

Images of the Cross:

Victory

(Easter Sunday)

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Welcome to our Easter Worship service, whether you are reading the transcript or watching the video. It is so good to be able to worship God together and celebrate resurrection even as we remain physically distant. Please continue to know that you can share prayer requests or praise items with Pastors or Deacons anytime. Please also remember to reach out to others - family, friends, neighbors, co-workers - to check in and stay connected. We will journey through this uncertain season together. For those of you who are watching the video, I am sitting in the sanctuary in order to highlight the beautiful Easter decorations. Special thanks to Brandy Ashley for providing the cross visuals throughout lent, and thank you to everyone who helped make this worship service possible. I hope you all enjoy this week's worship transcript/playlist.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-15 (NIV)

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The Word of God for the People of God
Thanks Be to God!

Sermon: “Public Spectacle”

“Don’t mess with Rome.” That was the message of the cross according to the Romans. You see, crucifixion wasn’t just the death penalty, it was a symbolic assertion of the complete power and dominance of the Roman empire. It was a public and shameful kind of execution reserved mostly for rebel slaves and revolutionary leaders that carried the message: “Don’t mess with Rome and don’t associate with anyone who messes with Rome either or this is how you will end up: as a public spectacle for the whole world to see.

You see, the Roman Empire asserted their power and dominance over others by conquering enemy armies and then celebrating their triumphs in a powerfully symbolic way. According to N.T. Wright: “In a world without electronic or printed media, victorious armies and generals would demonstrate to the folks back home what a splendid victory they had won, by bringing back the ‘spoils of war’. This would consist of all the [loot] they’d captured; a long and bedraggled line of prisoners; and, if possible, right at the end of the line, the king of the nation they’d just defeated. Then, as the climax of the party, the king would be ceremonially executed.”¹

This is what the Romans did to Jesus through crucifying him. Now, the Romans didn’t consider Jesus to be enough of a threat to bring him all the way back to Rome. After all, he didn’t have an army and Pilate wanted to release him, but at the urging of the crowds, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. The Roman soldiers then made a public spectacle of him, beating him, taunting and shaming him, and parading him to a hill where they hung him on a cross with a sign that said “King of the Jews.” The message was clear: “Don’t mess with Rome.” Jesus’ crucifixion was a public spectacle, symbolizing his weakness, the weakness of the Jewish people, and the weakness of the Jewish God in comparison to the might of Rome.

“Don’t mess with COVID-19.” That’s the message circulating around the world today. Because, in a matter of months, the novel coronavirus has spread throughout the whole world, infecting over a million people, and killing almost 100,000 people as of Thursday. In the United States alone, over 1,000 people are dying from the virus each day and that number continues to grow. Estimates suggest that well over 100,000 people in the US could die from this coronavirus, and that’s with all the preventative measures in place.

¹ Wright, Tom. Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 170). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

Don't mess with COVID-19. This virus is unstoppable. It is more powerful than any army, or empire or country, stronger than the Roman Empire in the first century, even stronger than the formidable military might of the United States today. Because this virus can't be blown up. It can't be quickly defeated. A vaccine will take many months at best. And thus, the virus is making a public spectacle of the weakness of humanity. Shutting down the economy. Closing businesses. Separating people and confining them to home. This virus is making a public spectacle of humanity because the virus infecting the world isn't just germs; along with the spread of the germs is also the spread of fear and anxiety and anger and grief and death.

This virus, COVID-19, is exposing humanity. I recently read a poem by Pastor Sarah Bourns from New York. On March 21, she wrote:

"We've all been exposed.
Not necessarily to the virus
(maybe...who even knows 🙄).
We've all been exposed BY the virus.

Corona is exposing us.
Exposing our weak sides.
Exposing our dark sides.
Exposing what normally lays far beneath the surface of our souls,
hidden by the invisible masks we wear.
Now exposed by the paper masks we can't hide far enough behind.

Corona is exposing our addiction to comfort.
Our obsession with control.
Our compulsion to hoard.
Our protection of self.

Corona is peeling back our layers.
Tearing down our walls.
Revealing our illusions.
Leveling our best-laid plans.

Corona is exposing the gods we worship:
Our health
Our hurry

Our sense of security.
Our favorite lies
Our secret lusts
Our misplaced trust.

Corona is calling everything into question:
What is the church without a building?
What is my worth without an income?
How do we plan without certainty?
How do we love despite risk?

Corona is exposing me.
My mindless numbing
My endless scrolling
My careless words
My fragile nerves.

