

GATHERING

Welcome

Call to Worship

One: Our God is a God of power and strength!

All: God has created each of us with His tender care.

One: Our God is a God of majesty and awe! We Praise you Lord for the new pictures from space that are reminders of the grandeur of your creation!

All: God walks with each of us, every step of the way.

One: Our God is a God of glory and wonder!

All: God loves each of us unconditionally and completely.

One: Our God calls us, each and every one of us, by name.

All: God calls each of us to unite in worship together, remembering that we are all His children!

One: So let us praise and worship God together.

Gathering Song: Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee, Who wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,

Though the eye of sinfulness Thy glory may not see,

Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee, perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber and John Bacchus Dykes, 1826***

PRAISING

Prayer of Adoration

Lord God Almighty, creator of all things. We lift our hearts, souls, minds and our very lives to you in thanksgiving for the wonders and beauty of creation. We give thanks for the new images of earth and the moon from the Artemis2 Astronauts that remind us how vast and far reaching is your creation.

How we praise you for your unfailing love that sustains us through every trial in life and guards us through each joy.

We thank you that you care for people and creatures alike.

All the earth finds shelter under your wings. You feed each of us from the abundance of your house.

Give us eyes to see oh God, that YOU and you alone are the fountain of life and you are the light by which we see through the darkness. Lift our spirits to worship you in love and truth and light this day. Amen

Song of Adoration: What a Beautiful Name

You were the Word at the beginning, one with God the Lord Most High.

Your hidden glory in creation, now revealed in You, our Christ.

What a beautiful Name it is, what a beautiful Name it is,
the Name of Jesus Christ, my King.
What a beautiful Name it is, nothing compares to this.
What a beautiful Name it is, the Name of Jesus.

You didn't want heaven without us, so Jesus, You brought heaven down.
My sin was great, Your love was greater. What could separate us now?

What a wonderful Name it is, what a wonderful Name it is,
the Name of Jesus Christ, my King.
What a wonderful Name it is, nothing compares to this.
What a wonderful Name it is, the Name of Jesus.
What a wonderful Name it is, the Name of Jesus.

Death could not hold You, the veil tore before You; You silenced the boast of sin and grave.
The Heavens are roaring the praise of Your glory, for You are raised to life again.
You have no rival, You have no equal; now and forever, God, You reign.
Yours is the Kingdom, Yours is the Glory; Yours is the Name above all names.

What a powerful Name it is, what a powerful Name it is,
the Name of Jesus Christ, my King.
What a powerful Name it is, nothing can stand against.
What a powerful Name it is, the Name of Jesus.

Brooke Ligertwood**

BELONGING

Kids on the Steps

Call to Confession: Teach Us Your Ways

Teach us Your ways, teach us Your ways
As we learn from one another, learn to love each other
Teach us Your ways.

Teach us to give, teach us to give
Give ourselves for one another, learn to love each other
Teach us to give.

Teach us to weep, teach us to weep
Let us weep with one another, learn to love each other
Teach us to weep.

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
Let us learn from one another, learn to love each other
Teach us Your ways.

**Isaac Wardell, Leslie Jordan, Orlando Palmer and Paul Zach

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

Lord as we confess before you and one another, open our hearts to the ways we turn away from you and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord have mercy on us! As we walk through this season of Easter help us to NEVER forget the immensity of your sacrifice and so live in a way where we show our gratefulness each and every hour of every day.

Help us to grasp and cling to your truth and light, to hold fast to you God. We confess that we do not love one another as we should, as you taught us to love. Forgive us and help us to let go of our sin. Help us to love better, with greater kindness, with greater clarity of how you love us. Reminding us again and again that we are called to be like Jesus.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Prompt us in the truth that you gave your life to forgive us, to break through our darkest night with the comfort and power of your light and your love.

Thank you Father that none of us can escape your love or do anything that can set us outside your will to forgive and embrace us. We thank you for your mercy on us and your promise that what you have set free is FREE indeed.

-Amen.

STEWADING

Invitation to Offering

Rejoice! He Is Risen!

FPC Bell Choir, Arr. Cathy Moglebust

FORMING

Sermon: Acts 15: 1-35

Sermon—Holy Humor Sunday

Jane Bahls

Good morning! It's good to see you here on this first Sunday after Easter. For many churches, this is one of the lowest attendance Sundays of the year— perhaps because Easter is such a big event for the church, and the pews are packed, and then people feel they can skip a week or two. So like I said, it's good to see you here.

