



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL
Partners in Christ's Service since 1890

EASTER SUNDAY

At Home or Small Group Worship April 12th

HYMN OF PRAISE

#216 Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (vs. 1-4)

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
All creation join to say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, O heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious king; Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Jesus died, our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where your victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise. Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ was led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen today! Christ is risen, indeed!

The tomb could not hold him. The grave is empty. Christ is risen!

Jesus Christ is risen today! He is risen, indeed!

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, today the tomb is empty, and Jesus Christ is risen! Let the world hear our Hallelujah! Let our feet dance for joy; let our voices sing! The world now knows that fear and death are defeated. Jesus Christ has risen! Hallelujah!

GLORIA PATRI #35

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son
And to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning
Is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Prayer Hymn #566 Be Still My Soul (v. 1)

Be still my soul, for God is on your side,
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Trust in your God, your savior and your guide,
Who through all changes faithful will remain.
Be still my soul, your best, your heavenly friend,
Through thorny ways leads to a peaceful end.

Silent Prayer

EASTER PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, the good news of Easter is here! He has risen! Let the whole world shout, Hallelujah!

We thank you, O God, for you continue to work miracles in our lives. You continue to roll away those stones that get in our way and block our paths. You continue to delight and surprise us by emptying tombs and making unexpected visits. And, as the spring flowers begin to bud and blossom, we see the signs of new life all around us.

Divine Spirit, we feel such joy rediscovering your presence in our midst. Free us from the things we need to leave behind. Free us from the trappings that keep us from becoming the disciples you would have us be. Roll away our doubts and challenge our despair with renewed hope. Help us to live joyfully and confidently, even amid the harshest realities of life.

We lift our prayers for all who mourn, who are ill, who are troubled, who feel their lives lack meaning and direction. We also lift prayers for those who serve and provide healing in these difficult days. Teach us how to extend your love and be your healers in a hurting world. Empower us to use our gifts and offer all that we are able, so that your realm may be more fully known.

Jesus has risen! And, as an Easter people, we pray in His name, the prayer He taught..... Our Father...

OUR 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 sins, as we forgive those who sin 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. Amen.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – *audio available on the church website*

MUSIC MINISTRY – *audio available on the church website*

Lift High the Cross arr. Raney/Molina
Jim Molina – Organ/Piano

SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE – *audio available on the church website*

Luke 24 (NIV)

Jesus Has Risen

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

SERMON

THE BEST NEWS

A first-year medical school student, making the usual hospital rounds, found himself in a delivery room where a woman was in the final moments of giving birth to a baby boy. He knew that childbirth was a painful experience, so he was quite surprised to hear the new mother screaming, “Joy! Joy! Joy!”

A few hours later, with the baby safely born and the mother holding the precious new life in her arms, the med student had a chance to return and visit with her. “It was heartwarming to hear you were shouting for joy at the birth of your son,” he told her.

Smiling politely, she replied, “Doc, you still have a lot to learn. I was shouting because I was in extreme pain, and Joy is the name of the midwife.”

English priest and professor of Christian Ethics, Samuel Wells, tells that story and reminds us that the good news of Easter is the best news any of us will ever hear. The road, Jesus traveled, to make Easter joy possible was full of painful disappointment and pain-filled betrayal. To those of us who kept a safe distance, the road looked more like a dead end. But, when the angels, in the *empty* tomb, said, “He has risen!” they communicated the whole gospel. Those “little” words tell us everything we need to know. Jesus is still at work!

Isn't that precisely the kind of news, and the best news, we need to hear! Especially now.

HE HAS RISEN!

The Kingdom of God we hoped for and sensed was coming has become a visible reality. The Word of God has taken shape in the form of love. We cannot contain God's love. No matter what life throws our way, whatever seems impossible to

you, Easter joy is unleashed, and hope prevails! Nothing is impossible for a faith that emerges from a tomb.

There is no denying that for a moment, it seemed as though all hope was lost. Jesus' crucifixion and death seemed to tell everyone that the world would stay unchanged.... that the world would still be the same ol' place. After all, we watched his lifeless body prepared for burial. We saw him placed in that small cave, alone. We witnessed the large stone placed in front of the tomb.

The cold grey immovable boulder seemed to communicate, "No more of this nonsense!" This was Jesus' *final* resting place. The stone set in place in front of the cave was simply there to seal away a trouble maker – and the memory of him, much like his dead body, would soon fade away.

Back in their homes, the small group of disciples and followers mourn and console each other. The gospel stories don't say if they sat around reminiscing, telling stories of their times with Jesus or whether they are completely shut down and grieving. Either way, we do know that they are shocked-stunned-paralyzed.

For this group of once optimistic disciples, the world changed, and nothing seemed possible anymore. Their agent of hope is dead, and their source of joy is gone. They feel as dead as Jesus. When the third day finally comes, they aren't feeling much better, but the women go to check on Jesus and anoint his body.

Here is where the story gets curious, and the woman must have been suspicious that something was up. Whose idea was it to anoint Jesus' body? Anointing a dead body was reserved for kings and dignitaries. Jesus said, "I am the Prince of Peace." Was he? Is it possible that Jesus *was* the "king of kings"? Can you blame these women for rekindling memories of how they knew him?

They quickly refocus. The women have a job to do. When they get there, they will keep to the task at hand. They will pay their respects, apply some spices and oils to his body, and be on their way.

Nothing like that is going to happen today.

When they arrive at the tomb and see the stone is rolled away. They are puzzled. Is someone else already there? If so, who could it be? And as they get closer, an even bigger surprise greets them - Jesus is not there.

Two angels are there, and they greet the women. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” I think that when the angels said those words they paused for a minute or two so the women could ponder its meaning. What would your reaction be if someone asked you, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Then, the angels go on, “He is not here, he has risen!”

Put another way, this empty tomb means.... this is not defeat; it is victory. The resurrection is not a departure from what Jesus said and did, but rather it is the culmination and fulfillment of everything he taught us and claimed to be true. The Kingdom of God has come nearer to all people.

Easter is a celebration of this new way to live, this new life. Easter is God’s way of saying, I am *staying* with you. And, in this glorious act, God says, I am redefining our existence together. The old notion of a divine magician working at the behest the most powerful - is out. The old expectation that if we can win over God, that God will fight our battles and defeat our enemies for us – is out. The old belief that God can be found only in a grandest of temples - that is out too.

Easter is the new revelation that God trusts us enough to put on his power to be agents of his love. Think about that good news and let that sink in! It is the best news you will ever hear! The divine Kingdom - here and now – will not crumble against adversity; will not compromise with injustice, will not abandon us the way we abandoned him. Ours is a God who will not promise to prevent the storms of life but promises to be *in* every storm *with* us.

As Matt Fitzpatrick, from St. Pauls UCC in Chicago, says, ‘There is no denying, the old order – the old ways of life still continue to whatever degree we allow them to. You can think of a dozen examples without even trying. The poor still need to beg for food. The homeless still need to worry about keeping warm and keeping safe. Plant and animal species still go extinct. A health pandemic still rocks us to the core.’

We still live in a world where those we love have the capacity to wound us – just as we have the capacity to wound them. Life continues to be a struggle. But because

of the good news of Easter, life is *more* than just a struggle because now our struggles have a purpose, and we have hope.

Life is no longer defined by defeat or loss.

Easter faith is a faith with nothing to fear. You can face the unknown and uncomfortable places of life. We no longer need to live on a false sense of self, on artificial happiness, or on blind ambitions. Instead, Easter faith intentionally takes us to the rejected places of the world, because those are places where resurrection comes from. Easter faith tells us – fear not - the best is yet to come.

We can live knowing that the future can be better than the past, the present is rich with opportunity to love, and all you need can be found right inside your heart. But remember, what is in your heart is not meant to stay there. It is meant to be set free, shared, and given away. So, let your joy overflow, let your capacity to forgive be unleashed, and let your ability to do good be counted on. He has RISEN. Halleluiah! Amen.

OFFERING

Thine is the Glory

Jeff Cranfill

Jim Molina – Organ/Piano/Keyboard Orchestrations

Let us be about the building God's realm. Let our gifts of time, talent, and treasure be given generously to glorify God in service to others.

Doxology

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

HYMN

#234 Crown Him with Many Crowns (vs. 1-4)

Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem
drowns all music but its own.

Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a scepter sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
and all be prayer and praise.
His reign shall no end,
and round his pieced feet
fair flowers of paradise
extend their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise and glory shall not fail
throughout eternity.

BENEDICTION

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.

HALLELUJAH CHORUS – *audio available on the church website*