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Choral Reading: Arise, Shine

LEE MAGNESS

This dramatic choral reading, configured here for three voices, reflects on the meaning of resurrection morning and on the light that the resurrection sheds on all our dark dawns. The reading is appropriate for a sunrise service or any service related to the Easter season. The reading may be performed as a unit or punctuated by songs, prayers, or other acts of worship.

REFLECTION 1: WHEN WAS SUNRISE?

- 1 When was sunrise?
2 Was it when the rows of clouds turned rose
even before the sun rose?
3 Or was it when the glory-glow of that golden globe
edged finally fully over the edge
of as-far-as-the-I-can-see?
2 Was it when the farmer squinted up at the fat orange slice
squatting on the flat fields that
run to the rim of the round-about world?
3 Or was it when the ochre orb hauled itself high as the deep hollow
and coldly warmed the up-for-hours woman
hanging her gray whites in the soon-to-set sun?
1 When was sunrise?
2 When ever is sunrise?
3 It is whenever
2/3 ever-so-much more of the light
1/2/3 makes it ever-so-much less of the dark.
1 Just what does it mean that the women came to the tomb at sunrise?
2 Matthew says, "when the first day of the week was dawning."
3 Mark says, "very early ... when the sun had risen."
2 Luke puts it "very early in the morning" ("at deep dawn").
3 But John says—
1 John, who half-heard enough to disbelieve the women,
2 half-believed enough to half-run
1 to the same they've-taken-away-the-Lord tomb,
2 on the same what-have-you-done-with-my-Lord morning—
3 John says, "While it was still dark."
1 How could the sun already have risen (if we Mark his words),
and it still be dark?
2 Sunrise is a tricky thing.

It can mean anything from first glimmer to full glory.
 3 There is a moment, a morning-moment,
 when it is day or night, dark or light,
 depending on if you have noon in your eyes
 or midnight on your mind.
 2 The women came to the tomb at sunrise, while it was still dark,
 and found the tomb as empty as their hopeless hearts.
 3 Which makes it clear-as-day
 that the Son rose
 while it was still dark.
 1 And isn't that just like God?

REFLECTION 2: THE LORD IS MY LIGHT

1 God created light in the midst of darkness.
 2 "The earth was without form and void,
 2/3 and darkness was upon the face of the deep
 2 And God said, Let there be light;
 2/3 and there was light." (Gen 1:2-3)
 1 God gave his people light in the midst of darkness,
 a felt darkness, a three-day darkness.
 2 "Then the Lord said to Moses,
 3 Stretch out your hand toward heaven
 that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt,
 a darkness to be felt.
 2 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven,
 and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.
 3 But all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt." (Exod 10:21-23)

 1 God led his people through the night by his light.
 2 "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud
 to lead them along the way,
 3 and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light,
 that they might travel by day and by night." (Exod 13:21)

 1 David, deep in the depths of the shadow of death, saw God,
 a light ever ready,
 in the darkness ever real.
 2 "Yes, you are my lamp, O Lord,
 and my God lightens my darkness. (2 Sam 22:29/Ps 18:28)

 3 Light rises in the darkness for the upright. (Ps 112:4)

 2 If I say, let only darkness cover me,
 and the light about me be night,
 3 even the darkness is not dark to you,

- the night is as bright as the day;
 2/3 for darkness is as light with you.” (Ps 139:11-12)
- 1 Job remembered the head-light of God,
 not the way out but the way through the darkness.
- 2 “In those days God watched over me;
 when his lamp shone on my head,
 and by his light I walked through the darkness.” (Job 29:3)
- 1 Isaiah saw the Light of the World,
 reflecting back, centuries from the sight,
 knew that no darkness would still be as dark,
 no other light would ever seem as light,
 in the light of the light of God,
 called on the shone-on to shine on,
 not yet knowing that the Rising One would raise one.
- 3 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shined.” (Isa 9:2)
- 2 “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn.
 Then shall your light rise in the darkness
 and your gloom be as the noonday.” (Isa 58:8-10)
- 3 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
 and thick darkness the peoples,
 but the Lord will rise upon you,
 and his glory will be seen upon you.
- 1 Arise, shine;
 2/3 for your light has come,
 1/2/3 and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isa 60:1-2)
- 1 Micah knew that, wherever we knelt or dwelt, God was,
 wherever we walk or sit, God is,
 light in darkness.
- 2 “When I sit in darkness,
 the Lord will be a light to me.” (Mic 7:8)
- 1 Matthew mirrored forth the light he saw in Isaiah,
 light in darkness, dawn in death.
- 3 “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light
 and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
 light has dawned.” (Matt 4:16)
- 1 There it is, again, still, says John:
 light in the midst but not in the mist of the darkness.

- 2 “The light shines in the darkness,
 and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)
- 1 From creation to Christ, Paul says,
 the light shines not only on but out of the darkness
 right where we are, he is.
- 3 “For it is the God who said,
 Let light shine out of darkness,
 who has shone in our hearts,
 to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
 in the face of Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)
- 1 “Awake, O sleeper,
2/3 and arise from the dead,
1/2/3 and Christ will dawn on you.” (Eph 5:14)

REFLECTION 3: WHEN IS SONRISE?

- 1 It’s just like God to lighten things up
 just when, precisely when,
 things are at their darkest.
- 2 Jesus rose for us, is risen for us,
3 not only because of the darkness
2 but in the darkness--
3 while it was still dark.
- 1 But it also says they came to the tomb
 when the sun had already risen
 while it was still dark.
- Just when was that sunrise of sunrises?
- 2 Sunrise is a tricky thing.
 It can mean anything from first glimmer to full glory.
- 3 There is a moment, a morning-moment,
 when it is day or night, dark or light,
 depending if you have noon in your eyes
 or midnight on your mind.
- 1 The women came to the tomb at sunrise,
 while it was still dark,
 while they were still dark,
2 dark with doubt,
3 dark with dread,
2 deep in the valley of the shadow of his death,
3 so oily-fingered, so myrrh-mired,
 they could never have lit a light.
- 1 The women came to the tomb at sunrise,
 while it was still dark,
 and found the tomb as empty as their hopeless hearts.

1/2/3 And so do we.

1 We all come to this dawn,
 2 in one way or another, less or more,
 3 drawn or drained,
 2 dreadful or doubtful or just plain darkful,
 3 in the dark, or worse, the dark in us,
 1 only to find that the Son has already risen—

1/2/3 Sunrise!—

1 just as he said he would,
 and better, just when he always does--

1/2/3 while it is still dark.

1 When is sunrise?
 2 When ever is sunrise?
 1 It is whenever
 2 ever-so-much-more of the light
 3 makes it ever-so-much less of the dark.

1 Arise, shine;
 2/3 arise from the dead,

1/2/3 and Christ will dawn on you.