We've all been exposed.
Our junk laid bare.
Our fears made known.
The band-aid torn.
The masquerade done.

So what now? What's left?
Clean hands
Clear eyes
Tender hearts.

What Corona reveals, God can heal.

Come Lord Jesus.
Have mercy on us.”²

As Pastor Sarah says in this poem, we've all been exposed. The weakness of the world, the frailty of humanity has been revealed through the spreading of this virus. The powers of fear, anxiety, and death seem to reign supreme.

² Facebook Post by Sarah Bourns is in New York, New York. on March 21 at 10:11 PM

That was the story of Jesus' crucifixion according to the Romans. That's the story we are living in today.

And yet, the Gospels tell a different story. Paul's letter to the Colossians tells a different story. In Colossians 2:15, Paul writes, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Say what? That doesn't make sense... The cross was supposed to be the victory of the powers and authorities over anyone who stood up to the might of Rome. The cross made a public spectacle of all who hung there, including the Jewish rabbi known as Jesus.

But Paul is telling a different story. Paul is telling the true story of what is really going on at Christ's death on the cross. It is not, in fact, the victory of the powers making a public spectacle of Jesus. It is actually Christ Jesus' victory over the powers. What powers? The powers that reigned supreme throughout the Roman Empire: the powers of fear, violence, and death, to name just a few.

How could this possibly be true? Because Jesus is the embodiment of God, as Paul says in Colossians 2:9. God the creator and sustainer of all things is fully present in the person of Jesus, even Jesus hanging on the cross. And while God hangs on the cross, the strongest powers are exposed: violence, fear, shame, anger, hatred, death. The powers are exposed and thus made into a public spectacle. Why? Because they did their worst to Jesus, just like they had done to countless others throughout history. But Jesus didn't fight back. Jesus received the full force of the powers, disarming them and exposing them for what they really are. And then Jesus took his last breath, a prayer on his lips, and died.

And the world silently waited in darkness. Was this the end of God making all things new? No. Because on the third day, God demonstrated a power that is even stronger than all the worldly powers exposed at Jesus' crucifixion. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. In doing so, God declared ultimate victory over all the powers for all eternity:

- God declared victory over fear.
- God declared victory over hate.
- God declared victory over shame.
- God declared victory over violence.
- God declared victory over death.

On the third day, God declared ultimate victory by raising Jesus to new life. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

That's the true story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It's a story of apparent weakness and frailty and loss, but it's truly a story of strength and hope and life. It's the story of God through Jesus making a public spectacle of all the evil powers, and disarming them for all eternity.

So here we are in 2020, a year that many people thought would be a year of vision, clarity, and hope. Here we are amidst a global pandemic in which the powers of fear, anxiety, violence, hatred, and death seem to reign supreme. It seems like the powers have exposed all of humanity, making a public spectacle of our weakness. We've all been exposed.

And yet, we are people who live by a different story. We are people of faith and hope, not out of blind optimism, but because we follow Jesus and serve the God of life. We know that the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is a story of victory, God's victory over the most powerful forces in the world, even over death itself.

And we can continue to embrace that story even today. Actually, we must embrace that story today. With the pandemic spreading, and along with it fear and anxiety and death, we must dig down deep and declare ourselves to be people of hope. As followers of Jesus, we are resurrection people.

Our great God revealed through Jesus is still alive and active in our world today. God is still working for healing and restoration even amidst the pandemic and fear spreading throughout the world. God is still working to expose the evil powers, disarm them, and make a public spectacle of them. And as followers of Jesus, we can live into this same story. We can join God in this same work.

We can declare our hope in God's power of life through our words and deeds. We can share hope and encouragement with our family and our friends and our co-workers. We can make phone and video calls, write letters and text messages and Facebook posts. We can speak words of encouragement to others and we can also receive needed words of encouragement from others.

We can share hope and life through our deeds. We can sew masks for organizations like Prairie View and Bethesda, We can make comforter tops for MCC. We can deliver groceries to family and friends. We can lift one another up in prayer. We can give generously of our finances. We can spend quality time with our family, reading books, playing outside, doing family devotions, coloring pictures, telling stories, and so much more.

We can join God in making a public spectacle of the powers today by declaring our faith and hope in Jesus' resurrection through our words and deeds. Even as the whole world suffers the effects of COVID-19, creation is groaning with new life. The grass is growing. The birds are singing. The wind is blowing. The sun is shining. The powers of fear and hate and death have been disarmed and defeated. The road ahead will continue to be difficult, but we can travel it together. And together, as God's people of resurrection and hope, we will get through this. Can I get an Amen?

