

Sunday, April 1st, 2018

A couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am, the liturgist will enter and take his/her seat on the Chancel. The pastor will enter, offer a welcome, and make announcements... The preacher will then ask... "Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.

PRELUDE "The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done" - Victor C. Johnson Dr. Elizabeth Davis
CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Awake, My Soul!" - Craig Courtney The Choir

After the choir finishes, the liturgist should step to the lectern & say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Isaiah 65 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Isaiah 65)

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;

They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;

Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Let us worship God beginning with a short video bringing us the voice of Mary Magdalene, answering the question that Jesus asks of us all, "Who do you say that I am?"

The video will begin immediately after this introduction.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? "Mary Magdalene" A Video

The Liturgist will return to the lectern microphone after the video & say...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Lord of Life, we gather in the name of the Risen Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving in glad Easter Celebration. We rejoice that you have come back to us in the triumph of the resurrection and given us the assurance of eternal life. Roll away whatever stones still separate us from you. Turn our fear to faith and our doubts to delight, as Jesus becomes for us an abiding presence; as the Easter story becomes our story, and as we embody its hope for the whole world. Amen.

"Would all of you who are able, please stand and join in singing "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today", #123 in *The Hymnal*.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

*HYMN OF PRAISE "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" *The Hymnal #123*

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say....

*CALL TO CONFESSION

On this day of resurrection, we remember the high expectations God has of us. Amid our Easter celebrations, it is well to examine our old ways and confess our failings before God and one another as we pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins, pausing for a brief period of silent confession at its conclusion. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

Merciful and risen Savior, we claim to be people of the resurrection, yet we confess that far too often we do not experience resurrection power. Our prayers are anemic and our faith is shallow. We com-

partmentalize our lives, placing you on the sidelines of our work, family life and play. We take too much for granted and fail to thank you for the blessings of health, relationships and freedoms. We are easily discouraged by problems, limitations, and failure. Gracious God, forgive our shortsightedness and our lack of trust. Help us to see that you are at work in our lives and in the world. Inspire us to hold fast to you in faith, knowing that you are working all things for good and that because of the empty tomb, we have nothing to fear. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures As he rose, victorious over sin and death, so shall we be victorious with him; forgiven, we are free to live to the glory of Jesus our Savior... Friends believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the blood of his cross. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike.”

The liturgist will take a seat.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Begin your time with the children by saying, "Today is April Fools' Day! Did you play a trick on anyone?" Follow this up with, "Did anyone play a trick on you?" Sometimes, we want to believe so badly that we fall for whatever someone says. For example, (Look toward the choir door and point) “There’s my dog, Katie!”

How many of you looked? What if I did it again, and this time I told you ahead of time that Katie was coming for a visit. Would you believe me and look then?”

How many dogs go to church? Who ever heard of such a thing? But no matter. She is coming, and look, THERE SHE IS?”

Let Katie come out from the choir room.

This is sort of what happened at Easter. Jesus told everyone that he would rise from the dead on the third day, and yet no one believed-- not his friends, not his enemies-- NOBODY! But he told them he was coming and he came!

That is what we celebrate at Easter. The followers of Jesus had a hard time believing this. They forgot that Jesus told them he would rise from the dead. They saw the empty tomb and thought the body of Jesus had been moved someplace else.

But it was not an April Fools' joke. The tomb was empty because God raised Jesus, and when the time comes, God will raise us too. Because he lives, no joke, we will live also.

Close with a prayer. "Thank you, loving God, for raising up Jesus from the dead on Easter morning. We thank you that Jesus is with us always. Amen."

As the children leave, the preacher will return to the pulpit and say...

A MINUTE FOR MISSION

“The Cameroon Mission”

When the preacher sits down, the Liturgist will go to the Lectern & say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We have come together today to give thanks for God's steadfast love. Each one of us is an expression of that love. By the way we live and the way we give, that love is carried into the lives of others. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY "That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright" - Leatherman/Held Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY *The Hymnal #592*

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

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Saving God, we make this Easter offering as a means of rolling away the stones of hunger, poverty, despair, and injustice in this world, that those held captive in such tombs may be released, and may rejoice in your power to the glory of the risen Christ. Amen.

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our faith using the words of the Affirmation of Faith taken from the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

***THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

(from 1Cor 15:1-11)

This is the Good News which we have received, in which we stand, and through which we are being saved-- if we hold firmly to the message that has been proclaimed to us: That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to Paul. By the grace of God we are what we are, and his grace toward us has not been in vain. So we proclaim and so we have come to believe.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

ANTHEM

"The Festal Day Is Here" - Hal H. Hopson

The Choir

After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will step into the pulpit & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, the fifteenth chapter beginning with the twelfth through the twenty-second verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage beginning on page #1001 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

"We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

The liturgist will take a seat on the Chancel or with the congregation.

The preacher will then step into the pulpit & say...

Our sermon text for today is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, the twenty-eighth chapter, beginning with the first verse through the tenth verse. I would encourage you to follow along and you can find

this passage on page #865 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the word of God.

Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Mag'dalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you."

So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Easter Fool's Day"

Rev. Mike Morgan

Today is April Fools' Day. It is also Easter Sunday.

This unusual conjunction of dates cannot go without comment.

The BBC once broadcast a short documentary in a current affairs series purporting to show Swiss farmers picking freshly grown spaghetti in what they called the Swiss Spaghetti Harvest.

About 50 years ago when the Texas Legislature was in a rare April special session, one member of the Texas House proposed a resolution calling for the Great State of Texas to recognize and publicly thank a resident of Massachusetts named Albert DeSalvo for his tireless efforts in reaching a national goal of zero population growth. In case you had forgotten, Albert DeSalvo was also known as the Boston Strangler.

Another forward thinking public servant in the Texas Senate tackled the same issue and introduced a bill doubling the gestation period for Texas residents from 9 months to 18 months.

As we look at the Easter story on this April Fool's Day, let's think about who might qualify as a fool in our story.

It could be Pontius Pilate? He cowered in the face of religious demagogues and an angry mob. He foolishly washed his hands thinking he could wash away his guilt and complicity in the death of Jesus. But Pilate, it's Easter. Jesus is risen, and your chance to take a stand for right, is gone forever, even if he is not. Easter fool!

Perhaps the disciples are the Easter fools. Many of the disciples felt foolish as their Master hung on a cross. They had given up their jobs for this Jesus. They had left their homes and families to follow this man. They had pinned their hopes and their futures to a man they believed would liberate them. He had even told them ahead of time what was going to happen. And Easter morning finds them hiding in a darkened room, windows and doors bolted shut-- as if that could keep Jesus out if he wanted to be there with them. But now disciples, it's Easter and Jesus is risen and you can't hide from him anymore! Easter fools!

Perhaps the Easter fool is Peter, the Big Fisherman. He defended his rabbi right and left. He was the one who identified Jesus as the "Christ, the Son of the living God." He swore never to abandon his Lord. He even drew a sword and lopped off the ear of a poor guy named Malchus who was there to arrest Jesus, but fortunately, Peter was better with a net than he was with a sword and only cut off his ear, not his head. But, Peter loses faith faster than a rock sinks in water. When Jesus at last is captured and led away, he denies he ever knew the man. And the person who said he would never leave Jesus, leaves. What a fool!

And now, Peter, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! Easter fools!

Maybe the Easter fools are the soldiers guarding the tomb. You have to feel for these fellows. They can't even guard a corpse in a cemetery. guard duty in a cemetery. Can you imagine how brutal the teas-

ing was brutal when they got back to their unit! They weren't really incompetent, just soldiers in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were just following orders.

And now, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! Easter fools!

Two prize fools in the story would have to be that pair of pusillanimous prelates that everyone loves to hate-- Annas, the high priest, and his toady son-in-law, Caiaphas. They have corrupted witnesses, falsified evidence, placed a mole inside of Jesus' inner circle. And with the Passover and their best chance to end the threat to their position and power rapidly approaching, they play Pontius Pilate like a bluegrass fiddler. And they succeed! They kill Jesus and shut him up in a sealed tomb. Nothing can stop their dynasty now!

But, unfortunately for them, that was Friday. Now it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! Easter fools! All of your plots, and lies, and machinations have come to nothing!

Perhaps the greatest fools are just found everywhere in the world around us. Certainly, much of the world believes we're nuts, complete fools who need Jesus and religion as an emotional crutch. We've got Joy Behar and Bill Maher and dozens of others who think we are crazy because we talk to Jesus, and worse-- we even believe he talks to us. But that's Friday kind of thinking. Over 500 people saw Jesus, alive and risen from the tomb.

So Joy, Bill, and others, who are we supposed to believe? You... or a half a thousand witnesses who were there? It's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! Easter fools!

Maybe, if we just stop to think about it, we'll find that many of us are Easter fools. We're fools when we claim to believe, but behave as though we don't. We are fools when we affirm a belief in the resurrection of Christ and declare that "He is risen!", and then live as though Jesus were still in the tomb, cold and decaying. We are fools when we confess with our lips that Jesus as Lord, and then fail to do the same with the rest of our lives. Such hypocrisy and lack of commitment marks us as fools indeed.

Friends, it's Easter morning and Jesus is risen! Easter fools!

The biggest Easter fool is not Pontius Pilate, not the disciples, not Annas the high priest, not Peter, not the guards, and not you or any of the rest of us.

The greatest Easter fool is Jesus Christ himself. During his ministry, he acted in foolishly-- eschewing a comfortable lifestyle. For friends he had tax collectors, hookers, lepers, fishermen, the poor and needy. He spurned the gifts of wealthy supporters-- except for a tomb he borrowed for three days-- and told them to give away their wealth and follow him. He chose weakness instead of strength, vulnerability instead of aggressiveness, honesty instead of influence, and love instead of hate. He even forgave those who had spit at him, scourged him, and nailed him to the cross.

But He is the one who called the devil's bluff in the greatest jest of all time. And because he did, Death could not hold him. The grave could not contain him.

On this Easter Fools' Sunday, perhaps this is what we have an opportunity to do: Became a fool for Christ.... a fool like Christ... and consider in humble reverence reaffirming our allegiance to the one who pulled off the greatest Easter Fool Prank in history.

Go ahead-- make your life as secure as you can. There will still be earthquakes, and 9-11's, and stock market crashes, and death.

Or you can allow him to roll away the stone that still imprisons you. Allow his love to cast out your fear so that you can live in freedom & joy to serve him as those who, in the end, are the wisest of all.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Lord Jesus, grant us such courage that we may never have our sense of vision & purpose clouded by our fears. Lend us wisdom enough to act with integrity, firmly committed to following you even when we are branded fools by the world around us. May we know that your foolishness is still wiser than our wisdom.

Give us back the great hope again that the future is yours,... that not even the world can hide you from us forever,... that at the end, the One who came, will come back in power to work even in us, bringing joy that is stronger even than death.

To that end Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these your gifts of bread

and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Through this reminder of your steadfast love and unfailing presence, dispel our doubts with the faith that comes from knowing that you are with us and that you will never leave us, even when we fail you most grievously. Give us strength to serve you faithfully until we feast with you and with the redeemed of all the ages at your table in glory, through Christ our Lord, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and who taught us to pray saying...

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.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

The Words of Institution

The Distribution of the Elements

The Prayer After Receiving

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Through this reminder of your steadfast love and unfailing presence, dispel our doubts with the faith that comes from knowing that you are with us and that you will never leave us, even when we fail you most grievously. So dwell within us that we may go forth with the light of hope in our eyes, and the fire of inspiration on our lips, your word on our tongue, and your love in our hearts, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Thine Is the Glory", hymn #122 in our *Hymnal*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Thine Is the Glory"

The Hymnal #122

*THE BENEDICTION

*CHORAL RESPONSE

"Because He Lives"

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; Because he lives, all fear is gone;

Because I know he holds the future, And life is worth the living just because he lives.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis