

**WILLITS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORSHIP GUIDE
March 31, 2024
Easter**

**“The very first Easter taught us this:
that life never ends and love never dies.”**

Kate McGahan, “Only Gone from Your Sight”

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Bringing in the Light

Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

Frankie J

LENTEN CANDLES:

PROCLAMATION:

(Leader) The light which the world tried to extinguish cannot be put out. Today we light the candles again proclaiming the transforming power of God. As the light returns, we give thanks that God's transforming love has been, is now, and will ever be at work within us. Today we celebrate new life, new joy, new possibilities. Christ is alive and living among us.

As we light the candles, we acknowledge that there is still pain and suffering in the world, but we place our trust in God and in the way shown by Jesus Christ.

(Leader) In the midst of darkness, there is light.

In the pain of death, there is life.

In the face of what appears to us to be overwhelming odds, God is at work in us and in the world, working for justice and peace, compassion and love, and life abundant. Christ is risen Christ is risen in us, for wherever we gather in his name, he is here.

All candles are lit.

ALL: Alleluia, Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed.

DECORATING THE CROSS

CENTERING WORDS: Leader

Are you searching for tombs and memories of Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified? Open your eyes to wonder. Our God is full of surprises.

CALL TO WORSHIP: L is the leader P is the people

(L) This very day God has acted.

(P) Today, we rejoice and are glad.

(L) We know the message that God has sent to all.

(P) God's peace, spoken by Jesus Christ, available to all in the Lord of life.

(L) The one who lived among us,

(P) doing good and healing all

(L) was crucified, dead and buried.

(P) But God raised him on the third day.

(L) This very day, God has acted.

(P) Today, we will rejoice and be glad!

MONEY FOR MISSIONS: Prayer of thanksgiving

HYMN: Christ the Lord is Risen Today #302 (vs 1, 5, 6)

OPENING PRAYER – Let us pray together

Dear Heavenly Father, just as you raised Jesus from the dead, you offer to us new and transformed lives in the risen Christ. We rejoice and give thanks for this good news which has been handed down to us from generation to generation. May we, also, be witnesses of Jesus, who you anointed with the Holy Spirit to bring blessings of mercy and healing. May we be witnesses of Jesus' suffering and death, as he meets us in the broken places of our lives. Most of all, may we be witnesses of the resurrection, with all people. This is your doing, O God. Thank you for this marvelous blessing. Amen.

HYMN: Because He Lives #364 (v 1)

SCRIPTURE: John 20: 11-18 Lorri Barker

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman,

why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

MESSAGE:

VISIONS OF JESUS

Rosemary Landry

Each of the Easter scriptures that we read from the Gospels has a slightly different story of the morning of the resurrection. Why is that?

- ✓ The first Gospel written was Mark. In his Gospel, the risen Christ never appears. But it ends so abruptly that 2 other endings were written later.
- ✓ Matthew wrote his gospel between 80 and 85 AD and Luke wrote his between 88 and 92 AD. They both changed and expanded Mark.

The question of Jesus resurrection is at the very heart of Christianity. There are many different explanations of the resurrection. Rumors about Christ's resurrection began to surface at the time of his death. Because there was talk about his resurrection, the Romans put a guard at the entrance of the tomb so the disciples couldn't steal the body and say the resurrection happened. Jesus' resurrection is the first-time resurrection is presented as a physical resurrection. For many Christians, if you don't believe the resurrection story as told in the scriptures, you're really not a Christian. Even Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15: 12-17: *“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.”*

Those are some harsh words for us. For many people, the idea of a physical resurrection – the resuscitation – of Jesus is beyond reason. For some people whether it happened or not isn't really important. Through the lens, the belief in heaven and hell, the belief that it was physical resuscitation, resurrection of Jesus is very important. But there's another way of looking at Easter; that believing in

the resurrection doesn't mean you have to believe in the actual physical resurrection of Jesus. What other kind of resurrection is there?

In I Corinthians 15: 35-49 we read: *“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.*

*So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. **It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.**”*

The doctrine of Jesus paying for our sins with his death on the cross and the resurrection is less than 1000 years old. It was not the belief for the first 1000 years of Christianity. The historical understanding of Jesus death was not that it was the will of God and God's plan for salvation. God's plan for salvation of the world – the transformation of the world – was through justice for all and peace without violence. That was what Jesus taught and lived. That transformation happens when each of us is transformed to be God's voice and actions of kindness, peace, joy, compassion and all that Jesus showed us we could be.

Most of us – I think it's a human trait – want to see something physical in order to believe it. We want proof. And the empty tomb is the proof we need to say death could not keep Jesus down. For many people, the empty tomb, proves that Jesus was resurrected – was alive and well. And then we read the stories of how Jesus appeared to many people, including his disciples. Yet there are the doubters. Those who are skeptical that anyone dead for 36 hours can actually come back to life. Some believe that if Jesus' body is still there, then there is no Easter. But it's a distraction from Jesus' life if we only focus on the resurrection of his body.

Let's look at it another way. Another way of approaching the meaning of the empty tomb is to understand it “parabolically” – which means “of or expressed in parables.” We can understand the story of the resurrection best if we look at it as a parable. We're used to Jesus' teachings in the form of parables: the good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the wedding banquet, the lost coin, the good shepherd and more. A parable is a story that is used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, independent of whether it really happened. So, if this story is a parable,

and Jesus wasn't resurrected on Easter morning, what is the meaningful and truthful lesson for us today? Let me read more from 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49

“The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the physical and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. As one of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as one of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the one of dust, we will also bear the image of the one of heaven.”

The name Adam comes from the Hebrew word “adamah” and represents the first man God created (as told in the creation story). Jesus was the last Adam. Adam in the creation story is living being. Jesus, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Jesus' body may not have been raised, resuscitated, or resurrected. But he has continued in the world for all eternity to be a life-giving spirit. How can the risen and living Jesus be all around us and with us, present everywhere, if he is bodily and physical?

There are many inconsistent narratives about people seeing Jesus after his death.

- The first one is when Mary goes to Jesus empty tomb. She meets someone and believes it is the gardener. But then he speaks to her and she recognizes his voice.
- Another time he meets up with two of the disciples on the way to Emmaus and they don't recognize him. Here scripture tells us their eyes were opened, but then he disappears.
- Another time the disciples are locked in a home out of fear. Scripture says “Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you”. It happened a second time also where Jesus just appears in the locked room with them.

Jesus once said to his disciples, ***“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”***

For some, believing in the actual resurrection of Jesus is important. For some of us, the empty tomb is a parable of the resurrection. We have not seen Jesus physically, yet we believe Jesus is Lord. It tells us that the powers that rule the world (then and now), that killed Jesus, couldn't keep him down. He's still with us, he's still trying to transform this world and all of us to work for the kin-dom of God on earth. To fulfill the prayer he taught us...***thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.*** It tells me that Jesus continues to call us to be engaged in his passion for the transformation of our world. So, the scripture reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15.....***“The first man was from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. As one of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as one of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have***

borne the image of the one of dust, we will also bear the image of the one of heaven.”

In the crucifixion we see the human nature of Jesus; he was beaten and suffered horribly, at the hands of the Roman soldiers, as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane when he doubted and asked God to “take this cup from me”, and finally in death when he cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” These are all human experiences.

There are numerous accounts of Jesus being seen after his death. These texts are not about Jesus being restored to his previous life as a physical being.

- When he appears to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul sees a bright light and hears Jesus’ voice. It says in Acts 9 that the men who were with Paul heard the voice but didn't see anyone.
- In Acts 7, we read that when Stephen was being stoned, he looked up and said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

Paul says in I Corinthians 15: 54-55, ***Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?***

Paul is talking about the hope that lives on after Jesus’ death. Frederick Buechner, author, minister, and theologian says, “*Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing*”. In the story of the resurrection, we see that there is always hope. Our Easter message is one of light and hope. The risen Christ lives in each of us – Jesus is all around us and with us, present everywhere. We bear the image of the one in heaven. The resurrection affirms everything that Jesus taught us. The power of the love we experience with Jesus cannot be constrained. Nor did it end with Jesus’ death. We are the resurrection. We affirm Christ's resurrection when we are the incarnation, the embodiment of Jesus’ life and teachings to others.

HYMN:

How Great Thou Art

#77 (vs 1, 3)

Please remain seated as we prepare our hearts for prayer

PASTORAL PRAYERS:

Prayers of the People

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

OFFERTORY: DOXOLOGY: Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God all creatures here below. Praise God above ye heavenly host. Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Offering Prayer:

Loving God, bless these gifts we now return to you. Bless our hands and our lives that they may serve you and your creation. May your glory and grace shine through everything we give, everything we say, and everything we do. In loving gratitude, we pray. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Monday	Prayer Team	10 am	Zoom
Wednesday	Book study	Noon	Bring lunch

HYMN: **Easter People, Raise Your Voices #304 (vs 1, 3)**

BENEDICTION:

Go to be Easter people; filled with hope and life and love. May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the way of God direct us; and may the love of God go with us as we serve our community this week.

SHALOM: Shalom to you now, Shalom my friends. May God's full mercies, bless you my friends. In all your living and through your loving, Christ be your Shalom, Christ be your Shalom.