

SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2024
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER



ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER
CONCERNS:

PREUDE: “Jesus Shall Reign” Dorothy Wells

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Uni-Pres Kindercottage

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Let us fill our hearts and minds with hope as we hear the Words of Jesus Christ.

All: “Peace be with you.”

One: When peace and justice seem uncertain, let us hear anew the Words of Jesus Christ.

All: “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”

One: Let us be comforted by the presence of Christ, whose love, and light dwells within us.

All: Let our lives be witnesses of these things.

One: Help us to be instruments of Christ’s peace to all in need of God’s healing love.

***INVOCATION:**

Risen Christ, create in us a clean heart so that we can meditate in your peace; abide in your mercy;

be filled with your justice; and be made new by your love. In your name, we pray. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 336 “Here, O Lord, I See You Face to Face”**

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

In his preaching, the disciple Peter reminded his listeners that no one can escape the collective guilt that allows innocent people to suffer. The mob action that sent Jesus to the cross was fed by fears and anger we are reluctant to claim. Yet we, too, reject the Holy One, by our neglect if not by deliberate intent. Peter invites us to repent and turn to God that our sins may be wiped away.

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION: We are disturbed and distressed, O God, by the evil that surrounds us. It is hard to view many people we see as your children: murderers, abusers, those who cheat others and profits at their expense. We fee like victims. Why should we confess our sins when there is so much evil beyond our influence? Yet we know we do not abide in your love. We sin by turning away from sisters and brothers who are also beloved by you, however**

they may differ from us. We seek the forgiveness you promise and the health you offer. Amen. Silence

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Loving God, thank you for the assurance of your grace. You grant us all your peace. Help us to trust in your peace, especially in times of conflict. Believing you will bring peace in our hearts, and to all the earth. Guiding us, so that all may come to know Jesus Christ, who is our Prince of Peace. In his name, we pray. 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.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Acts 3:12-19

¹² Seeing this, Peter addressed the people: “You Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us as if we made him walk by our own power or piety? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our ancestors—has

glorified his servant Jesus. This is the one you handed over and denied in Pilate's presence, even though he had already decided to release him. ¹⁴ You rejected the holy and righteous one, and asked that a murderer be released to you instead. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, the very one whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ His name itself has made this man strong. That is, because of faith in Jesus' name, God has strengthened this man whom you see and know. The faith that comes through Jesus gave him complete health right before your eyes.

¹⁷ "Brothers and sisters, I know you acted in ignorance. So did your rulers. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he foretold through all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Change your hearts and lives! Turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 4 Page 622

SECOND TESTAMENT READING: 1 John 3:1-7

³ See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us.

² Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that

when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves even as he is pure. ⁴ Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion, and sin is rebellion. ⁵ You know that he appeared to take away sins, and there is no sin in him. ⁶ Every person who remains in relationship to him does not sin. Any person who sins has not seen him or known him.

Practicing sin or righteousness

⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you.

The person who practices righteousness is righteous, in the same way that Jesus is righteous.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 24:36b-48**

Jesus appears to the disciples

³⁶ While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ³⁷ They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." ⁴⁰ As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of baked fish. ⁴³ Taking it, he ate it in front of them.

⁴⁴ Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Scars”

Let me ask you a question: *Why did Jesus keep his scars following his resurrection?* Why did the one who conquered death still carry the marks of that death on his body? – the scars from the nails that pierced his hands and feet and held him on the Cross, as well as the scar in his side where the spear went in. Why would the King of Kings, the Messiah, our Glorious Savior allow himself to still bear the marks of a common criminal, marks administered by Imperial Rome who used crucifixion to rule with an iron fist. Over the centuries Rome crucified tens of

thousands to intimidate, strike fear of punishment, and keep law & order.

It reminds me of King George’s line from Hamilton, “*I’ll send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love.*”

Why wouldn’t the Savior of the World remove the marks of Rome? He gave sight to the blind, healed the lame, cast out demons and even raised the dead – removing those scars would have been his easiest miracle.

His body was changed following his resurrection. His Resurrected Body was a transformed body, according to the Gospels. The Disciples had the doors and windows barred shut in fear, when suddenly Jesus came and stood among them. His Resurrected Body could apparently go through walls.

He also made great time on the roads. One minute he’s in Emmaus, the next minute in Jerusalem, and then to Galilee. He also looked different – Mary didn’t recognize him in the Garden on Easter Sunday. The 2 Disciples on the Road to Emmaus didn’t recognize him either.

So, if his body was changed, why didn’t he remove the Scars? I certainly would have, if I had the power. Who would want such a

reminder? Who would want to see the scars every time you looked down at your hands? This is one of those details in the Bible that you say to yourself, *if this was a work of fiction that detail is the sign of a brilliant writer.* – it's such a powerful image, and unexplained The Victorious, Risen Christ keeps his scars.

You heard the account of Doubting Thomas – he wouldn't believe unless he saw the scars where the nails and spear went in. *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* (John 20:28)

John is not the only Gospel to mention this. In Luke 24, Jesus appears to the disciples. The text says, *“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”* When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet (Luke 24:37-40). Jesus wanted to quickly demonstrate to the disciples that it's really him, so, *“he showed them his hands and feet”* (vs 40). What was he showing them? *The scars.* The scars proved it was him. That's one explanation for why he kept the scars. It was

proof – proof that the one who died on the Cross was the same one who now stood before them alive. The scars were needed to show them that it really was Jesus – alive again.

Scars do that, don't they? They tell stories. Scars from an operation often tell the story of an injury, a surgery, and recovery.

Every scar had a story. Does anybody remember when President Lyndon Johnson had his gallbladder taken out and, on the TV evening news he raised his shirt and showed the world his scar? I guess he was showing the world why he had been in the hospital or what a strong man he was to be back at work so soon after his surgery. Well, he also held up his beagle by his ears. Ah. Texans.

Jesus' scars tell the story of his love for us. The Gospels record Jesus' death not as a martyrdom, but as a willing sacrifice. He willingly laid down his life because he believed it was needed to show that love was stronger than hate, life is stronger than death, and God's Grace is more powerful than humanity's sins. He willingly laid down his life because he believed that his Cross and Resurrection would bring us to God. The Scars tell that story of courage and love, similar to another story.

Rev. Josh Scott once told the story about an orphaned boy who was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, tried to get upstairs to rescue the boy, but she tragically died in the fire and smoke. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed an iron drain pipe and came down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck.

Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons they felt they should be chosen to provide the boy with a home. As they talked, the child's eyes remained focused on the floor.

Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hands from his pockets, revealing scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition.

This was the man who had saved his life and whose hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap, the boy threw his arms around the man's neck and held on for dear life once again. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue. The scars told the story of love, of love in action. That love was

powerful and bonding. It brought them closer than words can even describe.

May the scars of Jesus do the same thing for us. May they draw us to him and bind us to him forever. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked" Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Hearing God, Responding Savior, Inspiring Spirit, we offer our prayers as a sign of our faith in you. May we and all the members of the church of Christ cling to your word revealed in the holy Scriptures, seeking also to do what you direct us to do through the commandments and examples of faith that we discover in its pages. May we be faithful in our witness to your love, so that those who suffer doubt may believe and reach out to touch you for whatever they need.

Grant that those who are undergoing trials of sickness and suffering may know your presence and a measure of resignation or healing.

Creator God, you made all things in your wisdom, and in your love, you save us. We pray for the whole creation. Confront both godless and believing world leaders with your call to justice and peace. Teach us effective ways to challenge injustice and evil in the power of your Spirit, and

with humility, acknowledging our own faults and failings.

God of patriarchs and matriarchs, you are the God of the living, not of the dead. Through your glorified Son, whom you raised from death, you have offered us repentance and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We rejoice in the promise that because he lives, we too shall live. Holy Spirit, keep us in your communion that we may serve God every day and every hour as we pray the prayer your Son taught us . . .

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.

PRAYER RESPONSE: 775 "Eagle's Wings"

**And God will raise you upon eagle's wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,**

and hold you in the palm of God's hand.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

One: All are invited to give joyously to the church that bears witness to Christ's love.

All: Let us give with a joyful heart.

One: God's loving generous love has given us every good and gracious gift.

All: We offer our gratitude for God's abundant blessings in our lives.

One: Now, let us be a blessing to others in the ways that God has faithfully and generously blessed us.

OFFERTORY: "Adoration" Roy E. Nolte

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen**

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING
AND DEDICATION:**

Let us remember that weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes early in the morning. May these gifts of blessing

be a sign of the love, light, and glory of our redeeming God who has created a world of abundance with all that we need. May we remain thankful witnesses to your generosity, O God, as we dedicate these offerings to you and your beloved creation. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 436 “God of Grace and God of Glory”**

***BENEDICTION:**

Living God, we are witnesses to your love and light. Your peace is seen in the dawning of each new day. Your equal justice bears witness in the interconnected universe that you have created. Faithful God, help us to feel the warmth of your loving light in the cooler moments of life. As we leave this worship service, let us go back into the world renewed as instruments of your loving peace and justice for all. May it be so. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

POSTLUDE: “Alive, Alive!”

PRAYER LIST: