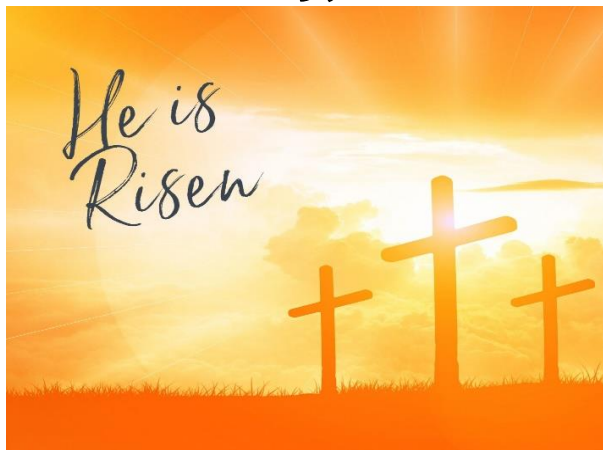


“ALLELUIA!”
IN ALL THE PLACES OF OUR LIVES!
EASTER DAY
APRIL 9, 2023



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

***INVOCATION:**

Good News God, your angels appeared to the faithful women of Jesus' company, bringing them news more wonderful and awe-inspiring than they could imagine – Christ is Risen!

Surely your angels can interrupt our lives, too, breaking into our losses and sorrows and offering a message of tremendous joy to change our lives!

Come this Easter morning, we pray, and fill us with the joy of the women disciples, the first witnesses to your resurrection, that our lives may also be renewed in hope

and glory. Let us roll back the stone of the grave and sing Alleluia once again! In Christ we pray, Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

God, we confess to you that while we know well the story of your victory over the grave, it is not a story we always live. We are dragged down by all manner of death – Fear may suffocate us: the loss of dreams and hopes for ourselves, our families, our communities, and our nation. Sorrow may wall us off like a grave, isolating us with anger, frustration, and grief.

Yet the stories of our faith are inscribed not with the marks of death, but with the word, “Alleluia!” So on this Easter morning, we pray that you will fill us with “fear and great joy” so that, like those women who came to the tomb expecting death, we may instead find the radiant new life that is ever before us in your Resurrection! Amen.

Silence

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

ONE: Just as Christ did not come to condemn but to liberate, so too is Christ raised from death not to judge but to celebrate. Cast off the yoke of sorrow and instead raise up the scepter of joy – Christ lives! We live! All is made new on this Resurrection morning!

***ALL: Alleluia and Amen!**

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever,
One God always here. (repeat two more times.)

(end) One God always here. One God always here.

EPISTLE READING: Colossians 3:1-4

GOSPEL LESSON: John 20:1-18

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

EASTER MESSAGE: WHY DID IT ALL HAPPEN?

I am a curious person. I have many questions and I search for answers that make sense to me; answers I can live with. However, I need the answer to be easy to grasp. I need steps and instructions.

If I would like to cook a certain dish for dinner, I need a recipe. But the recipe needs to be something I can understand. Don't tell me millimeters of flour; tell me cups. Don't tell me to include food that I can't spell or pronounce or know where to buy it or have never heard of. I want to use food that I can comprehend.

I want to know what sin is and how does it relate to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Daniel Migliore's book "Faith Seeking Understanding" the author breaks down all dimensions of our Christian theology in a way I can comprehend.

There may be others, but he and I believe sin is our resistance to our essential relation to God and our need of God's grace. Ignoring God, moving away from God, denying God's grace, mercy, and love are all sins.

We misunderstand the depth of sin if we merely think of sin as a violation of a moral code, a deviation from conventional behavior, doing something commonly

considered "bad". Instead, sin is primarily the disruption of our relationship with God. As the psalmist writes, "against you, you alone, have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4)

This disruption of our relationship with God that is the essence of sin appears in many different forms. For example; rejecting God's grace and forgiving or pardoning ourselves. Declaring our freedom to be infinite, we proclaim ourselves god. This is the sin of pride which amounts to self-centered idolatry. And it all happened because we rejected God.

