

From the Tomb - Easter Sunday April 17 2022



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-
6323
Rev. Rosemary Captain

**PLEASE NOTICE THAT THERE WILL BE NO BULLETINS
SENT OUT FOR APRIL 24 AND MAY 1**

**Easter Sunday service contains communion so have
your elements handy.**

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

This is the day that God has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We gather today to shout Alleluia!

Christ is risen; he is risen indeed.

Out of the doom of death and despair,
Victory comes, glory appears.

We gather today to shout Alleluia!

Christ is risen; he is risen indeed.

We shall live, witness, and recount the deeds
Of the God whose love endures forever.

We gather today to shout Alleluia!

Christ is risen; he is risen indeed.

Psalm 118; John 20

***INVOCATION:**

O, Redeeming God, like Mary of Magdala weeping at
the tomb, we, too, have witness the wonders of your
work with our own teary eyes. In this hour, O God,
elevate us in Christ and with the power of the Holy
Spirit, so that other may be awakened through our
preaching and proclaiming the good news:
news of healing, peace, justice, and community for all
people. Amen.

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

God, you call us to step out of the tombs that aim to consume us and more intentionally into the fullness of life that abounds in your presence.

In stillness and in silence, let us acknowledge the ways we have been separated from the richness of who you have called us to be.

Moment of silence

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

We admit that we have not always remembered the creative power of resurrection. In a world where dreams and joy have been entombed, and chaos is celebrated and normalized, we have not always considered the divine ingenuity at work that calls us toward the ways of peace, love, and hope. Although we may have strayed from the places where we meet you, we trust that not even death can separate us from you and the creative ways you show your love for us.

***WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

We know that you can bring us back to life, O God— That you will meet us in the shadows and remind us that there are no limits to this life.

With the fresh breath of the Holy Spirit, we are revived. Amen.

***GLORIA PATRI:**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

EPISTLE READING: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

¹⁹ If we have a hope in Christ only in this life, then we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. He's the first crop of the harvest of those who have died.

²¹ Since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came through one too. ²² In the same way that everyone dies in Adam, so also everyone will be given life in Christ. ²³ Each event will happen in the right order: Christ, the first crop of the harvest, then those who belong to Christ at his coming, ²⁴ and then the end, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he brings every form of rule, every authority and power to an end. ²⁵ It is necessary for him to rule until *he puts all enemies under his feet*. ²⁶ Death is the last enemy to be brought to an end,

***GOSPEL: Luke 24:1-12 The empty tomb**

24 Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. ² They found the

stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing.

⁵The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?⁶ He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee,⁷ that the Human One^[a] must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

⁸Then they remembered his words.⁹ When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others.¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.¹¹ Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women.¹² But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

These are the ancient Words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "What are you looking for?"

The chocolate bunny lies in the basket, surrounded by green paper "grass." With anticipation, the little boy carefully lifts the candy figure and bites into one of the long ears. But the sweet taste fades away quickly, and the child looks again at the candy in his hand. It's hollow!

Empty, futile, hollow, nothing – the words have a ring of disappointment and disillusionment. Yet this is the life experience of many. Grasping the sweet things – possessions, experience, power, and pleasure – they find nothing inside. Life is empty, meaningless – and they sink into despair.

Is that what Easter means to you? Easter egg hunts, Easter baskets, Easter bunnies. Yet one thing is missing. We wouldn't have this holiday at all if it weren't for Jesus whom God saved from death. And we are promised that same life from God. That's what we should be looking for; not chocolate bunnies with hollow ears.

Let's think about that. Jesus is never hollow. Jesus is never empty, yet he can fill our hearts to overflowing.

Where do we find this man who cheated death? We can find him in the smiles of children. We can find him in the eyes of the elderly. We can hear him in the cries of those who are hungry. We

can hear him speaking to the homeless. We can feel his aching heart when he sees the innocent people being killed in war or on our streets.

And after we have seen him, we need to spend some time with him. Talk to him the same way you talk to your best friend. That's how we get to know him.

And when we get to know him, we see the love he has for us, the compassion he has for us, the steadfast presence he has for us, and the meaning and purpose he has for our lives.

Jesus is sweeter than any chocolate bunny. We may desire more when we eat chocolate and we may desire more when we get to know Jesus. The more we take in Jesus, the fuller we will be, plus there are no calories when you taste the sweetness of our living Christ, plus you will never be hungry again. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer. On this Easter, as on that first day long ago, you come, Steadfast Love, continuing to walk with us on this strange pilgrimage of worry, fear, and loss, showing us the good news of the empty tomb, calling us to run and tell everyone of the new life which is ours.

On this Easter morning, as on that early first morning, you wait and watch, Gardener of the seeds of love, hope, and grace you planted deep within us, as we stand amazed at the harvest of hope and life which is handed to us this day as you call us by our names.

In those early morning moments, Spirit of the broken-hearted friends, you whispered of that love which cannot be held behind the stones of our fears and doubts, of that hope which puts grave clothes into bandages for the hurting, of that grace which turns cartwheels in the gardens of our hearts, even as you whisper them to us.

On this Easter, as on every day, your grace to forgive our sins, your peace poured out over all the world, especially the Ukraine, your love for all those who are sick, hurting, lonely, or grieving giving them new life and hope.

Let us pray together the prayer of our Savior. . .

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your 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.

***COMMUNION INVITATION:**

It is the Risen Lord, who welcomes us to this Meal.

We come to feast on life and peace.

Here, the Gardener of life plants seeds of hope and wonders.

We nourish them to produce bouquets of grace for others.

Here, the Singer of lyrics of goodness teaches us new songs.

Songs of how death has no more power over us.

There was only chaos, when there was no time,
but you breathed your Spirit, God of wonder,
and watched waters flow, and life emerge.

You whispered through your Word
and clapped as mountains grew tall,
grass rippled across meadows, cattle and other
creatures roamed, and creation's beauty shown in
wonder. The breath, the words, the created were
brought forth for all made in your image, but
temptation infected us with the virus of arrogance
and rebellious natures.

You would not give up on us, but sent those women
and men who kept calling to us, encouraging us
to turn away and come back to you, but the soft
seductive songs of sin knew our names all too well.

You called your Child's name who immediately
stepped forward to become one of us, for our sakes.
With all who hope in Christ, with all who continue to
question, we sing songs of praise to you:

Holy, holy, holy are you, Love which never ends.

All creation sings Easter cantatas.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Blessed is the One who has destroyed death.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the chaotic times and place long ago, you listened
to your people, God of all lives, and choosing to
forget all our pasts you sent your Beloved Child to
become one of us.

Into shattered lives, he came rebuilding your people;
seeing those who wandered alone, he took us by the
hand to lead us home;

noticing those quarantined by hate and fear, he
went to their hearts to care for them;

realizing how many had been forgotten, he called
us by name;

when everyone forgot who we were, he re-
membered our names;

when it seemed that the pandemic called death
would have its way, he became your clinical trial,
proving that resurrection love was the vaccine which
would protect us from the very power of death itself.

As we proclaim his death,
as we hope in the promise of resurrection,
as we join in glad alleluias on this day,
we proclaim that faith which is a mystery:

**The One thought dead, lives;
the One thought to be lost, finds us;
the One we think we will never see
will call us by name to bring us home.**

On this Easter morning, we pray you would pour out your Spirit upon this bread that it might give us strength and on that cup overflowing with grace. Pour out your Spirit, we pray as well, on your family gathered in these moments: people with great faith, yet who struggled not to lose it these past years; people who lived through loneliness, and hungered for community; people who have tried to be compassionate yet who were wearied by worry and fear.

As we eat this broken bread, transform us into those who will welcome the stranger, for we have known loneliness, listen to the ignored, for we have lived in silence, care for the forgotten, for we have struggled to be remembered.

As we drink of the cup of grace, we pray you would nourish us so we may learn from those

whose lives were not noticed,
whose fears were not alleviated,
whose needs were not met

And when that morning comes when we finish this pilgrimage of life, being welcomed by the Gardener of grace, along with our sisters and brothers of every time and place, we will sing of our love for you, forever and ever, God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ, your risen Son. 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, when we see that he has conquered death from the empty tomb. Amen.

***SENDING:**

We could just return to our homes,
slipping back into pandemic mode,
**but we will go to rebuild communities,
to care for those who are still so lonely.**
We could stand looking around,
wondering if Jesus has left us on our own,

**but we will turn and, seeing our neighbors,
we will call them by name and embrace them with
hope.**

We could keep our lips sealed, not telling anyone
of what we have heard and seen,

**but we will run to tell others,
grabbing them by the hands to go
and meet the Gardener of grace.**