

Home Service for Easter 3/31/2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Are you searching tombs and memories for Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified? Open your eyes to wonder. Our God is full of surprises.

Call to Worship:

Very early, still in darkness, we set out. Sorrowful, uncertain, knowing only our loss, we return to the tomb in our anguish and our love. Love looks back at us and calls us by name. You are seeking Jesus, who died on the cross. He has been raised. He is not here in your loss. The tomb could not hold him. Risen, he goes before you with new life for the world. Alleluia, Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Opening Prayer:

God, just as you raised Jesus from the dead, you offer us new and transformed lives in the risen Christ. We rejoice and give thanks for this good news, which has been handed down to us from generation to generation. May we, too, be witnesses of Jesus, who you anointed with the Holy Spirit to bring blessings of mercy and healing. May we be witnesses of Jesus' suffering and death, and how he meets us in the broken places of our lives. Most of all, may we be witnesses of the resurrection, sharing your promise of forgiveness and grace with all people. This is your doing, O God. It is marvelous in our eyes. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, you have walked patiently with us throughout our Lenten journey. You have celebrated our successes and our growing understanding of your love; and you have mourned our failures and rejections of your healing mercies. This day, as we have gathered to celebrate the joy of Easter, let us remember that we are to become "Easter People", people of the Resurrection; people who know that what was thought to be impossible has been conquered. Forgive our stubbornness and fears. Fill us with your healing love and help us to become the disciples that you need to serve in this world. For we ask this in the name of our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Words of Assurance:

Darkness is gone! Light floods into our souls! Christ is Risen! His love and mercy are poured out for you. Rejoice! You have been saved through the gift of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Read Psalm 118:14-24

The LORD is my strength and my defense^[a];
he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory

resound in the tents of the righteous:

“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!

¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;

the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”

¹⁷ I will not die but live,

and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,

but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;

I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD

through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;

you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;

let us rejoice today and be glad.

Prayers of the People:

Why is it, Lord, that we rush headlong into holidays? The store shelves have been filled with bunnies, eggs, candy, and all the trimmings of the secular Easter, and we are drawn to planning for that day. We feel a sense of urgency, and yet you have called us to be on this journey, gradually coming with Christ to the Cross and beyond. Slow us down. Help us to look more closely at our own lives, at the many ways in which they are driven and demands are placed upon them. Remind us

again of the ministry and mission of Christ, who came that we might have life. We have offered prayers for family and friends, for situations near and far. We have asked for your help, healing and blessing. Make us ready to receive these precious gifts. Walk with us on this pathway. Help us look at the barriers that have prevented us from following Christ and guide us through them that we may become stronger in our faith and our service to you, for we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel

you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Message

Throughout history, there have been significant mile markers that humanity points to saying, "That changed everything!" First, there was fire. Sometime later, there was the invention of the wheel, then, a few hundred years ago, the printing press came about. In just the last century and a half, we have seen the discovery of electricity and the invention of the lightbulb; Henry Ford's first Model T rolled off an assembly line; and the Wright brothers were airborne in the first powered flying

machine. And just in our own lifetime, we have seen the rise of computers and the internet, cell phones and wireless communications. As we know, “That changes everything!”

Certainly, these are all monumental events in human history, but none of them is as significant as the life of Jesus Christ. So significant is Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection, that our entire calendar is based on him. Above all, it was Jesus’ resurrection; the empty tomb that was found on that Easter morning so many, many years ago, nothing else even comes close to so completely changing the world as Jesus’ resurrection. As the women entered the tomb, the angel says to them, “He has risen!” “He has risen!” These three words form the greatest change of all time. More than anything else in all of history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ “changes everything!” For those who can and do believe in it, there is something indescribably impressive and wholly life-changing about those words, “He has risen! He is not here.” And for over 2,000 years, the Christian church has been testifying ceaselessly to a living, loving, grace-filled God. Why? Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Without the resurrection, it is virtually impossible to imagine that the Jesus movement would have continued. “This event had changed the world forever. It announced that God’s kingdom had come, and that there was dawning not just another day in the history of Israel and the world, but the start of God’s new age.” And sure enough, here we are over 2,000 years later, brothers and sisters in Christ declaring with faith and boldness: “Christ, our Savior is Risen from the dead! Hallelujah! Jesus lives!” It was Christ’s resurrection that made the Christian church. It was Christ’s resurrection that transformed a huddle of dispirited and frightened people into that valiant band who were willing to risk anything and everything for the sake of Christ! It was Christ’s resurrection that brought into being and set in motion this mighty Gospel, which has been proclaimed to nearly the entire world and has changed the face of humanity! “That changes everything!”

The transforming power of the resurrection began 2,000 years ago when three women walked into Jesus’ empty tomb to hear the words, “He has risen!” And the transforming power of the resurrection has been changing history and changing lives ever since. In fact, no single event in all of history has changed more lives around the world! We think of the sign of the Christian faith as the cross. But really the greatest sign of the Christian faith is no sign at all, but the presence of the risen Lord in us; changing us, giving us hope in eternal life. The resurrection gives us hope and meaning; it makes this nearly unbearable life worth living. And this is so because in the resurrection we see the triumph of good over evil. Through

the resurrection we see that Jesus really is God. And God is a God of love, of peace, of mercy and forgiveness. God is also a God who will never leave us, nor forsake us!

There is hope! God is alive! God is alive and loves each and every one of us unconditionally with a grace that never falters. And the great message of the resurrection is that when life comes to an end, it is, in reality the very beginning of life; the start of something so great we can't possibly wrap our minds around it. Despite every calamity; though wars rage, tempers flare, people hurt us, and we are often in pain, there is hope and there is peace. It is a peace that a faith in Christ gives. It is a hope that we were made for, and it comes from a personal relationship with the God Himself. And this isn't just any peace, this is the peace which surpasses all understanding.

God is alive and God loves you more than you could even love yourself! Remember this: You have a God who forgives you and then forgets, and sends you forward trusting you with his gospel; with his work, with his love! Just look at what Jesus did for Peter, after Peter had denied and betrayed Christ! After the women discovered the empty tomb, the angel instructed them to go tell his disciples and Peter. Even Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, was not beyond his forgiveness. And eventually, Jesus entrusted the care of his church to Peter.

All this reminds me what Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.""

The resurrection is the defining moment of history. The world has never been the same since, and millions upon millions of lives have changed because of it. The resurrection has radically changed the past, the present, and the future! So let us live our lives proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for we belong to the body of the Risen Christ and we are an Easter people. Resurrection means new life! This is the heart of the Christian message and what we are called to witness to at all times in our lives. The tomb is empty, but Christ is alive within us.

Let us pray: Today we come before you, Oh God, with hymns of praise as we celebrate your victory over sin and death, accomplished for us though the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to realize the significance of our Lord's resurrection to our faith and

daily lives, and to know his immeasurable gift of forgiving and redeeming love. This we ask in the name of our risen Lord. Amen.

Benediction:

Dance, celebrate, sing, and shout for joy! Christ is Risen and He goes before us, into this world of fear and pain. He has called us to bring the Good News of healing and hope, of redemption. Go in peace, and feel the presence of the Risen Lord with you, now and forever. AMEN.