

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
10:30 AM Worship – Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025

SILENT PREPARATION: If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. I Corinthians 15:19-22

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O Lord, our strength and our might, who has made glad songs of victory to be sung in the tents of the righteous: May the gates of righteousness be opened to us this day through the reading and hearing of your Holy Word, that we may enter through them, and give all thanks and praise to you; this glorious Easter morning, and even forevermore. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

I Peter 2:4-10

*Our First Scripture Reading comes from the First Letter of Peter.
In it, Peter describes an appropriate response
to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ...*

Come to him [that is, to Jesus], a living stone,
though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight,
and like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood,
to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,"
and "A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you
out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 24:1-12

*Our reading from Luke's Gospel
is an account of the events of that first Easter morning.*

*As the reading begins,
the women who have come from Galilee have rested on the sabbath –
according to the commandment...*

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn,
they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
but when they went in, they did not find the body.

While they were perplexed about this,
suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.
The women were terrified and bowed 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, but has risen.
Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,
that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners,
and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb,
they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,
and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.
But these words seemed to them an idle tale,
and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves;
then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

SERMON

“A Stone’s Eye View of Easter”

It has been said that *“the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed,
and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.”*

And – throughout that *progressive revelation* –
a revelation that *occurred over the course of many centuries* –
a significant number of stones have been involved,
at *key times*, and in *very special places*.

Indeed – the fact is – stones have been *first-hand witnesses* to God’s grace,
on many, quite extraordinary, occasions!

Today, we will pick up the **stones’** witness to God’s grace on **Palm Sunday** –
the beginning of the **Holy Week**,
whose culmination we celebrate on this, joyous, **Easter morning!**

Here, one such stone’s testimony begins.....

You *had to have been there* to understand.....

It was an *extremely festive* occasion!

Jesus was approaching **Jerusalem**,
and people were becoming very excited about his deeds of power.

They were throwing their garments in the path;
and voicing loud praises to **God**:

*“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord”!
“Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

Well, I’ll tell you why *that day is so special* to me:

In the middle of all that tumult – all of that commotion,
Jesus Christ – the **Son of God** – the **Messiah** –
the **One** without whom *nothing was made that was made* –
noticed *me*, and my friends!

We were there, in our *usual place*:
along the *side of the pathway* that **Jesus**' procession was traveling –
as he approached the city of **Jerusalem**.

Now, I've already told you that the multitude was *loudly praising God*
for the *great works* that **Jesus** had been doing.

But – *suddenly* –
some **Pharisees** in the crowd *dared to challenge Jesus*:

They said, "**Teacher, order your disciples to stop!!!**"

And it was then – *taking notice of us* alongside the road –
that **Jesus** responded:
**"I tell you, if these [that is, the people] were silent,
the stones would shout out."**

And – I want to tell you –
it was a *very proud moment* for us stones:
we were recognized as potential instruments of worship!

Indeed, **Jesus**' recognition placed us right in league
with some of our fellow stones –
who had *also been involved* in **God's** saving work.

I'm *sure that you have heard* of many of them:

The stone that **Jacob** first used as a *pillow* –
and – then – turned into an *altar*.... (Genesis 28:18)

The rock out of which **Moses**
obtained water for the **Children of Israel** –
while they wandered in the wilderness.... (Exodus 17:6)

The two tablets of stone on which the **Law** –
the **Ten Commandments** – were written.... (Exodus 31:18)

The five smooth stones – selected by **David**,
to fight the giant **Goliath**.... (I Samuel 17:40)

There was also – when **Daniel** was *thrown into the lion's den* – (6:16ff)
a stone placed at the mouth of the den to seal **Daniel's** fate.

That stone – then – was a witness to **God's salvation of Daniel!**

And – centuries later – (Luke 4:3-4)
there was a stone present in the *wilderness* –
where **Satan** tempted the famished **Jesus**:

Satan suggested that Jesus *turn it into a loaf of bread*.

But that stone remained a stone – bearing witness to **Jesus' faithfulness** –
his obedience to the course that **God** had set before him.

Now, **I am not sure** what the **Pharisees** thought –
when they heard **Jesus'** words about stones *shouting out*;
words which – by the way –
had *also been spoken* by the prophet **Habukkuk**. (2:11)

But, I know what I thought when I heard the **Pharisees'** challenge to **Jesus**:
I thought that the Pharisees should have known better!

After all, *they* were the local experts on both **prophecy**, and **religious tradition!**

You see, what **Jesus** was doing on that occasion had been *carefully planned!*

Prophets had a *regular custom* –
which they used, again and again –
when their spoken words *had not* had the desired effect:

That is, they resorted to a *dramatic action* –
to put their vital message *into a picture* –
a picture which *no one* could fail to see!