Sin is also the refusal to live in right relationship with God, with other people and with God's creation of nature. Sin is also the refusal to live in a just and peaceful community that participates in and reflects God's own life in communion. Again, it was caused by our rejection of God. Whenever you think of sin, see if the root cause is a broken relationship with God.

The good news is that God has not left us alone in our sinful estrangement from God, from others, and from the truth of our own creating being. The gift of God in Jesus Christ is the forgiveness of sins, companionship in suffering and death, and liberation for new life in self-giving love. If you were wondering what our discussion concerning sin has to do with Easter, think about what Jesus did to mend our relationship with God. He brought God back to the hearts of all.

Christian freedom is the beginning of a new freedom from the bondage of sin and for partnership with God and others. This fresh start has its basis in the forgiving grace of

God present in the new humanity of Jesus with whom we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament we can read many examples of the Hebrew people rejecting God. There would be a new king and the Bible would say and “he did not know God”. Time and again the Hebrew people turned their backs on God. For example, when Moses saved the Hebrew people from Pharaoh. The people complained about being in the wilderness and were ready to turn around and go back. They thought God had abandoned them. At the time of Jesus, the people were oppressed by the Romans. Again, the people thought God had abandoned them, but in truth the people had abandoned God.

Jesus came to us from his Father to change all that. Jesus came to remind the people that their life could be much better if they returned to God and learned to love each other.

Of course, the religious authorities liked the way things were before Jesus came. They didn’t want the people to trust God instead of trusting them to know what was right and wrong.

When Jesus proclaims, embodies, and enacts the reign of God in a world that has been built on violence, then and now, is no arbitrary religious doctrine but profoundest truth that Jesus must suffer. The boundless love of the triune God must collide with a world where the way of domination and manipulation of others prevails, and where violence plants the seeds of counter-violence, eventually provoking responses of retaliation and revenge.

As the risen Jesus explains to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, did not the Christ have to suffer all this and enter into his glory, meaning his display of his invisible qualities? (Luke 24:26) It was divine “necessity” – the “necessity” of God’s free, gracious, and non-coercive love for the world from its very foundation – that the love of God should be fully and unconditionally expressed in all its vulnerability in Jesus Christ.

It was sinful human “necessity” – the “necessity” engraved in the violent world order of our own making – that this one who mediated God’s forgive-ness and inaugurated the reign of God characterized by justice, freedom, and peace, that Jesus should become the target of violence. Jesus threatened to eliminate that world of violence that we inhabit and want to maintain.

A world enslaved to the gods of violence must get rid of Jesus.

It is in a world captive to the law of violence that Jesus lived and died for us all. But God raised the crucified Jesus and made him the chief cornerstone of a new humanity that no longer wills to live at the expense of victims; A new humanity that no longer imagines or worships a bloodthirsty god; a new humanity that is no longer interested in legitimizing violence, but instead follows Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ died for us in order to expose our world of violence for what it is – a world that is in deadly bondage to sin and violence, and that is breaking our relationship with God. Christ died for us in order to reveal and mediate

God's free gift of love and forgiveness that breaks the unending cycle of hatred for hatred and violence for violence.

Christ died for us in order to open, in the midst of our violent world, a new future of reconciliation and peace for a new humanity and a new creation. Whenever the message of the cross of Christ is rightly preached and heard with repentance, whenever people of faith gather at the Lord's table to celebrate new life in Jesus Christ and its promise of a new creation; whenever forgiveness is offered to others in the name of Christ and received in the power of the Spirit, the deadly circle of violence and counter-violence is broken, and the rule of violence begins to yield to a new world of solidarity, compassion, and peace.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ inscribes deeply into human history the truth that God's compassion is greater than the murderous passions of our world; that God's glory can and does shine even in the deepest night of human savagery; that God's forgiving love is greater than our often paralyzing awareness of our sin and guilt; that God's way of life is greater than our way of death. When Jesus was resurrected, he proved to us once and for all that God has never and will never abandon us. Put that good news into your Easter basket.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Almighty God, Lord and Giver of Life, in the joy of this Easter morning, may we see ourselves new in the freshness of resurrection. Help us to open our reluctant spirits to the

glad tidings of this day, that they may be sustained with the sacrament of the gratitude and praise. Strengthen us to live a holy life now. May we learn again to walk with eager steps, as those who have been healed, who have heard the shouts of victory, who look to the day when every worldly care dissolves and every selfish concern is crowded out by thy presence. Enter our prayers so we speak as people of the resurrection who expect and hope for what they ask. Yet keep our concerns worthy of the calling to which we are called and make our flesh and our wills ready to act on your words, in the praise of God and the love of people through Jesus Christ our risen and redemptive Lord. As we pray together the prayer your Son taught us. . .

THE 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING:

We are witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God, and now we turn in thanksgiving to share the good news of forgiveness and grace to all the world. Let these our gifts be a living testimony to those who most need the healing grace of Christ this morning, cornerstones of faith and joy for the entire world.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION: O God, you have become our light and our salvation –**

let these gifts open the gates of joy to all who hunger and thirst for your holy presence on this and every day. May they bear the gifts of Alleluia which we hold so dear, and give away with great joy. We pray in the name of our Risen Savior, Jesus the Christ! Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

May resurrection's God be with you!

And also with you!

This is the day to offer yourselves to God.

We open our hearts to the One who fills them with grace.

Join in the glad songs of all creation this day.

Our voices praise the One who opens wide the gates of life.

When only emptiness stretched out, you spoke at that time, Joyous God, and goodness and beauty sprang forth: swallows darting in the skies, young rabbits scampering in the grass, hippos splashing in rivers.

All this wonder and joy was your gift to your children created in your image, but we ran to play with death, when sin opened the gates of seduction.

Time after time after time, you sent the prophets to remind us of your never-ending love, but we chose to remain in sin's tomb, the stone of our rebellion locking us away. So you sent your Hopeful heart, your grace made flesh so we might not be given over to death.

With those who see and believe, with those who stand and question, we lift our Easter proclamations to you:

Holy, holy, holy are you, God who has made this day!

All creation celebrates your constant love.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who is revealed on this morning.

Hosanna in the highest!

When he could have clung to your glory, God who alone is holy, Jesus chose to become human at that time, so we might be filled with your grace. When we stood against the wall wondering if anyone noticed us, he came to take us by the hand to teach us new dance steps. When our lives crumble around us and we lie scattered on the ground, he gathers us up, reshaping us into your beloved community. When we were unable to break the power of evil over us, he allowed sin to toss him aside like a pebble in a shoe, until he was raised from the tomb because you refuse to give us over to death.

As we stand before the empty tomb, celebrating the great news of this day, we would have that faith which is a mystery:

Christ died, so sin could not hold on to us;

Christ was raised, so death could not hold on to him;

Christ will come, to hold us in steadfast love and hope.

At this time, in this place, pour out your Spirit upon your people and on the gifts of the feast of the resurrection.

May the bread which is broken open like the tomb, strengthen us so we may go to rebuild shattered hopes, to bind up the hurts of the world. May the cup which is filled with the fruits of your steadfast love, nourish us to leave the shadows of our fears and doubts to stand with the lonely and forgotten, to listen to the cries of the world.

And in that time to come, when we will be gathered with all our siblings of every place and of every moment,

we will sing your praises, as you hold on to us forever. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Do not look for the risen Jesus only here, in the confines of this church building.

We will seek the risen Jesus on the roads and in the streets, in all the pathways and byways of our lives.

Do not seek comfort in the familiar, but dare to risk the unfamiliar –

We know that Resurrection makes all things new!

Do not cling to all the old, expected notions about God, Jesus, Spirit, but go forth and celebrate this truly new Good News:

Because Christ lives, new possibilities are ever before us!

Christ is Risen Indeed!

Alleluia and amen!

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: NCH 236

Halle, halle, halle lujah, Halle, halle, hallelujah

Halle, halle, halle lujah, Halle, halle, hallelujah

POSTLUDE: “Low in the Grave” Lani Smith