I wanted to tell you a story I heard about a ship that hit some rocks. The ship was sinking. The captain called the crew together and asked if anyone knew how to pray. A sailor stepped forward. "I do, sir." The captain responded, "Good. You pray, The rest of us are going to put on life jackets, because we're one short."

Speaking of prayer: a woman invited quite a few people over for dinner. She put a lot of effort into the preparations, but finally the guests had arrived and were gathered around the table. She turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Honey, would you like to say the blessing before we eat?"

The daughter replied, "I don't know what to say,"

"Oh, honey, just say what you hear Mommy say."

"OK," said the daughter. "Dear God, why did I invite all these people over for dinner?"

In the early centuries of the church, the Sunday after Easter was called Bright Sunday, or Holy Humor Sunday. It's celebrating the great joke that God played on Satan. At the crucifixion of Christ, the devil thought he'd won. And then God raised Jesus from the dead. St. Augustine called it "Risus Paschalis," for the "Easter Laugh." Both the Roman church and the Eastern churches celebrated this day with humor. People played tricks on each other, told jokes, sang and danced and even threw water on each other.

This tradition went on for centuries, and the new Protestant churches joined the party. Then in the the 17th century, Pope Clement X banned the celebration. Perhaps it wasn't religious enough. Over time, the practice fell out of favor. But in recent years, many churches have reinstated Holy Humor Sunday. I read about one church in North Carolina where everyone in attendance got a paper bag with a silly costume piece, a kazoo and a joke. They put on their costumes and read their jokes, and everyone had fun. There's a publication called the Joyful Noiseletter that promotes Holy Humor Sunday and collects stories of ways congregations have fun on this day. So, maybe next year at First Pres....

I'll mention it to Pastor Dan. He isn't here this Sunday, as he enjoys a well-deserved family vacation in Arizona. But it reminds me of a story I heard of a pastor who woke up one beautiful Sunday morning and wanted nothing so much as to go golfing. So he called the associate pastor, faked a coughing fit, and said he was too sick to make it to church. Please carry on without me, And then he threw his clubs in the trunk and drove to a town a safe distance away to hit the links. On his first drive, he got a hole in one! This was incredible! The pastor hit two more holes in one and had the best golf score of his life. He couldn't believe it. He prayed, "God, why did you let me have such an amazing game of golf? You know what I did this morning." And a voice from heaven replied, "Who can you tell?"

All this actually is related to our Scripture for the day. It's a long passage from the 15th chapter of the book of Acts, a story that begins in the newly formed church in Antioch, which was north up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where Paul and Barnabas had been preaching. The church was full of Gentiles who had received the good news and become believers in Christ.

Some men arrived from Jerusalem, most likely Pharisees who had converted to Christianity. These men told the fledgling believers that they had to be circumcised, which was a commitment to keep all of the laws of Moses. According to Rabbinical interpretation, there are 613 commandments in the Torah, which includes 365 prohibitions and 248 obligations, or positive commandments. So trying to keep them all would be a pretty heavy lift for young believers. Let's pick up the story there, at the beginning of Acts 15.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Notice that the council spent a lot of time discussing the issue and listening carefully to each speaker. That's a good model for civic discourse as well as church governance.

More to the point, Peter pointed out that nobody ever had actually succeeded in keeping all those laws and obligations—so why should these Gentile believers be expected to bear that yoke?

In the end, James quoted a passage from the prophets predicting that God would call Gentiles by name to be his people. Then he said,

19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues."

Here James was recommending a minimum requirement to help the fledgling believers steer clear of pagan practices that might have been in their background. Don't drink blood or eat animals that have been strangled so as to retain the blood, and avoid associating with idols and sexual impurity. So they wrote the letter and sent it with Judas Barsabbas and Silas, who were two representatives of the church in Jerusalem. I'll pick it up at verse 30.

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brethren to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

This is the word of the Lord.

So it was a happy ending, and God's grace won out. But what does all this have to do with us today?

Quite a lot, actually. Because no matter how often people hear about salvation by faith, the old works salvation keeps creeping in there. It just seems we should be doing something to earn our own redemption. So the more legalistic churches create rules and regulations for the Christian life, and people grow up believing that God is sitting up in heaven with some big ledger, keeping track of what people do wrong, and whether it's balanced out by what they do right. It's a pretty grim sort of religion.