Nor had **Jesus** left things until the last minute.

He *had an arrangement* with the **owners of the colt** –
“**The Lord needs it**” was a *password* –
sufficient to secure its release.

And, **Jesus**’ action – in entering **Jerusalem** in this way –
was an act of *defiance* – and *great courage*:

By this time – as **John 11:57** intimates –
there was a price on **Jesus**’ head.

So – if **Jesus** had to go up to **Jerusalem** at all –
he could have *slipped in quietly*, and *unseen*.

But – instead – he approached the city in such a way
that *every eye* was focused on him!

And, it was a *deliberate claim* to be **king**,
an *intentional fulfilling* of a picture –
a *picture painted* by the prophet **Zechariah**: (9:9)

**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!**

**“Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”**

And – by *riding on a donkey’s colt* –
Jesus *further identified himself* as a *king of love, and of peace*:

Kings who *rode on horseback* – on the other hand – were *going off to war*.

It was as if **Jesus** was making *one last appeal*;
“**Even now, will you not take me as your king?**”

But – unfortunately – the **crowd** wanted a *conquering, military hero*,
one who would *restore the kingdom to Israel*.

And, the **Pharisees** *did not* want **Jesus** at all –
he was a threat to their own, religious kingdom;
they ruled the ritualistic roost, here and now.

And – therein – lies the *great sadness* of the situation:

They *all missed* the presence of **God** *in their midst!*

But, back to *my story*....

As **Jesus** began his descent from the **Mount of Olives**,
he had a *magnificent view* of **Jerusalem**.

The entire city – in *all its grandeur* – was stretched out before him.

But – knowing *what would soon happen* to it –
Jesus was compelled to *stop*, and *weep*.

I can still hear *his solemn words*:
“If you, even you,
had only recognized – on this day –
the things that make for peace!

But – now – they are hidden from your eyes...”

Can you *imagine the sadness* of “*what might have been*”?

Jesus’ words imply *culpable responsibility*:
Neither the **Pharisees** – nor the **people** – *should have been blind*
to the things which belonged to their peace!

They should have been *aware of* – and *involved in* –
what **God** was trying to do in their midst.

Indeed, the **Prophet Daniel** had made a specific, related, **prediction!** (9:25)

And – while he paused there –

Jesus pronounced an *almost unspeakable judgment* on that great city.

“(your enemies) will not leave within you one stone upon another;
because you *did not recognize*
the *time of your visitation* from **God.**”

Perhaps – *now* – you can understand

why I said that it was *such a sad occasion*, as well.

There was – of course –

all the *needless pain* – *and human suffering* – that would ensue,
because **Jesus’** peaceful way was rejected.

And – *not only that* – the functional – and worshipful – existence
of a *vast multitude* of *my fellow stones* –

the stones which – *together* – *comprised* the **Temple** –
was soon to be thrown into *utter chaos*, and *confusion*:

Not one stone would remain upon another...

Truly, the tears of **Jesus** were **God’s** tears over *needless pain*, and *suffering* –
pain and suffering which are *bound to occur* –
whenever the time of **God’s** visitation *is missed!*

Later – as **Holy Week** unfolds – **Jesus** acts as host at a **Passover table**.

And – while there – he *tells his companions* what is coming later than night:
one of them *will betray him*,
and, another will deny him – *three times!*

Next, **Jesus** leads them out – from that **Passover meal** – to the **Mount of Olives**.

“Then he withdrew from them – about a *stone’s throw* –
knelt down, and prayed....”

(Luke 22:41)

That stone was there – to listen to **Jesus’ anguished prayer** –
as he *seeks the strength needed* to complete his life’s work.

His deepest emotions are laid bare.....
and a stone bears witness to it all.

Now, you may well be asking:

“How do you know all of this?

“After all, you have admitted that you are just a stone...”

Well, we stones have been around a *very long time*.

And, we *are not subject* to the same **rules of decay** that pertain to you mortals –
earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and all of that....

If fact, *only one particular* **group of mortals**

ever *had the audacity* to make the claim that **“time was on their side...”**

Do you *remember the name* of that group?

The Rolling Stones!

Of course, if we are subjected to a lot of *running water* –
or *continuous abrasion* –
we *can* wear a bit.

But – nevertheless – some of us who were around in **Jesus’ day** *are still here!*

[If you have ever visited the **Holy Land**, you probably already knew *that!*]

You might even say that we stones are *subject matter experts*
when it comes to **time**.

And – because of that – I can *share a confidence* with you –
one that was told to me by another stone –
a *rather large, round one*, actually –
a stone that *had the honor of* protecting **Jesus’ body** –
after he *had given his life* for the sin of the world.

That large round stone was there –
on the **first day** of the week – the **third day** after **Jesus' death** –
when the *women came to his tomb* at dawn.

They had **spices** and **ointments** – with which to anoint his body –
but they find that large round stone –
inexplicably rolled away from the tomb's opening. (Luke 24:2)

Jesus' body is gone, and the women are *perplexed*, and *fearful*.

But **two figures** – in dazzling clothes – then announce that *he has risen*,
and they *remind the women to remember* all that **Jesus** had told them.

The women *do* remember, and – then –
they *leave* the tomb,
to *proclaim* what has been made to known to them.

And, that large, round stone – being *right there, on the scene* –
bears witness to it all:
the confusion...,
the fear...,
the mystery...,
the announcement.,
the recollection...,
the affirmation...,
and – finally – the commandment to *go*, and *tell*....

And, surely – if the women were *somehow silenced* – on that wondrous morning –
that very stone would have *shouted out!*

In any event – based on its experience,
that other – very large – stone assured me that the words of the **Psalmist**
had been *completely fulfilled* in the **Risen Christ**:

“*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*” (118:22)

And – as you might imagine –

all we stones now *gladly* join the **Psalmist** in exclaiming,

**“This is the Lord’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.”**

(118:23)

Indeed, it is a *great honor* for us

to be mentioned in a metaphor which describes **Jesus Christ** –
the **Lord – and Savior** – of *all* creation!

But – the **Good News** is – there is a *blessing in all of this* for you **humans**, as well:

You – too – can become *useful* and *productive* – like stones –
if you are *faithful followers* of **Jesus!**

Remember these words from **I Peter**:

**“Come to him – that is, Jesus Christ –
a living stone, though rejected by mortals
yet chosen and precious in God’s sight,
and, like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood,
to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

**“For it stands in scripture:
See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
whoever believes in him will not be put shame.”**

So, if you want to take advantage of this **unique opportunity** –
to be *functional, living, stones* –
and to become a *holy, sacrificing, priesthood* –
you have two, major responsibilities:

First, **priests** represent the people before **God** –
by the work of **intercessory prayer**.

This can be done *anywhere...*, by *anyone...*, and at any *time...*!

Second, **priests represent God** in the **lives of other people** –
primarily, through *acts of loving care*, and *self-less service*.

And – in just the short time I’ve been with you this morning –
I’ve *noticed many opportunities* for this type of activity, as well:

Ushering, Greeting, and Assisting in Worship....

Singing – to the **glory of God**

Serving as **Church Officers.....**

Joining in **Mission Outreach....**

Making new friends, and *inviting* them,
or – better yet, *bringing* them –
to *join you* in worship....

What a wealth of possibilities!

In closing, I extend to you *my very best wishes*
in your efforts to become living stones.

It is a very *high calling*,
just as is the *calling to become a priest* –
a *faithful member* of the **priesthood of all believers**.

Indeed, **baptism** is the *believers’ ordination* –
for service in the name of **Jesus Christ!**

And – *as mortals* – make *good use of your time*;
the *present moment* is the *only time you truly have!*

Finally, *always be ready* for the **day of God's visitation**.

Indeed, you *can always* experience **Jesus presense**:

he is with you whenever you *pray* –
or perform an *act of ministry* – in his name....

And – if you are ever near **Jerusalem** – *look for us*.

We'll be in our *usual places* – alongside the road –
waiting for **Jesus** to return,
and we will – most certainly – be *ready to praise* him.

The **words** *are already* on our lips:

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord."

Amen, and Amen!

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AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Pastor

From the Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

One: What benefit do we receive from "the resurrection" of Christ?

All: First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, that he might make us share in the righteousness he has obtained for us through his death. Second, we too are now raised by his power to a new life. Third, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge to us of our own blessed resurrection.

One: What comfort does "the resurrection of the body" give you?

All: That after this life my soul shall be immediately taken up to Christ, its Head, and that this flesh of mine, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and be conformed to the glorious body of Christ. That, since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall possess, after this life, perfect blessedness, which no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor any heart conceived, and thereby praise God forever.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Pastor

Go forth as living stones, being built up in the faith, and building up others – through intercessory prayer, and acts of loving service; doing all in the name of our Rock, and our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory, and honor, and praises – in this life, and in the world to come! Amen.