

Sunday, April 12, 2020 - 11:00 AM
Easter Celebration Service

WELCOME

Larry Courson, Pastor

OPENING PRAISE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!
The tomb could not hold him.
The grave is empty.
He shattered sin's power over us.
Death could not contain him.
He conquered death for all eternity. Christ is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

What a beautiful day for celebrating! Lord God, we are so grateful for the promise that this day holds. We are filled with hope and joy and life. Thank You for loving us so much that You sent Your only Son to die for us. Thank You also that death was not the final word. We see the brokenness of our sin and the effects of it in the world around us. It is only through this work that we can live in anticipation of a world where sin and darkness no longer exists. We wait in anticipation for Your return and the final defeat of sin and death. We praise You, O God, for the great story You are writing! Amen.

PSALM 105:1-5 (NLT)

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim His greatness.
Let the whole world know what He has done.
Sing to Him; yes, sing His praises.
Tell everyone about His wonderful deeds.
Exult in His holy name; rejoice, you who worship the LORD.
Search for the LORD and for His strength; continually seek him.
Remember the wonders He has performed, His miracles,
and the rulings He has given.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE Resurrection Eggs

FIRST READING Isaiah 25:6-9 (NLT)

In Jerusalem, the LORD of Heaven's Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. There he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The LORD has spoken! In that day the people will proclaim, "This is our God! We trusted in him, and he saved us! This is the LORD, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!"

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (NLT)

Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place. I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

GOSPEL READING Matthew 28:1-10 (NLT)

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you." The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

As Easter people, we believe God is Lord of both life and death.

We believe that in an astounding act of love, Jesus suffered and died on the cross to save us from our sins.

We believe, three days later, Jesus was raised from the dead, promising us salvation, not because we deserve it, but out of love, through grace.

We believe we are called to respond to that gift of grace, not out of duty, but in gratitude, to carry on Christ's work until He comes again.

Because, as Easter people, we are confident Christ will come again.

Alleluia! Amen.

OFFERING

MESSAGE SONG

VIDEO: The Voice – The Emmaus Disciples Luke 24:13-31 The Voice (VOICE)

Picture this:

That same day, two other disciples (not of the eleven) are traveling the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they walk along, they talk back and forth about all that has transpired during recent days. While they're talking, discussing, and conversing, Jesus catches up to them and begins walking with them, but for some reason they don't recognize Him.

Jesus: *You two seem deeply engrossed in conversation. What are you talking about as you walk along this road?*

They stop walking and just stand there, looking sad. One of them—Cleopas is his name—speaks up.

Cleopas: *You must be the only visitor in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about what's been going on over the last few days.*

Jesus: *What are you talking about?*

Two Disciples: *It's all about the man named Jesus of Nazareth. He was a mighty prophet who did amazing miracles and preached powerful messages in the sight of God and everyone around. Our chief priests and authorities handed Him over to be executed—crucified, in fact. We had been hoping that He was the One—you know, the One who would liberate all Israel and bring God's promises. Anyway, on top of all this, just this morning—the third day after the execution— some women in our group really shocked us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but they didn't see His body anywhere. Then they came back and told us they did see something—a vision of heavenly messengers—and these messengers said that Jesus was alive. Some people in our group went to the tomb to check it out, and just as the women had said, it was empty. But they didn't see Jesus.*

Jesus: *Come on, men! Why are you being so foolish? Why are your hearts so sluggish when it comes to believing what the prophets have been saying all along? ²⁶ Didn't it have to be this way? Didn't the Anointed One have to experience these sufferings in order to come into His glory? Then He begins with Moses and continues, prophet by prophet, explaining the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, showing how they were talking about the very things that had happened to Jesus. About this time, they are nearing their destination. Jesus keeps walking ahead as if He has no plans to stop there, ²⁹ but they convince Him to join them.*

Two Disciples: *Please, be our guest. It's getting late, and soon it will be too dark to walk. So He accompanies them to their home. When they sit down at the table for dinner, He takes the bread in His hands, He gives thanks for it, and then He breaks it and hands it to them. At that instant, two things happen simultaneously: their eyes are suddenly opened so they recognize Him, and He instantly vanishes—just disappears before their eyes.*

You just heard “The Voice Bible” account of the Emmaus Disciples on Easter Sunday. Use your imagination. We are going back in time. It is Passover Sunday in the 15th year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. You have just tuned in to watch the latest news. Of course it begins with Breaking News from a street reporter from the Jerusalem Post. Let’s listen in.

I am in Jerusalem, just outside a house with an “Upper Room” that seems to be the hiding place for Jesus’ Disciples, the now 11 men closest to Him during his time as an itinerant preacher. There have certainly been a series of strange and unexpected events in Jerusalem over the past few days concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

I just finished interviewing two men from the village of Emmaus before they climbed the outside stairs and entered the upper room. They were afraid to be seen on camera, but they did tell me that I could report their amazing if not unbelievable story.

Emmaus is about seven miles from Jerusalem. These two men live there. Cleopas did all of the talking. He told me that they were walking home and talking about everything that had happened since Friday. Jesus entered Jerusalem one week ago today with crowds cheering for him, waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna.” Jesus got more attention than the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who came into Jerusalem the same day. We knew after that day that this was not going to be a typical Passover.

Cleopas said a stranger caught up with them and asked what they were talking about. He told the stranger, “**You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.**” When the man asked, “**What things?**” Cleopas answered “**The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth. ... Our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him.**” (18-20)

The religious elite in Jerusalem did not like Jesus. They saw him as a threat to their authority and issued an arrest warrant for him before the Passover. I have a copy of it here. **Wanted: Jesus of Nazareth. He shall be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who knows where he is, let him declare it to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.**

They got their wish. One of Jesus followers, Judas Iscariot, sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver, the price paid for a common slave. He led a mob that arrested Jesus to an olive press outside the city gates. The Sanhedrin had an emergency late night meeting and condemned Jesus to death. Because Pontius Pilate was in town, they had to send Jesus to have him order Jesus’ crucifixion. It took some arm twisting, but Pilate finally agreed and Jesus was sentenced to death. Reports from that day say that the sky turned dark at noon while Jesus was on the cross and that there was an earthquake when he died.

Cleopas then told the stranger, “**Some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive!**” (21-22)

I reported from Jesus’ tomb earlier this morning. Jerusalem experienced its second earthquake in three days at sunrise this morning. The large stone that was sealed to keep grave robbers out was moved. There was nothing inside the tomb except for the grave clothes that had been wrapped around the dead body of Jesus. There was no sign of him anywhere. Two of Jesus Disciples, Peter and John, ran to the tomb to look insider for themselves after the women told them what they had seen and heard.

Cleopas said the stranger finally talked. “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?” (25-26) Then Cleopas said the man took them through the Jewish Sacred writings and explaining everything that had happened to Jesus. That must have been one incredible story.

When they got to Emmaus, they invited the stranger to stay with them. When they sat down to eat, the stranger took some bread, spoke a word of blessing and broke it to give to them. That’s when Cleopas said they realized the stranger was no stranger at all. Cleopas said the stranger is Jesus. As soon as the two men recognized Him, Jesus just disappeared.

The two men packed the things they would need for the night and ran back to Jerusalem. They just went inside to tell the rest of Jesus’ followers that they had just seen Him, that Jesus is alive.

I’m looking up into that Upper Room right now. It looks like someone just lit a bunch of candles or torches because the whole room just got bright and quiet. I could hear a lot of talking just a few minutes ago. Now it sounds like there is just one voice coming from the room.

Wait just a minute. Cleopas and his friend are coming back down the outside stairs. It looks like they want to tell me something. But they still look camera shy. I’ll listen to what they have to say and report back as soon as I can.

I’ve got more Breaking News. Cleopas just told me that Peter had seen Jesus earlier today and that Jesus is alive. When I asked him what else happened inside, Cleopas said that Jesus just suddenly appeared in the room and said, “Peace be with you.” They thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus asked them, “Why are you frightened? Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” (vss. 36-38) Then Jesus ate some fish. Dead men don’t eat fish. Cleopas also told me that Jesus said to them, “There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.” (47-48)

I have the sneaky suspicion that we have not heard the last of Jesus of Nazareth or from His followers. I need to find out more about this forgiveness of sins for all who repent. If this is true, it changes everything. I remember learning in my Bar Mitzvah classes these words from the Prophet Isaiah. (53:4-6)

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!

But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own.

Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

Cleopas and the people in that Upper Room believe that Jesus lives. If they are right, that changes everything. Did Jesus die on the cross to forgive your sins and mine? Is Jesus alive? Does His death and resurrection make a difference in your life? I can’t answer those questions for you. We report, you decide. Now back to the studio.

PRAYER

Holy God, author of all life, we celebrate today Christ's resurrection.

We celebrate life and light, joy and hope, peace and love, for these are the gifts made possible by Christ's victory over sin, evil and death. The resurrection gives witness to Your power to defeat all that opposes You. It affirms Your purpose to rescue and restore all of creation. It proclaims Your redemption plan for all the peoples of the world. It testifies to Your active and ongoing work in our lives. The resurrection is our assurance that You can and will "make good" on Your promise of eternal life. It is to that promise that we cling, trusting that there is nothing that is able to separate us from Your love which is made known to us through Christ Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

Elly, Evan, Ken, Kathleen, Stephanie

Medical Professionals

First Responders

Government Leaders

Peace Call Committee

THE LORD'S PRAYER—Everyone

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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

With renewed hope, we walk and live and breathe.

God is not dead; He's alive!

Let us carry this hope to the world.

Our God is not dead; He's alive!

Live in the name and the power of the Risen Lord. Amen.

CLOSING PRAISE