



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

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
At Home or Small Group Worship for May 3, 2020

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**OPENING HYMN**– *audio available on the church website*

Kevin Loeper, vocals

#53 Morning Has Broken

Morning has broken  
Like the first morning,  
Blackbird has spoken  
Like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing!  
Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them, springing  
Fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall  
Sunlit from Heaven,  
Like the first dewfall  
On the first grass.  
Praise for the sweetness  
Of the wet garden,  
Sprung in completeness  
Where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight,  
Mine is the morning,  
Born of the one light  
Eden saw play.  
Praise with elation,  
Praise every morning,  
God's re-creation  
Of the new day!

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

God is calling us today.

Why is God calling us?

To be the church, people united by God in faith.

For what purpose would God do such a thing?

Because God has given each member a gift to share, so that if we all come together and lean on one another, then we can become all that God has called us to be.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

We enter this time of worship to thank God for all the steadfast love we have been shown. We begin this time with prayer asking God for strength and mercy as we continue this journey of life. We come into God's presence to sing and praise Him. Amen.

## **GLORIA PATRI**

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 #263

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place,

I can feel his mighty power and his grace;

I can hear the brush of angels' wings,

I see glory on each face;

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Silent Prayer

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Loving and Gracious God, we admit that we are seldom moved by signs and visions that do not fit into our world views. We let our doubts be more compelling than our faith in you. Yet, you break down all barriers, even the restrictions we impose on you. You move us through our self-imposed boundaries by continually providing glimpses of life-fulfilled and life-abundant. Lord, thank you for forgiving us when we sin against you. Thank you for breaking into our lives and calling us out of old ways of being and into a new life with your Son.

Today, we ask that you would help us hear your story anew. May we be touched by a new reality beyond our human knowing, and partake in the inheritance you have

promised to us. Your love has been made real to us in the life of Jesus. Now, by the Holy Spirit, our lives are made more real by your call to be the church, the body of Christ, and to serve.

As your church people, we lift our prayers and recommit ourselves to taking bold action where we can, for all who are in need. We pray for strength and guidance for all of the tasks and decisions that lie ahead. We pray for those facing illness, awaiting test results, and facing impending news. Thank you for the frontline workers and military men and women who serve so courageously and faithfully. We pray for all those who heal and are seeking ways to lessen the stresses and anxiety of daily living. Help us to recognize and rejoice in the beauty of your creation. Help us celebrate your goodness, mercy, and love. You continue to empower our lives through the generosity of your grace. May our hearts always be open to the signs of your presence and the reality of your kingdom. We pray in the name of our Savior, Christ, our Lord, amen.

**OUR LORD’S PRAYER** – *audio available on the website*      Michelle Maiers, vocals

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*      Martha Mendoza

**MUSIC MINISTRY**– *audio available on the church website*

Table of Grace

Choplin

*Chancel Quartet*

*Michelle Maiers, Meg McGarry, Kevin Loeper, Al Thurkow*

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

**Acts 2: 42-47**

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

What is it about Jesus that makes us want to leave behind the world we know for something completely new and different?

Maybe, for those early disciples, Jesus' voice sounded too irresistible. Maybe, he spoke in such a way that it opened up their imagination to the possibility of a better way of life for all people. Maybe, he spoke with such authority that you had to see what he was talking about for yourself. Have you ever been busy working on a project or cleaning the garage, when a neighbor rushes over and says, "Drop what you are doing! You gotta come outside and see this!" And, you do. You want to see the same thing she is seeing. When you get outside, there it is - the most beautiful rainbow you've ever seen.

I think that's how the good news sounded and looked like to those early disciples whenever Jesus described it or demonstrated it. Jesus brings a living gospel for all to see and understand. He was in their midst and they saw his mighty power first-hand. And, the more they saw Jesus at work, the more everyone was in awe. It's that feeling you get when you see a rainbow in the sky, or when you hear a grandchild say his first words, or when you meet your soulmate. Something inside you instinctively wants to hear and see more, and you are willing to follow wherever it goes.

This was all well-and-good the first time Jesus was with them. They were popular with big crowds. Big crowds followed Jesus and those early disciples wherever they went. Jesus' voice resonated with everyone; young people, older people, busy people, poor people, rich people, people of different backgrounds, and origins. Jesus was there, in person, gathering and leading the assembly.

However, as quickly as the crowds gathered to listen and support Jesus and the disciples, everything came to an abrupt end. Remember, the day Jesus died on the cross was a day that day the powers of the world wanted to prove, one more time, that fear and hatred still destroyed and killed any threat to their rule. Once again, human authority wanted to prove that no one is safe, not even the best or bravest among us.

Immediately after Jesus's death, life looked as dreary and hopeless as before they had first met him. They all prepared to settle back into the way things were, the way the world always seems to be.

And then Easter happened. Jesus has returned, but this second time is a lot more challenging. As joyful as Easter glory is to us, it was a real dilemma for Peter and the others. Jesus walked back into their lives – proclaiming a new beginning. Jesus called them out of their homes and out of their fear. This time it was up to them, he tells them.

Suddenly, they had a choice to make about how they were going to live from now on. They could settle back into the facade of their old life, pretending that they had never met Jesus, or they could fling open the doors of their homes and their hearts and follow him again. But that meant going back out into a world with the message of God's kingdom that would bring danger and risk.

But, the thing about Jesus is that once he comes into your life, he stays with you. The more he is with you, the more you want to know him. When this happens, you can forget everything you thought you knew about the world and even about yourself. Up is down, the first will be last, tiny seeds grow and overtake your garden, a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread can feed thousands of hungry people. And, if you are in despair about how bad your life seems to be, think again! Once the love of Christ begins to fill your heart, anything is possible. Anything!

In today's story, things began to happen - again. The crowds that followed Jesus, now gather to listen to the disciples. Awe came over everyone who listened. The new crowds resonated and responded to what they heard from Peter and the other disciples. They started to meet together. They planned for it. They met regularly. They organized. Using faith as a guide, they even created a new set of rules.

They met together because they wanted to be together. Strangers became friends. And even stranger than that, they adopted a, "What's mine is yours" policy. They were so concerned that everyone had what they needed that nobody needed a thing!

Holding things in common, giving away what you didn't need, meeting together *out of* gladness and generosity - this is how Luke describes what happened to all those people. All the things Jesus ever said and did, all the things he taught while he was there among them - were happening. They found themselves *called out of* an old way of being in the world and into a new way of life eternal. What is that word again? Oh yeah, ecclesia.

What is it about Jesus that makes us want to leave behind a world we know for something completely new and different?

People really do want to get *called out of* shallow living. People really do want to surrender and give up a self-idolizing lifestyle, for a life of service to others, and to worship God. People really want to trust rules that apply justice and mercy. People really do get saved from afflictions, corruption, and the destructive influence of sin. They did then. We do now. Jesus isn't just "Lord," he is also "Savior" – now and forever shall be. He calls us *out of* for our sake. Ecclesia.

All we need to do is answer.

There is a story about a minister who is standing in the front doorway one Sunday morning. He sees two new visitors approaching. The first gets to the pastor and says, "Pastor, I am new in town and let me tell you, the last church I attended was horrible. The congregation fought constantly. We always had money trouble. And, don't even get me started on that pastor."

The minister smiled politely and said, "Well, welcome to this place, but I am sorry to inform you that you will find all of those same problems here."

The next new visitor approached the minister and said, "Hello pastor, I am new in town. Let me tell you, I move around a lot, but I have experienced the most wonderful churches everywhere I go. When there were disagreements, they got worked out fairly, there was never any money trouble, and the pastor's message always helped me think about faith and feel God's love."

The minister smiled politely and said, "Welcome, to this place. I am pleased to inform you that you will have the same experience here."

Jesus wants us to live this kind of life -- one marked by a lack of attachment to material things, by an openness and receptivity to others, and by spiritual maturity. He wants us to assemble as communities of justice and generosity, rooted in prayer, and committed to acts of compassion.

What is it about Jesus that makes us want to leave behind a world we know for something completely new and different? Maybe, it is because of the way he loves us.

AMEN

**OFFERINGS** – *audio available on the church website*

*God has showered us with His gifts, and we are ready to share, to serve and to love in His name. Let us use our spiritual gifts that we may live a faithful life.*

I'll Fly Away  
*Jim Molina, piano and Dave Benziger, guitar*

Bromley

**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.

**CLOSING HYMN** – *audio available on the church website*

Meg McGarry, vocals

#349 My Jesus, I Love Thee

My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine,  
for thee all the follies of sin I resign;  
my gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou;  
if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love thee because thou hast first loved me,  
and purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;  
I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow;  
if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

In mansions of glory and endless delight,  
I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright;  
I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow:  
if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

**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.