

voice, You will have to heal my deafness. And where I deliberately choose to do what I know is wrong, You must restrain my self-destructive urges. Make me over into the person You want me to be, that I may yet find that destiny for which You gave me birth and through which I may best bring you glory. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION** (*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*)

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. 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 God through the grace of His Son, let us also 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, liturgist will step into the lectern 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 Ms. Karen."

The preacher 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.**

As the children leave, the liturgist will step to the pulpit and say,

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

In the stillness of this hour, let us be attentive to the nudges of the Holy Spirit as we take note of all our blessings and all our church is doing to banish darkness and spread the light of the Gospel. Let your light shine as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings.....

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

THE OFFERTORY

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

"If Thou Art Near" - J.S. Bach/David Paxton

***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 lectern and say...

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Lord, we read in your word that your truth is greater than riches. We sing that you are greater than silver, more precious than gold and more beautiful than diamonds. But, if we're honest, we must admit that we worry about money. We struggle and strain to get it and we stress over seeing it dwindle away. God, grant us faith in you as our true hope and in your provision for all our needs. Then fix our minds on heavenly things, the things that last, so that we may loosen our hold on the things of this world. May we be cheerful givers, quick to share and happy to lend to all in need. And in this, as in all things, may you alone receive glory. Amen.

The liturgist will take a seat until after the Anthem.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the

Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

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

ANTHEM

The Choir & Laura Foster, flute

"Give Me Jesus" Howard Helvey/Craig Courtney

After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from the Book of Acts, the second chapter, beginning with the eighth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #952 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyre'nians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cili'cia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.

Then they secretly instigated men, who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

The liturgist will take his seat.

The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our Sermon text for this morning is taken from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, beginning at the first verse. You can find the passage on page 1027 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God. . . .

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Leader: ...This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Easter People"

Have you ever noticed in all those old paintings of Jesus that hang in museums and get reprinted in magazines that he is always shone with an aura or halo around his head? It's the same as well for his family, for the apostles and saints of the Christian faith.

The old Italians and Dutch Masters could not paint Jesus with making him glow. Whether it was the baby Jesus, the boy Jesus in the Temple.... Jesus teaching.... Jesus healing... Jesus suffering... Jesus dying... Jesus risen and ascending.... in all of them Jesus' face was shining. The baby's face was shining. The precocious boy conversing with the rabbis had a shining face. Whether he was teaching or healing, his face glowed. It shone when he was angry and overturned the tables of the moneychangers. It even glowed as he hung lifeless on the cross with his face hanging down, caked in dirt and dried blood. Shining. Always shining.

Did these artists think Jesus was radioactive and glowed in the dark?

Naw. What they were saying is this. The only way you can really know Jesus is through the resurrection. When you look at Jesus through the lens of the resurrection, a person of faith sees him with what some people call a resurrection glow.

So when you look back over the life of Jesus, even in his infancy, you see him with a halo, an aura, a glow. It is so because the artist is looking at Jesus through the lens of the resurrection and he is saying with certainty, "He is Risen!" When you are raised from the dead, you are different. When you're raised from the dead you don't look the same as you did before. You don't act the same. You don't sound the same.

If these painters had been a different kind of artist, and used words for their medium, they could have just said, "He is risen from the dead, victorious over death and shall live forever. He is triumphant over sin, and now he shall reign forever, He sits at the right hand of his Father in heaven, until he comes again in final victory, and renders the final judgment on all of His Creation.

But if you only have a paint and canvas and brush, how are you going to say that. And they said, "With a resurrection glow."

When I was confirmed at First Presbyterian Church in Texarkana in 1965, the minister, Jack Rorex, read the passage we heard just a while ago:

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

That night as I laid there in my bed, I tried to figure out what all those words meant, at least what I could remember of them: "If then you have been raised with Christ, set your minds on things that are above, for you have died, and when Christ appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

You know that after you're raised from the dead, you don't look the same, sound the same, talk the same, act the same. But what does that look like? What do you look like? What do you say? How do you act? What do you do?

I went to school the morning after my confirmation and my first public profession of faith. I wondered, "Is anyone going to know that I've been raised from the dead? Maybe I should wear my Sunday clothes, or at least my Sunday shoes. It certainly wouldn't hurt.... How am I supposed to talk now? Should I pepper my conversations with an occasional verse of Scripture?...."

What happens when I get to baseball practice? How are they gonna know I've been raised from the dead? Will I suddenly be able to hit a fast ball? Will I be able to make through practice without an error?...Are they going to look at me and think, "Wow, he's been raised from the dead."

Not likely... So how WILL I be different? What difference will the resurrection make in my life? How do you talk? How do you walk? How do you relate?

Some of you, since you came to this church, have been buried with Christ and raised with him into new life. So now what? Somebody who's been raised doesn't look the same, act the same, talk the same.

The church to whom these words were addressed, the church of Colossae in what is now modern day Turkey, didn't know what to make of them either. "You have been raised with Christ, so seek the things that are above..."

But how do you seek the things that are above? Well, even though they didn't understand it completely, that church began to seek them all the same. They became fascinated with mysterious things. What they did was to employ the ancient version of psychics and fortune tellers. They thought it meant to see into the future as only God from his heavenly perspective can see. Maybe even communing with the dead with the help of mediums like James Van Praagh. They were thinking, "If we're going to leave behind the things of earth and seek the things above, it's got to be something

really unusual. And that was how the church at Colossae acquired a reputation as a very unusual church, fascinated by things that nobody else understood. They developed a strange practice, very difficult to translate in any modern sense, but might be translated as “walking in the middle of the air”. Now what they were doing, I don’t really know, but there are recorded some experiences of elevation.

