned* about the state of so many women in Africa, about the many layers of oppression they endured from the sides of both religion and culture. They pointed out how women were so actively engaged in faith communities, filling the pews, but often left out of decision-making and not encouraged (or allowed) to share their own thoughts or ideas about their religions.

Oduyoye is famous for saying "a bird with only one wing cannot fly." By this she means that the Church will only fly if it uses both of its wings: both men *and* women. Thus the Circle has, from its inception, advocated for a "two-winged theology" that looks at issues facing the every-day lives of people in their community. For thirty years it has offered a corrective lens to academic theology and church leadership that perpetuates (often unknowingly) colonial/patriarchal/ hierarchal perspectives. There is so much more that can and has been said about the history of the Circle and its reasons for beginning, but I will leave it at this general introduction for now.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye is one among many women who have taken up this vision. She has had powerful women alongside her of the likes of Musimbi Konyoro, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Musa Dube, Esther Mombo, Denise Ackermann, Fulata Moyo, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Sarojini Nadar, Anne Kuimet and many more. Now a new, younger (second and third) generation is following in their footsteps.

There have been different key areas of focus throughout different phases of the Circle. Throughout the last decade, a lot of work has been done to theologically address the HIV/ AIDS epidemic which has been so devastating to the continent at large. The conference that we attended in Botswana marked a shift in focus for the next five years to the ecological crisis. The conference was called: "Mother Earth, Mother Africa in Religious Imagination." It was held at the University of Botswana and organized by Botswanan biblical scholar (and true power-woman) Musa Dube.

After having spent quite a bit of time over the last two years diving into the works of the Circle, learning its history, its names, its areas of concern, needless to say, I was delighted to get to attend this conference. Listening to many presentations, engaging in conversation, and presenting a paper on Musa Dube's earth-friendly hermeneutics taught me a great deal. Something I will never forget is getting to hear, witness and meet some of the 'legends' in person. It was truly inspiring.

Something else that was personally very special for me was getting to have Amos and Jonas there with me. Jonas watched Amos the whole time so I could fully engage at the conference; people were moved by seeing that. Amos also made many new friends and did not seem to mind being passed around and featured in selfies! He was basically declared honorary youngest Circle member. The photo here is of Amos with Auntie Mercy Oduyoye. When she held him, she said that there was also a baby at the founding meeting of the Circle thirty years ago.



Did You Know That...

At the beginning of February, 26 kids and teenagers met for a Film Day? They watched 2 beautiful films and ate masses of delicious finger food. In March they explored the world of Janosch, a well-known author of hundreds of great children's books translated into many languages.

The service on the first February Sunday focussed on Bible women? Christine presented to us Sara, Naomi and Anna (a name she had given the Canaanite woman) and let them offer their bread for our communion on that day.

Coffee&more on Mondays is very popular? We had to stop it because of the Coronavirus crisis, but are looking forward to re-opening when the world goes back to normal again.

The Council on Ministries met at the beginning of February to finalize plans for 2020? The charge conference in May will not take place. We do not really know when we will be able to meet as a "physical" group again. Welcome to new members on the council: Israel Pereira, Megan Bedford-Strohm, Cathy Williams, Kat Wagner, and Theo

Sarpey. A big thank you to them, and to those who had served in the past and will take a break now.

The Thursday evening Bible Group is reading a new book? The feminist Bible group for women began reading Catherine Keller's awesome book "On the Mystery." If you are interested talk to Pastor Christine or Rahel Pereira.

The Prayer Supper group is still praying together online while churches are shut? The Tuesday evening gatherings will restart at Philippus as soon as we may open our church again.

The Homework Club is offering individual emergency help for school kids? As long as the schools are closed, Nicolas Kanzleiter is happy to organise support for the kids who need and want it.

On 16 February Izzy preached on Isaiah 55? His sermon can be found on the Peace Church website, both as a pdf and an audio file. It is worth reading!

If you are in need of childcare or food shopping, Peace Church can help you? Contact Pastor Christine.

On 9 February the teenagers helped Pastor Christine with the Sunday service? Peace Church experienced a very touching hour of remembering the life & theology of Martin Luther King.



The Valentine's party was a big success? Way over 50 people enjoyed being together and sharing food, music and games. A big thank you to the band who played the music for us!

A new Bible study group may be formed? Kat and Christian would love to host a midweek evening Bible study and fellowship group, starting in May. They are planning to meet fortnightly on Wednesdays. Please speak to Christian or Kat if you're interested.

On 23 February we baptised Miriam Clara Nguyen? Miriam was the happiest baptism child ever. Pastor Christine preached on the Miriam of the Bible being a way of life, not only a beautiful name.

We Would Like To Introduce...

Name/Family: Mr Oladeji, my wife Mrs Abosede, children Sofia & Sean.

Where do you come from/where do you live here? We are from Nigeria and now live in Messestadt West.

How long have you been in Germany? Three years and some months.

Why did you come to Germany? I came as an immigrant with my family.

Are you here forever or temporarily? We have a permission to stay, and hope to be here as long as possible.

What is your profession/job? I am training to be a specialist in warehouse logistics. My wife is currently doing a German course.

Hobbies? I love sports, especially football, basket ball & tennis.

Which are your favourite meals? African Food (pounded yam).

Favourite stories of the Bible? The birth of Jesus.



How did you find Peace Church? We found the church through a Peace Church member – “Mama Gideon”.

What do you like best at Peace Church? I love the companionship within the congregation.

What are you responsible for at Peace Church? I help the ushers and clean up after church coffee.

What does the Christian faith mean to you? ...to live with each other in peace, to love each other, live in unity, and care for those in need.

Wishes or dreams for the mission of Peace Church? I pray that the love and unity among the church members continue to grow.

Peace Church Calendar / Plans

...which we will realize as soon as we are given permission to open our church again.

Weekly events:

Coffee&more on Mondays 13-16.30h
Homework Club on Fridays 14-17h

Monthly events:

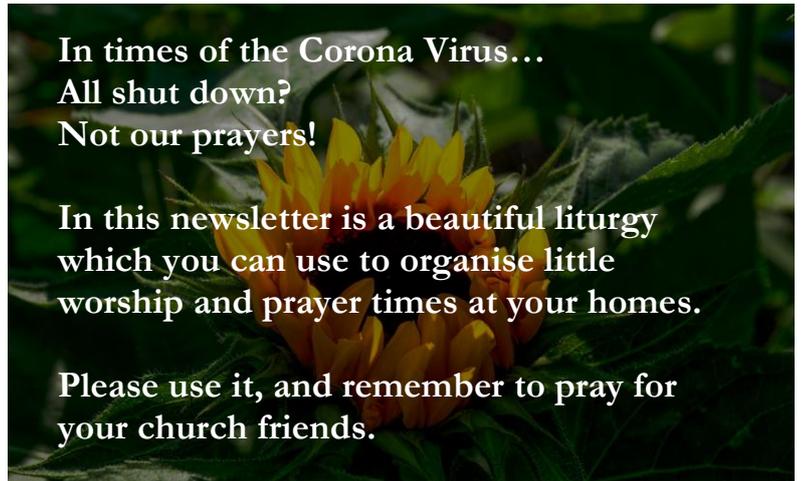
Prayer Supper on Tuesdays 17.30h
Women's Bible Study on Thursday 19-21h
Kids' Club on the first Saturday of the month

April

Sunday 12 April Easter Service & Sunday School ???
Sunday 19 April Sunday Worship & Sunday School ???
Sunday 26 April Sunday Worship & Sunday School

May

Sunday 3 May Communion Worship & Sunday School
Sunday 10 May Sunday Worship & Sunday School
Sunday 17 May Sunday Worship & Sunday School
Thursday 21 May Joint Worship & BBQ with Philippus
Sunday 24 May Sunday Worship & Sunday School
Sunday 31 May Pentecost All-age Worship, Peace Church Birthday



Impressum

Your suggestions, comments and contributions are welcome. Deadline for the next issue is 17 May. Please include a photo if possible. (Reports may be edited.) If you would like to receive future issues by e-mail, please send a message to christine@peacechurch.de, simply type "PCN by mail" and we will add your address to the list.



Contact Details:

Peace Church United Methodist, Chiemgastr. 7, 81549 München

Christine Erb-Kanzleiter (Pastor) e-mail: Christine@peacechurch.de
www.peacechurch.de Facebook: www.facebook.com/PeaceChurchMunich

Phone: 0179-6726794 / 089 8563 6735

Germany: Account 90 88 394 at Kreissparkasse München Starnberg (BLZ 70250150)
IBAN: DE47 7025 0150 0009 0883 94 / BIC: BYLADEM1KMS (München)

Philippuskirche Contacts: Pfarramt Philippuskirche 089-690 79 93, Claudia Viehbeck (secretary)
Pfarrer Klaus Pfaller 089-693 94 685