

## Worship Service- April 16th, 2017

*The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am.*

*After a short prayer with the choir, the liturgist, choir, and organist will enter behind the Pastor and take their seats. The pastor will step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....*

*The preacher will then ask...*

“Are there any other concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

*The preacher will take a seat.*

PRELUDE “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” The Handbell Choir

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP “Christ Is Alive!” The Chancel Choir

*After the Choir sits down, the liturgist will step to the pulpit & say...*

“Would you join me in reading responsively our call to worship, adapted from Jeremiah and printed in our bulletins.”

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Jeremiah 31)

The Lord is risen!

**He is risen indeed!**

The Lord will be the God of all the families of Israel and they shall be his people.

**The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;**

When Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared from far away.

**I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.**

Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!

**Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.**

Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria;

**The planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.**

For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim:

**“Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.”**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

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, and the Easter story becomes our story, and 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*.

\*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

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received-- that Christ died for our sins...." Having failed to live as we should, Christ now gives us a second chance. We are invited to come, to confess our sins, and to receive his forgiveness and his healing. Let us pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray....

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

Eternal Father, we confess that when it is too difficult to be faithful today, we postpone the attempt until a more opportune time. When that opportunity presents itself, we make our excuses so that we need not even risk failure. We prefer to play it safe and witness only to the converted. And when we fail in spite of our our efforts to avoid such terrifying risks, and fall short of the mark, we confess that we blame our parents and our children, our experience and our naivete, our lack of resources and our life of abundance. Forgive our failures, we pray, and grant us a second chance to show the world your love and power at work in us. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*(pause for about 30 seconds of silence)*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ... he was buried, and ... raised on the third day". As he rose, victorious over sin and death, so shall we be victorious with him; forgiven, we are free to live to the honor and 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

Having been reconciled to the Father, let us be reconciled to one another and share Christ's peace. 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 return to the lectern and say...*

"At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward to the front pew for a message from the Lord prepared just for them by Ms. Karen."

*The liturgist will take a seat until the children begin leaving the front.*

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.***

*As the children leave, the Preacher will step to the pulpit and say,*

On April 27th, this church will hold its annual Cameroon Barbecue Lunch Fundraiser. It's success depends upon the support and participation of every one of our members and friends. It has been extraordinarily successful, and while we are all familiar with the effort required of us in making it happen, we are not as familiar with what we have accomplished and the promise this mission holds for the people of Nkom and for us. We have prepared a short video to tell the story.

MINUTE FOR MISSION

The Cameroon Mission

A Video

*After the video, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Every encounter with the risen Christ, can make the difference between a triumphant life and a ignominious death. When we realize how much we have received from a loving God, our gratitude pours forth in eagerness to share good news with the world. So let us now demonstrate our love and gratitude to God, as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

*Take your seat for the offertory.*

**THE OFFERTORY**

**"Easter Improvisations" - Paul Manz**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**\*DOXOLOGY**

**(In Unison)**

***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 pulpit 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.

*The liturgist will invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and then take his seat.*

**ANTHEM**

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

**The Choir**

*As the choir sits down, the liturgist will step to the lectern & 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 nineteenth 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...

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.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

*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. 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 sepulcher. 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."

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Our thanks be to God!**

## THE SERMON

“God Came Back”

Those who went to the empty tomb that early morning were unprepared, unbelieving of what they saw. They had never, could never in their wildest imaginations conceive of resurrection, any kind of victory of life over death.

I'll tell you why the women who peered into the dark tomb were shocked. There's something about us-- despite centuries of death's death and divine assaults on morbidity-- that still finds comfort in the darkness of a tomb, the friendly confines of predictability, habit, routine.

And who among us does not relish snuggling under the covers on a cold night? And which of these still awaken the following morning, shocked once more that day has come, life has resumed, and we are yet alive? We love our deaths, our duties, and well-shouldered drudgeries, limits, rules, habits. Finitude fits us like a glove.

When a beloved student in Houston was killed in a tragic accident last year, a therapist appeared and told a group of grieving students, "You're all doing just fine, right on schedule with your grief, this is good."

But days later, at his memorial service, the choir (never ones to respect authority) stood and sang defiantly, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" -- In their song, **God came back**. Death slinked off campus, his great victory party ruined by a choir that refused to defer to the authorities of this world-- especially death.

"There arose a Pharaoh in Egypt who did not know Joseph," says Exodus. That Pharaoh made the Hebrew children slaves, placed upon their backs unbearable burdens, killed their boy babies (only the first of many genocides against God's Chosen).

Are you surprised that lots of us loved it in slavery? Oh, the work was hard, but at least we got three square meals a day. Pharaoh's slavery is not so bad once you learn to adjust. The bent back grows calloused to the sting of the master's whip. Adapt. Adjust.

Nonetheless, **God came back**.

To Moses, minding his own business, long having forgotten Egypt and his capital crime committed there, a bush burst into flame and a voice came forth, "I've heard the cry of my people. I'm going to free them, go head-to-head with Pharaoh, and guess who's going to help me!

Moses hesitated and stuttered and stammered.

But-- **God came back!**

Israel, having been led to freedom by God through Moses, was not free long. From the north came chariots, war horses, iron spears of the Assyrians. Cities were burned and pillaged. Whole Hebrew tribes were carted off into cruel exile.

**But God came back.**

A sharp-tongued prophet, Jeremiah, promises that the beleaguered exiles will return. In a speech of consolation in Jeremiah 31, the prophet points the way toward a great homecoming party, a great "dance of the merrymakers" to rival anything you've ever seen on on any college campus or at any beach during Spring Break.

The Assyrians called out the National Guard to put them in their place, to quell the unrest.

But then -- **God came back AND led them home!**

In a little backwater town in first century Judea, Roman troops hung out on every corner, registering these Jews, enrolling them in order to better oppress them, and suppress them. The greatest, most powerful army, in service to the most ruthless of dictators-- what can anybody do? Keep your head down. Say your prayers. But--

Down in the ghetto, in a stable out back, a young woman begins to sing. "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior... for he has scattered the proud, he has put down the mighty from their thrones."

Mary, why do you clench your fist and sing? Mary replies, "Well, I'm having a baby."

And stars exploded with joy. A heavenly choir sang in exultation because of the great and wonderful thing that had just happened that most of the rest of the world slept through... **God came back.**

Good Friday took no one by surprise-- not, if you know anything about the facts of death, or the way the religious and political establishment works-- then you know that he was doomed from the start. He had a knack for going against society's grain-- the way he disregarded social convention, eating with tax collectors and whores... the way he reached out to the poor, the lepers, the forgotten, the rejected, the nobodies. Friday's bloody business at "The Place of the Skull" came as no surprise. Caesar had the troops. The crowd turned against Him. The one who came inviting us all to life, was now nailed to the cross, death's latest spoils of battle.

"It was a good campaign while it lasted, but we didn't get him elected Messiah," we said.

We told the women, "You go on out to the cemetery and take these flowers, show our last respects to Jesus. We'll come later, when it's day." And the women left to go out to the place of death, and prepare the body of their master in a manner that befitted his station. But of death and peered into the tomb. Surprise! God came back!

And as they leave the tomb- confused, afraid, perhaps even angry that someone has apparently stolen the body-- two men dressed in dazzling clothes greet them and tell them to stop their crying, that just as he told them he would, **God came back!**

When they returned they all that they had seen and heard to the disciples, who though they were making it all up. Yet even for these slow witted men, who had deserted him in his hour of need, who had never really understood who he was and what he was offering-- **God came back.**

When will we become accustomed to death's defeat and the incursions of God? The whole history of God's intrusions among us is the tale of the defeat of death! Easter is everywhere. When will we get it in our brains?

**God came back.**

I had friends who had spent time in East Germany back in the 80's who declared to me: "The wall will never come down, not in our lifetime." Period. Fact. But two weeks later, what happened-- help me ya'll -- What happened?

**God came back and the wall was history.**

A man in my home town had a drinking problem. He lost his job. He lost his family. Everyone told him, "Once a drunk, always a drunk. It's like a disease, something genetic, in your family, something in the blood, fixed." But then a woman whom he knew at work slipped him a note one morning, "I know what you're going through," the note said. "Been there myself. I can show you a way out if you're ready to be free." Everyone who knew him gave the credit to his permanently sobering up to AA. But he attributed it to the fact that--

**God came back.**

Cancer? Terminal. Untreatable. Nothing to be done, they said. Curtains. She said, "I'll live with it, and if I have to, I'll die of it." I called it grit. She said it was because, even in her illness--

**God came back.**

Who you gonna believe? The world says adjust, adapt, stuff happens. A student dies needlessly. A friend dies of cancer. A good man dies because of the actions of a bad one. And the world says, "Pin the blame on somebody, grow up, adjust to reality, this is the way the world is."

And then at the funeral, we hear of Jesus' promise, the Choir sings the "Hallelujah Chorus." And we are lifted above our distress, and we have hope again. Why?

Because-- **God came back!**

#### THE PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

We thank you, God, that you did not leave Jesus entombed, but sent your angels to roll away the stone, raising him as he said, amazing his disciples then and now. Thank you for your coming back to us over and over again, lifting us from the depth of despair and filling us again with hope and the breath of your life-giving Spirit.

Grant that we may always hold fast to our faith in Jesus that the night of our mourning will turn into a dawn of rejoicing. Move into the dead areas within your church and bring us new vision, strength, and purpose. Keep us expecting to be surprised, to be amazed by your resurrection interventions in our lives.

For those who are depressed, fearful, or anxious, Lord, Grant that they may open themselves to your coming to them with your assuring presence. For those who struggle to believe that death and destruction do not have the last word, that you who came back to us at Easter remain with us still, remind us that the world is ever in your care and that you will remain forever the Supreme Power over all, through Jesus Christ our Lord, 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.

#### \*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“Because He Lives”

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus;  
He came to love, heal, and forgive;  
He lived and died to buy my pardon,  
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives. *Refrain:*

*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.*

How sweet to hold a newborn baby,  
And feel the pride and joy he gives;  
But greater still the clam assurance,  
This child can face uncertain days because he lives. *Refrain:*

And then one day I'll cross the river;  
I'll fight life's final war with pain;  
And then as death gives way to victory,  
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know he reigns. *Refrain:*

#### \*THE BENEDICTION

#### \*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks”

Alleluia, Alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord.  
Alleluia, Alleluia! Give praise to His Name.

#### \*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis