

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church

April 12, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION: I bless the LORD, who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.
– Psalm 16:7-9

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

**Great God of power, we – your Easter people – gather to praise you.
Continue to make your ways known to us; fill us with your presence.
We cannot live apart from you.
Your counsel and instruction are with us day and night –
we have only to open ourselves to your direction.
Inspire in us fullness of joy – we pray –
as we respond in faith to the risen Christ,
and embrace the tasks he sets before us.
Build us up in Christian community,
that we may truly care for one another,
through all of life's trials. Amen.**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Great God of peace,
by whose breath the Holy Spirit enters our lives,
and transforms our community of faith:
Come to us now, whether we have opened – or locked – our doors.
Lead us to faith beyond sight,
trust beyond doubt,
deeds beyond words,
that we may live as your forgiven – and forgiving – children,
leading the way for realization of your peace –
among us, and in us –
and in all the world.
We pray in the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING I Peter 1:3-9

*Our first reading comes from the beginning of Peter's first letter.
It immediately follows the Salutation....*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
kept in heaven for you,
who are being protected by the power of God – through faith –
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
In this you rejoice, even if now – for a little while –
you have had to suffer various trials,
so that the genuineness of your faith –
being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire –
may be found to result in praise, and glory, and honor
when Jesus Christ is revealed.
Although you have not seen him, you love him;
and even though you do not see him now,
you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable
and glorious joy,
for you are receiving the outcome of your faith,
the salvation of your souls.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING John 20:19-31

Pastor

Our second reading comes from the Gospel of John, chapter twenty.

*As the reading begins, the risen Christ has appeared to Mary Magdalene,
and she has – obediently – told the disciples what he said to her.*

*But – nevertheless – they have gone home, locked the doors,
and – essentially – are cowering in fear....*

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked –
for fear of the Jews –
Jesus came – and stood among them –
and said, "Peace be with you."

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,
and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side,
I will not believe."

A week later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.
Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them,
and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it in my side.
Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples,
which are not written in this book.
But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah,
the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

MEDITATION "The Case of the Three Locked Rooms"

Narrator: The scene is the rooms of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson
at 221-B Baker Street, in London.

Watson has just entered to find Holmes deep in thought,
wrapped in a cloud of pipe smoke.

He tries not to disturb him, but – in a moment –
the detective rouses himself, and speaks to his friend....

Holmes: Well, Watson, I don't mind telling you
that I seem finally to have met a challenge
that is truly worthy of my skills.

Perhaps – if I succeed in this –
you will be able to record my strangest case,
a baffling un-murder.

Watson: Good heavens, Holmes!
Surely you've solved many puzzling murders.
Can this one possibly be more obscure than the Case of the

Holmes: Please pay attention, Watson.
I said that it appears to be an un-murder.
The body has disappeared.

And – to make it more difficult –
we must begin our investigation with a locked room mystery.

Watson: Ah, yes, a classic!
Like "The Adventure of the Speckled Band."
The young woman was found dead in a room
with the doors and windows locked from the inside.

Holmes: That was indeed puzzling,
but the situation here is quite different.

Part of the problem – as I have said –
is that there was no body to be found.

And the locked room was unlocked.

Watson: But.....

Holmes: Permit me to explain.
We are concerned here with one Jesus of Nazareth,
a man who had been accused of crimes,
condemned to death and executed.

His death was certified by the authorities.
The body was placed in a sealed and guarded tomb.

But investigation has shown that the body
is no longer there and is nowhere to be found.

Watson: Clearly the body was stolen.
He must have had accomplices.

Holmes: So you would think.
But the women – who had found the tomb empty –
claim that they had given no thought
to having the stone rolled away from the entrance.

And there is reason to believe that the body left the tomb
while it was still sealed.

Watson: But, Holmes, that is preposterous!
How could such a thing happen?

Holmes: You know my methods, Watson.
As you recorded my words –
in your account of that earlier case –
that you called “The Sign of Four”:

“When you have eliminated the impossible,
whatever remains – however improbable – must be the truth.”

Watson: But, Holmes –
surely a corpse vanishing from a sealed tomb is impossible!

The laws of nature forbid it!
Such a thing would overthrow all common sense!

Holmes: Perhaps so.
Yet that is merely the beginning, Watson.

That is only the first of the locked rooms
with which we must contend.

Permit me to continue....

Watson: Good heavens!
Now do we have another corpse in a room locked from the inside?

Holmes: No, Watson.

The one with whom we have to do is far more subtle than that.

This room was indeed locked from the inside,
but – within it – were 10 living – but terrified – men,
who had been accomplices
of the man who was executed.

We know that his death had left them completely disillusioned,
and deathly afraid that their own arrests and executions
were imminent.

Watson: They had good reason to be afraid and to lock the doors.

Holmes: Perhaps.

But they claim that this Jesus appeared to them there –
even though the doors were locked.

They say that he spoke with them,
and that they identified him.

Watson: It could only have been a dream.
Wish fulfillment.
A hallucination of some sort.

Holmes: Good old Watson, the common-sense medical man!

But I'm afraid it won't do.
It's too easy.

They claim that they saw the wounds resulting from his execution.

And, a mass hallucination of 10 men would be extremely unlikely.

Watson: Then there had to be a secret entrance,
some hidden passage by which an imposter came
and imposed himself on them.

Holmes: I have made a thorough investigation,
and have found no such thing.

Watson: Good heavens, Holmes!
This is incredible.

Am I to believe that a dead man disappeared from a sealed tomb
and appeared alive in another locked room?

He would have to be able to overcome the limitations of space and matter!

Holmes: Precisely!

Watson: But, Holmes, there is a much simpler explanation.
The women were hysterical.
The accomplices lied.

Holmes: Watson, I am afraid that it is a conceit of our sex
that women are more likely to be fearful
and uncertain than men,
and to become hysterical upon the slightest provocation.

Those women steeled themselves –
to walk through the darkness to the tomb of a criminal –
when all the men were afraid to show themselves.

And the accomplices – as I have told you –
were disillusioned and terrified.

They ran away when Jesus was arrested.

Cui bono — what did they have to gain by making up such a story?

They would have only subjected themselves to new dangers by doing so.

But you have not heard the third part of the puzzle.
There was yet another, a third, locked room.

Watson: This is too much!
Now do we have a corpse in a room locked from the inside?

Holmes: No, Watson.

If I were faced only with a physical problem,
the case would not be so challenging.

What has made me the greatest scientific detective of all time
is not merely my perception of physical clues –
and their significance –
but my knowledge of how people think.

And that is the mystery of the third locked room.

As I have explained,
Jesus' followers had deserted and denied him.

Some of them saw him die.

They had lost faith in his cause and were afraid for their own lives.

They were locked up within themselves –
as if in a psychological prison.

Those men were hopeless.

Can you imagine them suddenly hatching a plot,
making up a preposterous story,
and then going out in public to proclaim —
in defiance of the authorities —
that this dead man was alive
and was the nation's rightful king?

I think not.

No, Watson, I'm afraid the conclusion is inescapable:
Someone broke into their locked rooms.

Watson: Forgive my slowness, Holmes.
I'm afraid I don't understand.

Holmes: Surely, Watson, you know from your medical practice that guilt, fear, and anxiety can paralyze a person.

Those followers of Jesus were in such a state.

Their world had been shattered,
and they had crawled into a corner to hide –
like wounded dogs.

What reached them there?

What gave them the courage to start announcing that this Jesus –
who was executed and apparently failed in his task –
had in fact succeeded?

Watson: Perhaps it was some form of mind over matter, Holmes.
Maybe it was a dramatic instance of positive thinking.

Holmes: Permit me to say that you
have not yet grasped the full scope of the problem, Watson.

Those men had no positive thoughts.

Their minds had been beaten down.

And – I remind you – there were three sealed rooms:
the tomb of Jesus,
the room where his accomplices gathered,
and their psychological prisons.

Can that be coincidence?

Watson: Good heavens, Holmes! Do you mean.....

Holmes: Yes, Watson. The dead man was alive.

And there is perhaps some reason to believe that he is still alive.

I have received reports of other hopeless people –
beaten down by life –
for whom hope has been restored,
and whose lives are being changed.

Locked rooms are still being opened.

Watson: But, Holmes!

Amazing as this is,
 permit me to point out that you have not explained these mysteries.

How could the man once dead be alive?

How could he have penetrated solid walls to appear to his accomplices?

And how could their thoughts and beliefs
 have been so profoundly changed?

Holmes: Yes, Watson, those mysteries remain.

And, I confess that I have not yet solved them.

But there is a much greater, a much deeper, mystery:

Since all of this has happened –
 we must ask –
 who is this Jesus?

Narrator: Friends, the question of the identity of Jesus
is a question that each one of us must answer.

Indeed, everything – in this life, and in the life to come –
 depends upon how we answer that very question!

Perhaps – as was the case with two of his first followers –
 we also will recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread....

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Adapted from the Second Helvetic Confession (1561)

Christian faith is not an opinion or human conviction, but a most firm trust and a clear and steadfast assent of the mind, and then a most certain apprehension of the truth of God. This truth is presented in the Scriptures and in the Apostles' Creed. It includes an apprehension of God himself – the greatest good – and especially of God's promise, and of Christ who is the fulfillment of all promises.

This faith is a pure gift of God which God alone – of his grace – gives to his elect according to his measure. God does this by the Holy Spirit, by means of the preaching of the Gospel and steadfast prayer.

This same faith keeps us in the service we owe to God and neighbor, strengthens our patience in adversity, fashions and makes a true confession, and – in a word – brings forth good fruit of all kinds and good works. To God be the glory! Amen.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

In Jesus Christ, God came to us to dispel any mystery about his love for us.

And, Christ's resurrection – his being set free from the bonds of death – sets us free from all the locked rooms of our lives.

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....