Reflection Questions:

- What destructive powers do you see at work in the world today?
- How did Jesus make a public spectacle of the evil powers through his life, death, and resurrection?
- How does Christ's victory through his death and resurrection give you hope today?
- In what ways are God and God's people working today to make a public spectacle of the powers even amidst the global pandemic?
- In what ways are you following Jesus and declaring your hope in our God of life through your words and deeds?
- What other resources stand out to you as you consider this scripture and sermon (songs, hymns, poems, artwork, etc...)?
- What prayer requests do you have at this time?

Congregational Prayer & Benediction: Pastor Rosie

Today is a glorious day! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!

Today we celebrate Easter with Christians around the globe. This virtual celebration can make us sad; we'd rather be together in person. But I encourage us all to think of this gathering today as an invitation to celebrate a new way of living. We will gather together in person again, and O, what a glorious day that will be! But in our longing to be back in the pews, let us not forget the message of Easter now. We are here and we are together now, and for this we are grateful. As always, if you have a prayer request or want to share a praise item with the Tabor congregation, please contact one of the pastors and we will share it through this medium or via the prayer chain.

Dear friends, Easter calls us to envision assurance. This is not something we can do for ourselves, we cannot will it on our own; rather assurance is what has been given to us through Jesus Christ; through his life, death and resurrection. And now more than ever, even in the midst of forces that pull us toward fear, uncertainty and anxiety, we must now answer a new call – to live with the Easter message of hope and assurance of forgiveness and salvation. Easter calls us to live with new possibilities, new space, new energy for obedience, new waves of joy!

Today as we gather our hearts and minds together in prayer,
-let us be mindful of all that is happening in our lives, our communities and in the world around us. Let us pray.

-This past week we experienced many more deaths due to the covid-19 coronavirus. We are all vulnerable and feel empty-handed as we see it creep into our communities affecting our families, friends and co-workers in one way or another. We lament this reality, and once again we find ourselves at a loss for words to express our anxiety, fear and grief. Lord, hear our prayer.

-Let us be mindful and give thanks for all the front-line workers who risk their lives and health every day to serve and protect others; for teachers who continue to teach online so their students have opportunities for growth and affirmation; for parents and children who are navigating new paths of being family together while sheltering in place. Lord, hear our prayer.

-Let us be mindful of all that happens behind the scenes each week as our staff and volunteers work together to provide meaningful worship; for the good and faithful leadership of Shannon Friesen and Gayle Funk, as they facilitate on-line discussions which lead us to Spirit-led decision making. With gratitude, O Lord, hear our prayer.

-Let us be mindful of those who are suffering, grieving, mourning losses, and dealing with health issues.

-Lord, hear our prayer for Dora Unruh who is scheduled for surgery at St. Francis on Monday to increase blood flow to her leg. Grant her healing, and surround her with peace, hope and comfort.

-We give thanks for the healing that is coming and continues to take place in our body, mind and spirit. Open our eyes and ears to see you and hear you. Open our lips to praise you in the midst of our questions and struggles. Open our hearts to be your people of generosity and gratitude. O Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

God of resurrection power, we give you thanks for the way you reveal yourself to us through the ordinary; through unscheduled conversations, through surprising notes and phone calls, and through the blooming flowers and green grasses, and through warm sun and soft breezes that remind us of your love that enfolds us through times of joy and sorrow. Strengthen our trust and confidence in you. O Lord of Easter, hear our prayer.

We pray for our communities and our world, that we might see the needs among us and be your image bearers. Be our hope, be our strength, be our shield. Grant us your breath of peace in the midst of uncertainty. Fill us with praise and gratitude in the midst of despair. O Loving Father, draw us toward you, toward your way of self-giving love. Draw us away from all that is not love.

We are in what seems like an extended Lenten experience. What do you want us to learn, O Lord? Teach us, forgive us, and transform us. Show us that you are the God who remains with us during our Fridays and Saturdays of waiting and wondering. On this Easter Sunday, break forth as you did on that first Easter morning, bringing us out of our tombs of darkness and into your marvelous light! We pray all these things through the power of your Son, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior. Alleluia, Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Amen.

Receive these words of benediction:

“May hope in the Risen Christ sustain you.
May faith in the Risen Christ strengthen you.
May the joy of the Risen Christ radiate in your lives
today and in the days to come.
Go in the peace of new life. Amen.”