

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

EASTER SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118)*

One: "This is the day which the Lord has made."

All: "Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

One: We have heard a rumor: he who we thought was dead is alive. Could it be true?

All: He is risen! He is risen indeed!

One: "This is the Lord's doing."

All: "It is marvelous in our eyes."

One: He is risen!

All: He is risen indeed!

***OPENING HYMN** "Thine Is the Glory" GtG 238

One: Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son;

**All: endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.**

One: Angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,

**All: kept the folded grave-clothes
where thy body lay.**

One: Lo! Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb;

**All: lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom.**

One: Let the church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,

**All: for the Lord now liveth;
death hath lost its sting.**

One: No more we doubt thee,
All: glorious Prince of life!
One: Life is naught without thee;
All: aid us in our strife.
One: Make us more than conquerors
through thy deathless love;
**All: bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above.**

One: Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son;
**All: endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Surprising God, you have done it again – done the unexpected...and then expected us to believe. The story is wonderful and glorious. But we tend not to believe. It is nice to hear the news again, and something about it thrills us. But we do not live as if it were true. Forgive us for disbelieving you. Touch us once again with your Easter sunrise. Dispel the darkness within us. And free us to the transformation of life found in an empty tomb and a resurrected Lord. Make us your Easter people. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Let us rejoice in the goodness and grace of the Lord!
All: Through the death of Christ we are forgiven. By the resurrection of Christ we are given new life.
One: So rejoice and be glad, and celebrate the good news of God's grace!
All: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. Amen. Alleluia!

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: And also with you.

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

A SHARING

SCRIPTURE READING Mark 16:1-8

MARK 16:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Has He Risen For Us?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

The week had gone by so quickly, like a blur. The crowd's cries still rang in their ears from his joyous and triumphant entry just a week ago. His debates with the authorities had gone so well, he being able to match them at every thrust.

Then the other night they had shared a meal together. And something about what he did – with breaking the bread and passing the cup around to them – something about that made it special, different, joyous...but also somewhat sad. For he said he was going to leave them, that this was his last meal with them for a long, long time.

Then there was the terror in the garden. They had tried to stay awake while he prayed, like he asked them to. But all the rush and excitement and tension of the week took its toll, and they fell asleep – until they heard the noise of the crowd...led by Judas of all people! And they arrested him. And after all was said and done – and much of what was said were lies – after all was said and done, the Roman authorities executed him.

And his followers...all they could do was fear for their own lives. They fled and watched from a distance. And now they felt so lost and alone and abandoned. They had thought he was the one, the promised one. The Messiah who would bring in God's kingdom, finally. But now he was gone. And it was over. And they were still numb and in shock. Now what? What next?

Our story in Mark tells what happened next. Some of the women went to pay their respects to the one they had been with for what seemed like so long, and now seemed almost too

long ago. But things did not go as they had planned. His body was not there. Instead they encountered a man dressed in a white robe who proclaimed that this Jesus had been raised and would meet the disciples in Galilee. The passage says the women told no one, for they were afraid. Yet we know that somewhere along the way, at some time, they did indeed share the story. Our presence here today is testimony to that. And a week where the unbelievable had happened – Jesus being crucified – ended with the unbelievable happening – Jesus being raised from the dead.

He has been raised; he is not here,
the man in white told them.

He is risen. And the first of his followers were transformed. Oh, it took a while to sink in, and they took some convincing. We know this from other stories about his appearances to them. But it eventually it did sink in. The one they thought was dead and gone was now alive and forever with them. And they were transformed.

What about us? We, too, have heard the story. And today we are here, supposedly for a reason. What about us? Has he risen for us?

Now in one sense, the question is easy to answer. With our faith as a community, a church, we believe that he has indeed risen for us, as he rose for the disciples long ago and for others throughout the centuries since. He has risen for us in that he has risen on our behalf. Just as we proclaim that he died on our behalf – to destroy the power of sin and death, to take our place suffering the consequences of our sin, to demonstrate his great love for us – so we also proclaim that he was raised on our behalf – to offer us new life in him, to offer us release and freedom from the power of sin and death, to demonstrate God's power and glory and love for us.

Yes, he has risen for us. As the Apostle Paul writes,

We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead..., we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:4-5 RSV)

For us, for our benefit, on our behalf he died and was raised from the dead.

But, has he risen for us? In another sense, the question is not so easy to answer. Not to cast doubt on the resurrection taking place, though it cannot be scientifically proven; it must be believed. But that is the crux. Do *we* believe? Do we believe in such a way that our belief that he has risen impacts our lives?

I remember hearing a story once about a church which put on an art exhibit. It seems that some of the art was very modernistic, too much so for one woman. This woman, obviously upset by the whole thing, complained to the minister, saying, "**If Jesus knew about this, he'd turn over in his grave.**"

Is *that* how we live, thinking of Jesus as long dead and capable only of “turning over in his grave”? Or do we live in the fullness of his resurrection light, which enlightens and transforms our hearts and minds and world?

Has he risen for us in that our faith in his presence with us makes a difference in our lives? Has he risen for us in that our belief in the resurrection really matters in how we live and

think and act? Has he risen for us so that he dwells in our hearts and molds our life? In this sense, has he risen for us?

If Christ has risen for us, we will face life, and death, differently from those for whom the resurrection means nothing. Now, time does not permit an exhaustive delineation of the myriad ways in which a resurrection faith can transform our lives. But let me suggest a couple.

If Christ has risen for us, then we will know the depth of his forgiveness.

The disciples knew it that first Easter morn. We mentioned something of this last week: the fact that the man in a white robe instructed the women,

“tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him,”

means that Jesus has not given up on them. There is **“forgiveness and restitution,” “a renewed [sense of] call,” “a fresh start for [the] disciples”** (see Williamson, Interpretation, p.284). Their failure and denial and betrayal are not the last word in their relationship with him.

The grace of the Risen Lord who forgives us of our most terrible failings: our denying, our forsaking, and yes, even our betraying him. A forgiveness that releases us from the shackles of yesterday's failures and frees us for today's successes and tomorrow's opportunities. The experience of forgiveness which empowers us to forgive others, to receive forgiveness, and even to forgive ourselves.

We often have the greatest trouble forgiving ourselves. We tend to have high expectations for ourselves. Or maybe closer to the mark, misguided expectations, assuming that we are somebody we are not. Trying to do things as well as you-know-who when our gifts and talents are different. Never satisfied with who we are and what we have to offer because we'd rather be like someone else. And so we find it hard to forgive ourselves for not being who we aren't.

But then, we tend to find it hard to forgive others, too. We bear grudges against our friends. We cherish that chip on our shoulder, all the while pretending it isn't there. We fall into the trap of cheap forgiveness, saying, "It's all right, no bother, don't worry about it," when in fact it's *not* all right, it *is* a bother, and we *do* worry about it.

We fail to address the painful issue of forgiveness because it is painful...and it is risky. We forget that true forgiveness involves hurt: the hurt of the one injured, the hurt of the one who knows he or she has done wrong and feels badly for it. Yet it is through that hurt, and sharing that hurt, that we know true forgiveness. Look at the cross and know that God's ultimate act of love and forgiveness hurt. Will it be any different for us?

-Can we forgive each other? It will not be easy. It means being honest about the hurt, but then also letting go the hurt in order to rejoin and renew the relationship. Which do we cherish more: the chip, or the person?

-Can we be forgiven? It means confessing the wrong we have done, the pain we have caused, which causes us pain. And then it means asking for and accepting what only the person we have hurt can give: their love and acceptance and forgiveness.

-Can we forgive ourselves? It requires that we accept who we are and where we are in life, even though that's not where (and who) we want to be. That we accept that we are not our neighbor, that we are not someone else, but that we are who we are, warts and all. And most

importantly, that we accept that we are loved as we are: that God accepts us as we are, stretching out the divine arms to embrace us...even from a cross.

If Christ has risen for us, then we can know the power of that forgiveness.

If Christ has risen for us, then we will face death and grief with a difference. We will still sorrow, hurt, and weep. We will still miss the one who is now gone from our midst. All of this is simply evidence that we are human, for we grieve when we lose someone or something that is dear to us. Yet our grief is tempered by our belief in the resurrection. To say this is no simplistic assumption that who or what we have lost will eventually be returned to us, or we be reunited with them. It is much more profound than that. It is the fundamental belief that death and grief and separation are *not* God's final answer for creation, but that life and joy and community *are*.

But there is yet another reason we face our grief with a difference. And that is because we know we do not face it alone. Though everyone about us may appear not to understand – and that is not an unusual reaction – we can know that Christ does. When we remember the hell that he went through in the crucifixion, when we remember the story of him in the tomb, we know that there is nothing about us – no sorrow, no pain, no suffering – nothing that he cannot and does not understand.

Lamar Williamson put it this way:

The significance of [his death] is best appreciated when one stands beside an open grave. Jesus has been there, too, not simply as a mourner but as the corpse.... There is no dimension of our mortality he has not assumed.

(Interpretation, p.282)

He, more so than anyone else, truly understands our grief, our pain. And he reminds us that our pain is not the end. Our pain is not the final answer. And our pain does not tear us away from God. For in the resurrection we affirm that nothing can separate us from God – nothing that we experience in life or in death can take us from the care and comfort of God's loving arms.

If Christ has risen for us, we will face death and grief with a difference.

The question still remains: Has he risen for us?

Yes, in the sense that he died on our behalf and was raised that we might live.

But has he risen for us in how we believe in our hearts and in our minds, in the way we live and think and relate to each other and the world, in the way we approach life...and death? This question we can only answer for ourselves. But we can share in our search to answer that question. And that maybe one of the most important things we can do. For as you share with me how Christ has risen for you, maybe then I, too, can believe he has risen for me. And then together we can join in a chorus with voices from throughout the ages, singing,

Alleluia!

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,
fully human, fully God.
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**Pastor: God of mercy and new life...
People: ...hear our prayer.**

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection “The Old Rugged Cross”
Alto Sax and Piano duet

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**O God, giver of life,
who sends the dawn and fills us with hope,
you shower us with gifts so abundant,
we cannot measure them all.
You give us life itself
and the power to befriend our companions in this world.
Bless the gifts we offer, and our very lives,
for the sake of those in need,
for the sharing of your new life.
In the name of our Resurrected Lord we pray.
Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord’s Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.
(The prayer continues...)

The Lord’s Prayer (Traditional)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(With the passing of the bread, please wait until all have been served so that all may partake together, reflecting our unity in Christ.)

“Feed Us, Lord” GtG 501

One: Feed us, Lord.

All: Feed us, Lord.

One: In the broken bread,
be revealed again.

All: Come and feed our hearts, O Lord.

(With the passing of the cup, please partake as soon as received as an expression of our personal relationship with Christ.)

One: Quench us, Lord.

All: Quench us, Lord.

One: On this thirsty ground,
may your love flow down.

All: Come and quench our hearts, O Lord.

Prayer

One: Fill us, Lord.

**All: Fill us, Lord,
with the bread and wine
of the risen Christ.**

One: Come and fill our hearts, O Lord.

One: Lead us, Lord.

All: Lead us, Lord,

One: nourished here by Christ,

All: given strength for life.

Come and lead our hearts, O Lord.

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SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Because You Live, O Christ” GtG 249

One: Because you live, O Christ,
the garden of the world has come to flower;

**All: the darkness of the tomb
is flooded with your resurrection power.**

One: The stone has rolled away
and death cannot imprison!

**All: O sing this Easter day,
for Jesus Christ has risen,**

One: has risen,

Unison: has risen!

One: Because you live, O Christ,
the spirit bird of hope is freed for flying;

**All: our cages of despair
no longer keep us closed and life-denying.**

One: Because you live, O Christ,
the rainbow of your peace will span creation;

**All: the colors of your love
will draw all humankind to adoration.**

One: The stone has rolled away
and death cannot imprison!

All: O sing this Easter day,

One: for Jesus Christ has risen,

All: has risen,

Unison: has risen!

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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