And they’d say, “We’ve been raised with Christ. We’re not like we used to be. Now we walk in the middle of the air.”

They further decided that they must raise their standard of moral and ethical rigor and take keeping of the law to a whole new level. They even had a little motto they lived by, “Do not handle. Do not touch. Do not taste.” You can just imagine how their egos must have swollen with each new visitor that came and commended them for their moral rigor, “Now those people are taking their faith seriously. They really walk the walk!”

So Paul wrote to them, “Stop all that stuff you’re doing... it may look religious... it may appear to be Christian, but it isn’t. **None** of it amounts to a hill of beans. What you’re doing is self-serving, self-promoting, and spiritually egotistical. Sure you may be impressing a lot of people with this garbage that doesn’t matter, and they may be fascinated with how deeply moral and religious you appear to be, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus Christ. You’re doing your thing— not his.”

So they asked, “Well if this isn’t what we’re supposed to do, what is it. What are we supposed to say and do if we are a people raised from the dead in Christ? What do Easter people look like, act like, sound like?” How is the resurrection supposed to show in us when we go to work... to school... to ball practice?” How are people gonna know?

And Paul takes them back to an image from when they joined the church. Do you remember when you first became joined with Christ? The church had a ritual, and you wore old ragged clothes to church. And there were clean, white robes for you there to put on. And when you left the preparation room to go out to join the church, you left the old rags behind, and you put on the new robes that were so white, **they shined?**

Do you remember what those old rags represented? The very things you were trying to rid yourself of forever. Do you remember what they were? Greed... Take off the greed.

What else? Lust.... take off the lust...

And? Lying and gossip and malicious talk ... Take them off. Drop them to the floor where they belong. Leave them there.

Laziness and sloth... and you took it off....

Anything else?... Profanity and vulgar speech... and you took it off. You just got rid of it. That was the old. You don’t need it anymore.

That was the old, and you are a **new** creation. You don’t wrap a brand new baby in filthy rags.

And after you had taken off all of the filthy, ragged, old stuff. Do you remember what you did then... you put on a new, spotless, white robe. You remember what that was? You put on... compassion.... You put on kindness.... humility.... forgiveness, the forgiveness Christ had given you, and the forgiveness that you would give to others.... And you put on LOVE!.... Do you remember that day, when you were joined to Christ forever? From that day on you wear the clothes that Easter people wear, the clothes of the resurrection— compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, and love.

So tell me friends, is it true? Is that the way you remember it? Or should we just try to be more religious, make up a whole new set of rules,... maybe try walking in the middle of the air,... or even set up a conference call some Sunday morning in worship with the Psychic hotline so we can commune with our ancestors? We can even invent some new things, so that when people visit, they see what’s going on and say, “Oh my, aren’t they religious!... How sincere they are!”

Or do we show in the everyday, normal course of life, that we are an Easter people, risen with Christ.

The longest sermon preached in the New Testament was not by the Apostle Peter, nor by Jesus. It was preached by the deacon Stephen as a defense of his faith in Christ when he was placed on trial

for blasphemy and sedition. When he was arrested and brought before the high priest and Sanhedrin for trial that would lead to his execution, those who hated him and sought his death looked at his face, and saw what appeared to them to be the face of an angel. Stephen glowed. He had radiated the love and peace of Christ, even to those who would kill him.

If someone were to take your picture as a person who is risen with Christ, would you glow? are you crazy, of course not.

If someone took your picture as one of the Easter people, would you glow? Of course you would.

The ancient artists were right, there is a resurrection glow.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me?...

Father, in these quiet and cloistered moments we have caught a glimpse of Thy glory. For the light already shed upon us we give you thanks: for the prophets of old who had no fear save fear of yourself, for the saints of the ages whose words became gates to your presence, for the record still kept in the Scripture we cherish and the faith still held in the church that we love.

For your purpose in us we beg your triumph: that the prayers of our lips become the deeds of our lives, that neither weakness nor fear will restrain us from shouldering our crosses. Inspire us, Lord, to carry into the everydayness of our lives all to which we aspire at such a moment as this. May our faith have feet and hands, a voice and a heart, that it may minister to others, that the gospel we profess may shine in our faces and be seen in our lives.

May we return to face the grind of the monotonous and the humdrum routine of duty with a new vision. We beg you to transform for us our common tasks and glorify them with a new light, that we may apply ourselves to them with fidelity and devotion. In the name of Him who came "not to be ministered unto but to minister," 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.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Pass It On", which is printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Pass It On"

It only takes a spark to get a fire going,
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;
That's how it is with God's Love, once you've experienced it.
You spread His love to everyone. You want to pass it on.

What a wondrous time is spring, when all the tress are budding.
The birds begin to sing, the flowers start their blooming;
That's how it is with God's love, once you've experienced it.
You want to sing. It's fresh like spring. You want to pass it on.

I wish for you my friend this happiness that I've found;
You can depend on Him. it matters not where you're bound,
I'll shout it from the mountain top! I want the world to know!
The Lord of love has come to me. I want to pass it on.

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"On Eagle's Wings"

And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun, And hold you in the palm of His hand.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis