

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

EASTER SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118)*

One: Hallelujah! Christ is risen!
All: **He is risen indeed!**
One: “This is the day that the Lord has made.”
All: **“Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**
One: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”
All: **“This is the Lord’s doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.”**
One: So rejoice and sing praises and give your worship to God.
For Christ is risen!
All: **He is risen indeed!**

***OPENING HYMN** “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today” GtG 232 *(Verses 1-3)*

1. **Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!**
2. **Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!
unto Christ, our heavenly King, Alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!**
3. **But the pains which he endured, Alleluia!
our salvation have procured. Alleluia!
Now above the sky he's King, Alleluia!
where the angels ever sing. Alleluia!**

Words: Stanzas 1-3, *Lyra Davidica*, 1708; stanza 4, Charles Wesley, 1740
Music: EASTER HYMN, *Lyra Davidica*, 1708; adapt. from *The Compleat
Psalmody*, 1749
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, we have proclaimed your glorious resurrection.
Yet we have not lived as Easter people.
We are unsure of your promise,
 confused about your will,
 and afraid in the face of danger.
Like Mary, we weep at the tomb,
 but do not recognize your presence.
Call us by name, risen Lord,
 that we may know you with confidence.
Whenever we are tempted to fear death,
 give us courage to confess your Easter victory.
Whenever we are distracted by petty conflicts,
 keep our minds on your reconciling love.
Whenever we are overwhelmed by the power of evil,
 reveal again to us your triumph
 over the destructive powers of oppression.
Forgive us our sin
 and let our lives be a testimony to your salvation
 through the love of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from I John 4)*

One: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent the
 Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.”
All: **Because Christ died, we receive forgiveness for our sins. Because he
 was raised from the dead, we receive new life in him.**
One: So rejoice and be glad, and believe 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

SCRIPTURE READING John 20:1-18

(next page...)

JOHN 20:1-18 (Common English Bible)

¹ Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him." ³ Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. ⁴ They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. ⁵ Bending down to take a look, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Following him, Simon Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. ⁷ He also saw the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head. It was not with the other clothes but was folded up in its own place. ⁸ Then the other disciple, the one who arrived at the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ They did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to the place where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb. ¹² She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. ¹³ The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him." ¹⁴ As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." Then she told them what he said to her.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Vindicated!" by Pastor Bill Vincent

"We're going to win Sunday. I guarantee it."

A bold claim by the upstart quarterback of the New York Jets regarding the upcoming Super Bowl...in 1969.

Joe Namath's words were questionable, but then vindicated when the Jets indeed defeated the Colts.

Mohammed Ali claimed, "I am the greatest!"
And seemed to back it up with a record of 56 wins against only 5 losses.

Of course, there is the opposite experience with such claims.

Several years ago, during another March Madness, an underclassman on a West Virginia basketball team brashly predicted they would defeat their upcoming higher-ranked opponent. Instead they were resoundingly defeated by a 2-to-1 margin.

And in the poem highlighting the joys of baseball, the end is not very celebratory, for
there is no joy in Mudville – mighty Casey has struck out.

("Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888," by Ernest Thayer)

People can make claims. Or others can make claims for them.
The claim is one thing.
The proof, the confirmation – the vindication – is another.

Such vindication is the resurrection: the ultimate sign.

The cross had appeared to vanquish Jesus: defeat him, lay his claims to rest.
But the resurrection vindicated it all.

- his message
- his way, including the cross
- his person, who he is: the anointed one, the Chosen One of God; and our Savior.

And the resurrection also vindicated those signs he shared and performed.

Jesus turns water into wine, and we hear of that new life we can know even now.
Really?
And the resurrection says, "Yes!"

He heals a royal official's son – from afar! – and we hear that invitation to risk faith, to be persistent in faith, to engage faith.
And we wonder if it's all worth it.
And the first Easter morn says, "Yes!"

He heals a man who has been lame for 38 years.
And we wonder if there are some things we must give up in order to embrace this newness, this healing.
Is it worth the risk?
And the empty tomb says, "Yes!"

He feeds 5000 with some meager resources.
Can he feed us? Can he meet our needs?
And the resurrection says, "Yes!"

He walks on the water and calms the storm.
And we wonder if he will do the same for us and our hearts and our lives, in the midst of our fear.

And that first Easter says, “Yes!”

He gives sight to a man blind from birth. The man boldly shares what he has seen, what he knows.

And we wonder if we are called to that same bold witness.

And the empty tomb says, “Yes!”

He raises Lazarus from his own grave.

And we are called to embrace the reality of death in life, but also to embrace that life that he calls us to, this day and every day. Could it be?

And the risen Lord says, “Yes!”

He said, *“I am the light of the world,” “I am the bread of life,” “I am the resurrection and the life.”*

And that first Easter morning proclaims, “Yes, it is true.”

Now, all of this is not meant to suggest we forget the cross.

Remember: the empty tomb did not come about without the cross.

The cross and the resurrection go together. You cannot separate the two.

But also remember, there is no good news...without the resurrection.

There is no celebration, there is no reason for us to gather here today...without the resurrection, and its vindication, and its emphatic “Yes!”

But also note: as the resurrection vindicates Jesus, there is also a sense in which we ‘vindicate’ the resurrection – by our response. Our response becomes a part of the sign, a vindication of the resurrection: our response to his call, his life.

Yes, I know, the history of the gathered believers is a mixed bag.

To be brutally honest, yes, the church has been persecuted.

But the church has also done its fair share of persecuting.

The church has proclaimed faith.

Yet often responded in fear.

The church has claimed love.

Yet too often failed to show it.

Yet in spite of all its checkered past – in spite of its flaws and frequent failings – the church remains. Not by its own power, but by the power of the One who left the tomb empty.

And it’s curious: one of the ones who has spoken this truth about the church, better than many others, was a Pharisee: part of the group that often opposed Jesus and his ministry.

His name was Gamaliel. He was part of the council in Jerusalem when some of the disciples were brought before the council. They had been told not to preach of Jesus, but they had continued to do so. So they have been brought before the council and the council is angry with them, and is ready to kill them...until Gamaliel has wise words to share:

“Consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. (Acts 5:35-39 NRSV)

And indeed, many have tried. And been unsuccessful.

And the church continues. Still with a checkered history.

But the church continues, in ways unexpected and people unimagined.

And that impact on the world – that impact that we can see and hear and feel and know – that impact in my life and in yours – and in how we make an impact on others and the world – all of that impact is part of the ‘vindication’ of the resurrection.

I say ‘part’, because God does not need us to vindicate God’s work.

But the resurrection surely has more impact on others when others can see that impact in us and feel that impact in their lives because of us.

So, do we live as people knowing that vindication of the resurrection?

So, do we live as an Easter people?

What are our lives saying about him?

Do we embody grace that is not hollow, but substantial in its dealings with others?

Do we stand firm in the midst of winds and storms that blow, and stand firm with grace and tenderness?

Do we offer that compassion of the Good Samaritan to all those bruised, beaten, bleeding and left to die on the side of the road?

Do we meet vengeful voices with forgiveness and mercy?

It’s a daunting task, a challenging calling.

Maybe we’re not sure we can do it.

I confess, I question whether I’m up to it.

And this whole attempt to respond to his calling, to live as Easter people, seems dead in the water before it even begins.

But remember this: he who is the way had that way confirmed by the resurrection.

He who is the truth has had that truth proclaimed by the empty tomb.

He who claims to be the life has that claim vindicated by that first Easter.

And his vindication offers us assurance of his presence, even here, even now, even in those times when we feel all alone.

And his vindication offers us confidence in his way, when so many voices seek to entice us to another way.

And his vindication offers us hope in this life. For his life is on-going. He is no longer in the tomb. He is alive, here, now, with us. And his life is for us, and with us, and in us.

For as he himself promised those eleven disciples who met him later on in Galilee,
“remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20 NRSV)

And when we doubt our way, or think we’ve actually lost our way, we
look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, (Hebrews 12:2 NRSV)
...and our life.

And we do so with confidence,
and we claim him with confidence,
and we cling to him with confidence.

For we know he is the one.
You can bet your life on it...literally.

For Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!

***HYMN “Christ Is Alive!” GtG 246**

- 1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.**
- 2. Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.**
- 3. In every insult, rift, and war
where color, scorn, or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.**

(continued...)

4. **Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.**

5. **Christ is alive, and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**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.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Lord, have mercy.
All: **Christ, have mercy.**

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

God of the empty tomb, your grace astounds us, your generosity fills us to overflowing. Accept our offerings as signs of our gratitude and bless our work on Christ's behalf. May we love as Christ loved. May we serve as Christ served. Call us forth into your world, guided by Christ's spirit. 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

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Sing: “Let Us Break Bread Together” GtG 525

1. **Let us break bread together on our knees;
let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.**
2. **Let us drink wine together on our knees;
let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.**
3. **Let us praise God together on our knees;
let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees,
with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.**

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “At the Font We Start Our Journey” StF 2114

**1. At the font we start our journey,
in the Easter faith baptized;
doubts and fears no longer blind us,
by the light of Christ surprised.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Hope held out and realized.**

(continued...)

2. At the pulpit we are fashioned
by the Easter tale retold
into witnesses and prophets,
by the power of Christ made bold.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Faith proclaimed, yet still untold.

3. At the altar we are nourished
with the Easter gift of bread;
in our breaking it to pieces
see the love of Christ outspread.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Life embraced, yet freely shed.

4. At the door we are commissioned,
now the Easter victory's won,
to restore a world divided
to the peace of Christ as one.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Easter's work must still be done.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: Receive the good news:
All: Christ is risen from the dead.
One: Tell the good news:
All: the power of death shall no more oppress us.
One: Live the good news:
All: we are free to love as he has loved us.

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.
One: For Christ is risen!
All: He is risen indeed!

***RESPONSE** "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!" GtG 245 (Verse 4) [Tune 232]

(next page...)

- 4. Hail, the Lord of earth and heaven! Alleluia!
Praise to you by both be given, Alleluia!
Every knee to you shall bow, Alleluia!
Risen Christ, triumphant now. Alleluia!**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739, alt.

Music: EASTER HYMN, *Lyra Davidica*, 1708; adapt.
from *The Compleat Psalmodist*, 1749.
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POSTLUDE

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