Which reminds me of another story. Apparently Groucho Marx once got off an elevator and ran into a clergyman. The pastor approached him, shook his hand and said, "I want to thank you for all the joy you've brought into the world." Groucho replied, "Thank you, Reverend. And I want to thank you for all the joy you've taken out of it."

Because trying to get brownie points with God isn't much fun. And it's definitely not what Jesus preached.

Sometimes we just can't help ourselves— earning favor with God is so deeply imbedded in our culture. "I must be living right—I got such beautiful weather for my picnic." Or "I'd better do something good, because I think I'm in trouble with the man upstairs." Some people are convinced that they could never go to heaven because of all the bad things they've done or their history of addiction or the fact that they've never prayed much.

But that brings us back to the Easter Laugh. Because Christ gave his life to free us from all the laws and rules and regulations that we couldn't keep anyway. When Jesus was raised from the dead, not only did he defeat Satan, but he opened up a life of freedom and joy for all who believe. And that's worth celebrating. Amen?

Song of Response: Let Us Be Known

Let us be known by our love
In every word, in every deed honor the Son
Let our light shine in every eye
Let us be known by our love

For the glory of the Father
For the glory of the Son
For the glory of the Spirit
Let us be known by our love

Let us be known by our joy
In every home, in every heart sing to the Lord
Let our life show goodness and hope
Let us be known by our joy

For the glory of the Father
For the glory of the Son
For the glory of the Spirit
Let us be known by our joy

Let us be known by our peace
In every town, in every tribe Jesus is King
Let us go forth, heal and restore
Let us be known by our peace

For the glory of the Father
For the glory of the Son
For the glory of the Spirit
Let us be known by our peace

Micah Massey, Ryan Flanigan, Matt Armstrong and Nate Moore**

Prayers of the People

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your gift of the Holy Spirit, who is here to guide and direct us and help us to find our way. Give us a passion for your written word so we may be directed rightly when the path is clouded with doubt or uncertainty. We can never stop learning from you and the Holy Spirit. Give us ears to hear her voice and eyes to see the way she leads us.

Lord we lift up your church around the world...

Fill it with all truth, with all peace. Where we are corrupt, purify us; where we are in error, direct us; where in anything we are amiss, reform us. Where we are right, strengthen us; where we are in want, provide for us; where we are divided, reunite us; for the sake of Jesus Christ our savior.

Father we pray for our country and the church within...

We are ALL your children. You have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for truth and justice to confront one another without hatred or bitterness and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect.

-Lord we pray for our leaders and ask for an end to war.

Let us never forget that our role as your children is to discern your will and do it and to uphold whatever is true and just and good; following in your example while always letting LOVE guide our actions, and hope fill our hearts.

One: Now, let us pray the Lord's prayer together

ALL: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. AMEN

SENDING

Sending Song: Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me

What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer.

There is no more for heaven now to give.

He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom,

My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace.

To this I hold: my hope is only Jesus

for my life is wholly bound to his.

Oh, how strange and divine, I can sing, all is mine!

Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The night is dark, but I am not forsaken,

for by my side, the Savior, he will stay.

I labor on in weakness and rejoicing,

for in my need, his power is displayed.

To this I hold: my Shepherd will defend me;

through the deepest valley he will lead.

Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome:

Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven.

The future sure, the price, it has been paid.
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon,
and he was raised to overthrow the grave.
To this I hold: my sin has been defeated!
Jesus now and ever is my plea.
Oh, the chains are released; I can sing, I am free!
Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

With every breath, I long to follow Jesus,
for he has said that he will bring me home.
And day by day, I know he will renew me
until I stand with joy before the throne.
To this I hold: my hope is only Jesus.
All the glory evermore to him.
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat:
Yet not I, but through Christ in me

Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson and Michael Farren**

Benediction

Leading in Worship This Morning:

Liturgist: Lesley Smith

Kids on the Steps: Melinda Hickey

Sermon: Jane Bahls

Musicians: Joselyn Thomsen, Emma Thackston, Madison Spencer
Sound and Video Techs: Zane Reneau, Dan McCaffery, Pat Scott

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Church Secretary: Lori Wheeler

Bell Choir Director: Tomi Kent

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Preaching Pastor, Blackfoot Church of the Potomac: Natalie Mauer