



Dear Friends,

It has become a St. George's tradition to get the kids of our Sunday School and Youth Group to help us "hide the Alleluia" on the last Sunday before Lent begins. We have a wooden sign, hand-carved by Jim Streadwick, and it's the job of our young people to pick a spot (and remember the spot!) where the Alleluia will reside for the season of Lent, then to be taken out again on Easter Day.

The word 'Hallelujah' is a Hebrew word, whose Greek form is 'Alleluia.' In both languages it means 'praise the Lord,' or 'praise Yahweh,' and in the Christian church it is considered a particularly uplifting word. From ancient times, 'Alleluia' was associated with the Easter season, and therefore the practice developed of omitting the word during Lent as a way of differentiating the Lenten season and marking it as a time of simplicity and solemnity.

It's a word that has also become more prominent in pop culture over the last few decades, mostly because of the ascendancy of Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah." It took Cohen decades, and legend has it, 15 pages of *discarded* lyrics, before finally recording it. Although the song would come to be described by such songwriting greats as U2's Bono as 'the most perfect song ever written,' it was originally rejected by Cohen's record label. "We know you're great," the record executive is said to have stated in response to Cohen's now-recognized masterpiece, "we just don't know if you're any good." Since this rejection, the song has made a three-decade long climb through the channels of popular culture eventually becoming the soundtrack for everything from the movie *Shrek*, the tragedy of 9-11, the Vancouver Olympics, and numerous other evening television dramas, movies, and benefit concerts, along with it now being a staple of secular funeral services and other ceremonies. It has become so much a part of the fabric of our current day culture, in fact, that commentators have noted that the song no longer really belongs to Leonard Cohen. It has assumed a life, a meaning, and a purpose, in which all of our culture participates. And the word "Hallelujah" has become a popular one for a whole variety of other kinds of songs, whether country, rock, folk, or even metal.

Within the church and also now beyond, "Hallelujah" or "Alleluia" is a word that says a lot without having to be too narrowly defined. It speaks of how loss and gratitude can be tied to one another, how we express hope and love in the midst of grief, and most importantly, it names a surrendering all of the challenges and blessings of our little lives into the loving hands and bigger plan of God.

When we sing it on Easter morning, our Alleluia will be full of exuberance and fanfare. We'll have a big choir, brass, and all of the sparkle that our beautiful St. George's church so beautifully brings to our festival services. When our Sunday School "finds the Alleluia" and returns it to our sanctuary, we mark the end of our Lenten journey, which has, we hope, been a



time of drawing closer to God and renewing our walk with Jesus. Our Easter readings will proclaim the impossible news that Jesus is not dead but is risen.

We will hear and express the tremendous joy of what it means to know that the most shattered places of our lives can be healed, that God will never abandon us to sin, death and despair, and that whatever our struggles and heartbreaks, our lives are part of a bigger story of how God is healing all of creation and calling all of us back to our one true home.

In our church tradition, the seasons of the Christian year are important. The changing flavour, emphasis, signs and symbols of our worship are meant to honour the variety of emotions, moods, and contexts in which individuals in a Christian community will find themselves. At times, our prayer before God will be joyful and full of gratitude, at other times it will be marked by sorrow or pain or need. Although we “put the alleluia away” during Lent, it is ultimately a word that holds the whole story of our emotions, our needs, our prayer.

I pray this Easter that you will hear the message of hope and love that you most need to hear. I pray that you will find in our “Alleluia” and in our sacred story the space you need to bring your life, your whole self, to our worship and to our walk of faith and to find once again that Jesus meets us along the way, and that God’s life and love is revealed as the strongest power of all.

Yours in Christ,

The Reverend Canon Martha Tatarinic, Co-Rector

Holy Week

March 24th - Palm Sunday (Children's Liturgy at 10am)

March 25th to 28th - Daily Noon Hour Eucharist

March 28th - Maundy Thursday 7pm

March 29th - Good Friday Walk, 9:45am, beginning at Royal House

Noon Hour Good Friday Service at St. George's March 30th - Easter Vigil, 7pm

March 31st - Easter Day, Services at 8am and 10am