

Call to Worship

The world is shaken, the stone rolled away, the tomb empty! Christ is Risen!

**The power of God is revealed; death is defeated. And life is affirmed.**

Fear is vanquished, and joy reborn!

**Nothing remains the same, for it is Easter Day!**

Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen indeed!**

Prayer of Invocation

**O Christ of Light and warm presence, shine on us as we wait in faith,  
Christ of life beyond our sight, be known this day within our life.**

**God of the miracle of Easter rising, be found among the ordinary  
and lift our hearts in hope. Amen.**

The Word

Acts 10:34-43

Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another.

**Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him.  
This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news  
through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!**

You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power.

**Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because  
God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did, both in Judea and in  
Jerusalem.**

They killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to be seen, not by everyone but by us. We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with him after God raised him from the dead.

**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. All the prophets testify about him that  
everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."**

Living the Word

A pastor stood to preach at the 10:00AM morning worship service on Easter Sunday. The church was packed (unlike our situation today). The people were all adorned in their beautiful Easter attire. Easter bonnets on decorated heads, patent leather shoes, newly acquired dresses and suits on the congregants were the order of the day. The fellowship was rich that Sunday. The choir sang powerfully. It was a lovely, sunny day. Everyone waited in earnest expectation for the pastor to deliver the word of God.

The pastor arose from his seat, entered the pulpit to deliver his sermon, and with a loud voice proclaimed boldly, "Well, I guess there's only one message that can be given today. And that is, that Jesus is risen!" The congregation responded, "He is risen indeed!" The pastor then said "Amen," pronounced the benediction, and dismissed the service!

Now if I was to do that today, You would feel short changed and I would have missed the opportunity to give you the hope that we all need on this Easter morning, April 12, two thousand twenty. Not only are we all waiting for the noxious Covid-19 Virus to take us, or pass us by.

The reality is that the devil is trying to bury all of us with something. All of us have had a 'grave' we've been saved from or a "grave" we need to stay out of, even beyond the deadly virus. Here is what more needs to be said this day, 'in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection DEATH DIES!' Because Jesus got up... in the name of Jesus, we can get up, too!

Whatever is getting you down or pulling you down or keeping you down, Easter says there is hope and we can get up, get past it and move forward. If you feel you have failed or life has failed you, this is not the end. God is not done yet and there is more coming. Jesus came out of the grave and we can overcome anything that is trying to bury us.

What did it take for the disciples to get back up? They had watched Christ die before them, Easter came and Jesus was gone literally as well as in death. Yet because of all Jesus had taught them, all that they had seen him do, they knew they had to believe and move forward.

We need to know about these men; learn their stories and they will give us the reason to move forward as well. Each of the twelve chief disciples of Jesus Christ were called apostles. Can you name four of the twelve apostles of Jesus? How many of the 12 can you name? Count them as you go. How did you do? Here is the list: The Twelve Apostles were Peter, Andrew, James the Greater, James the Lesser, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, Thaddeus (Jude), Simon and Judas Iscariot. Matthew and John were 2 of the original twelve, along with Peter and the rest, but what about Luke and Mark?

Did you believe that all four of the gospel writers were part of the original Apostles? They weren't nor was Paul, who wrote many of the letters that make up the New Testament. Mark wrote his gospel about 40 years after Jesus died, Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels after they had read Marks, and both of those are longer – or more fleshed out. Matthew was a Tax Collector and his writing is from that perspective.

You may be thinking what does it matter? But it does. Luke was a physician and his writing was from that perspective. Luke was one of the early Christian leaders, able to keep the story given to him by others and share it writing from his experience and understanding. And in today's passage he records the first Christian sermon about the inclusion of all people in God's kingdom through a condensed message of the good news that Jesus came to share.

Although the book of Acts never says so, we believe that Luke is the author. He was also the only Gentile, or non-Jewish writer in the New Testament. He wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which gives us a series of typical exploits and adventures of the great heroic figures of the early church.

Both writings are addressed to an unidentified person with the name Theophilus and show how the new faith that began so humbly was expanding. In today's scripture, Luke tells the story of Peter being invited by a centurion named Cornelius to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Remember that Peter was a strict Jew believing that God's favor extended only to the Jews. But Peter had received a vision from God informing Peter to "never consider unclean what God has made pure."

Imagine Luke, a non-Jew, considered only on the edge of worthiness by Peter, just imagine Luke writing this letter with great excitement that All have been given a chance through the life of Jesus Christ, not just the Jews. He tells the event of Peter reviewing for Cornelius the gospel of Jesus. It is probably only a small part of the discussion that happened that day, but it can be a reminder to us of how simple the story can be told and grasped by an open and willing listener.

Because of that, it is all the more important because in today's passage of scripture we have the very essence of the first preaching about Jesus. Even as Peter was speaking, things were happening and Peter and the Jewish Christians were amazed to see it. The Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends.

They even began speaking in other languages and praising God. For the skeptical Jews this was the final proof of the astonishing fact that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The new Gentile converts were baptized then and there. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for some days. Why? Surely so he could teach them more as their hearts were now open to learning.

So let's take a look at what Peter said to them: He said, *"I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: God is Lord of all!"*

'All' being the operative word here. Jesus was Jewish, but he came with a message for everyone. That message is this 'If you worship God and work toward doing what is right, you are acceptable to your Creator.' Does your 'all' of inclusion include everyone? Who in your life or your lifetime have you judged as unworthy because they grew up somewhere else or with another denomination or religion?

Last week we talked about our response to God and how if the response is genuine, then no one can judge it as God knows what is truly in our heart. What is your worship response to God? Is it one of celebration of your blessings or one of deciding who is 'in' and who is 'out?' Today, this day of resurrection I invite you to let the rags of your tombs be gone and come out free of your prejudices and judgement toward others.

Next, Peter begins to remind these Gentiles of the stories they have heard of Jesus the Messiah: *"You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with him."*

They had heard the stories, just as we have. Like us they may not have been present for all of the events or even any of the events, but they had heard about this 'Jewish nobody' who was going from town to town with positive stories of God's love and healing in his hands.

I was raised that it is a sin to gossip. Even so, I have had times when I have found myself sharing negative stories, which I shouldn't. It is easy to get caught up in a juicy conversation...When I was the Associate Pastor working with Pastor Graham West in Eau Claire I would often hear him say, "Gossip the Good News."

I am sure that some, maybe many, helped spread the word about this stranger traveling around doing miracles and spouting about love. I am even more sure that some of it was meant as negative gossip, perhaps more often than the Good News that it really was. Either way, some heard the good news and wanted to share it and to know more.

Peter was giving Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles permission to 'gossip the good news of Jesus Christ' when he goes on to say: *"We are witnesses of everything he did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day and allowed him to be seen, not by everyone"*

*but by us.*” So, even if you weren’t present for the crucifixion or the resurrection, by believing it was true when you heard the story, they and us became witnesses to God’s great work in Jesus Christ.

*"We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with him after God raised him from the dead. 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. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

Peter is telling Gentiles that they were chosen, just as much as the Hebrew people, because they are a part of God’s Creation. Also, you were chosen, and you, and you, we were all chosen to ‘gossip the good news to the world, that God has a place for everyone. Imagine again what hearing this meant to Luke, who had felt the second-rate looks and nods as a Gentile Christian in a mostly Jewish group of disciples of Jesus.

Luke writes as if his life and mission has been confirmed by Peter in this event. And it has. Now he has to ‘gossip this good news’ to Theophilus, knowing that it will get passed on. Now – All are accepted, according to the Apostle Peter. It did get passed on, and on and on. Two thousand years we are reading and sharing this same good news from God, through Christ, to Peter, to Luke and on and on to us today, here and now.

God has raised Christ from death and we are invited, and even instructed to remember this story and to eat and drink in remembrance of him. That is why we regularly break bread and taste the grape as symbolic reminders of who Christ was and is still for us. We are to tell the truth of Jesus, that he is the one who taught us how to live, how to die and how to live again. This is what Easter is truly about.

If we can believe this outrageous story of miracles, and generosity of love, and acceptance of all, and worthiness; if we can believe in who Jesus came to be for us - with open hearts and minds, we receive forgiveness of all our sins. That my friends and family is much better than even Cadbury Mini Eggs at Easter.

This day let us be resurrected in Christ, with the story to share of the good news of God’s love and acceptance of all of Creation, and accept the honor of being chosen by the opening of our eyes, ears, hearts and minds to understand and continue to live as Christians.