

SERMON FOR EASTER SUNDAY 2014

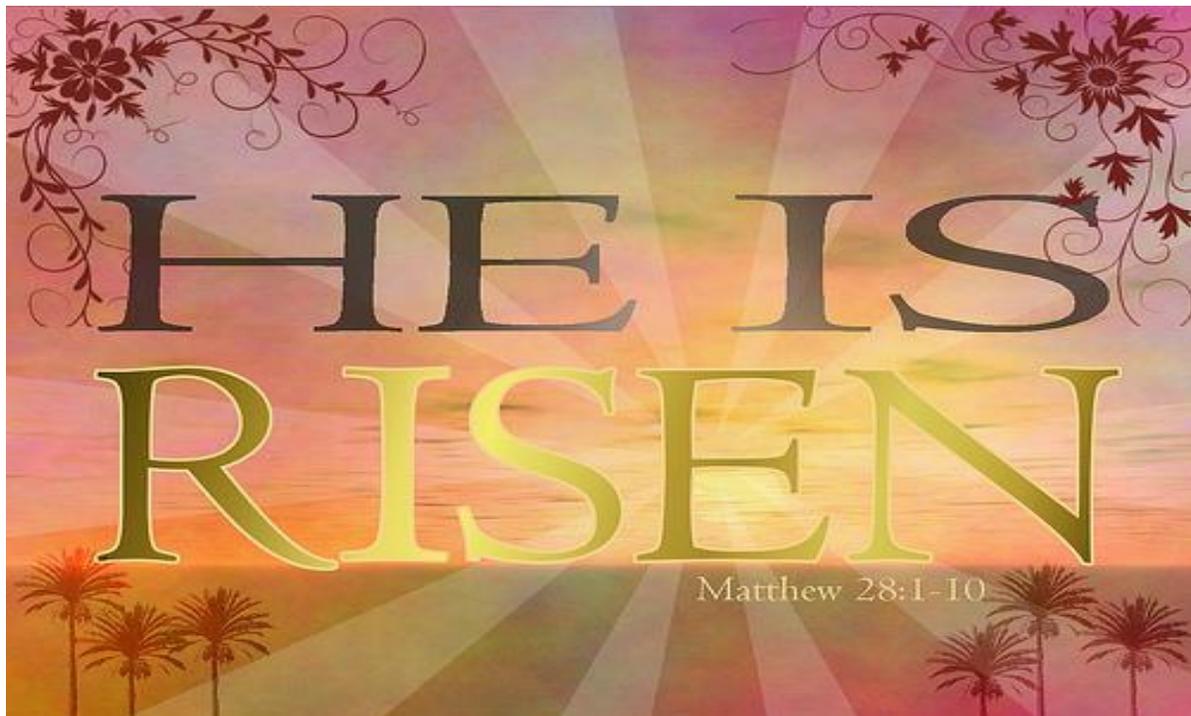
April 20, 2014 – 10:30AM Joint Worship Service

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC

Scripture: Acts 10:34-43; **Matthew 28:1-10**

Message: ***"Turning Our Sorrows into Joy!"***

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Gathering in the Word

Prayer: Great GOD of Light, you come to us while it is deepest night; GOD of Life, you overcome the power of death. Alleluia! We come this Easter morning from the shadows to stand in your holy presence—unafraid. Alleluia! Fill our hearts with joy on this day of resurrection. Alleluia! Amen!

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

This is the traditional Easter greeting for Easter morning worship around the world! Easter is the pinnacle and highest point of the church year! The reason we gather this morning on Easter Sunday is to worship our GOD whose love and aloha is stronger than hate and commitment to live that can overcome death!

Hearing the Word

1st Lesson: Matthew 28:1-10 (The VOICE Bible)

28 After the Sabbath, as the light of the next day, the first day of the week, crept over Palestine, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb *to keep vigil*.² Earlier there had been an earthquake. A messenger of the Lord had come down from heaven and had gone to the grave. He rolled away the stone and sat down on top of it.³ He *veritably* glowed. He was vibrating with light. *His clothes were light, white like transfiguration*, like fresh snow.⁴ The soldiers guarding the tomb were terrified. They froze like stone.

⁵ The messenger spoke to the women, *to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*.

Messenger of the Lord: Don't be afraid. I know you are here keeping watch for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ But Jesus is not here. He was raised, just as He said He would be. Come over to the grave, and see for yourself. ⁷ And then go straight to His disciples, and tell them He's been raised from the dead and has gone on to Galilee. You'll find Him there. Listen carefully to what I am telling you.

⁸ The women were both terrified and thrilled, and they quickly left the tomb and went to find the disciples and give them this *outstandingly good* news. ⁹ But while they were on their way, they saw Jesus Himself.

Jesus (*greeting the women*): Rejoice.

The women fell down before Him, kissing His feet and worshipping Him.

Jesus: ¹⁰ Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. Tell them I will meet them there.

In Matthew 28 – Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected in Jerusalem; where the disciples were staying. They haven't gone home. But wonders of wonders—on the first day of the week—the women followers of Jesus claimed Jesus has been raised from the dead! They had heard it from the lips of the angel (messenger)—but then they bumped into Jesus himself! The disciples must have been shocked to hear this; their first thought was to run over and see Jesus for themselves! But there was a catch: the women report

Jesus as telling them to head over to Galilee and they will see him there.

Galilee is nearly 80 miles to the north as the crow flies—maybe 90-100 miles on the ground! It would be a 2-3 day trip if you allow time to eat, rest, and sleep!

Matthew's gospel tells us that the grandest and most colossal event in history was just down the road where the disciples were and they had to walk a very long way to celebrate Easter. For some reason Jesus wanted to be in Galilee. The gospel ends the way it began: in an out-of-the-way place called Galilee!

What does Matthew 28 not provide?

- ✓ There's no explanation for just how Jesus' death and resurrection would help other people.
- ✓ So how does it help you and me or anyone else?

All we do have is that Jesus is alive again—claiming that somehow he now holds all the authority in the universe. So what the disciples are now commissioned and authorized to do is to tell people that Jesus is alive!

- ✓ Jesus resurrection is about life!
- ✓ Jesus resurrection is affirming of creation and our lives in it!
- ✓ **We are to be zesty and invigorating people as Christians—radiating life and goodness in a world of death and rotteness!**

Matthew tells us that to get to Jesus the disciples had to head out into the **sticks** (the country-side) of a remote

place where they would then encounter **the quiet joy of Jesus.**

- ✓ **Churches are to be places of deep-seated joy!**
- ✓ **Churches should be zestful and passionate places of life and holy liveliness and not places of death and finger-wagging judgment only!**

Jesus tells us that that our post-Easter job and task is to embody and also teach all the Jesus commanded:

- ✓ Jesus commanded that we love our enemies!
- ✓ Jesus commanded that we show compassion to all our neighbors!
- ✓ Jesus commanded that we be a forgiving person and community!
- ✓ Jesus commanded that we seek the lost in our neighborhoods and the world!
- ✓ Jesus commanded that we welcome those whose status in life is like that of lowly people—that includes the homeless and houseless around our church on Young Street!

At the core of GOD's kingdom is joy and grace, kindness and compassion, mercy and aloha—mostly the quiet stuff. Compassion doesn't make a lot noise; neither do grace and kindness. Yet Jesus says that these are *resurrection fruits*. Jesus was GOD's action in the world. If we want to get in on that action—we need to be like Jesus!

This is the irony of Matthew 28: The disciples have Jesus back with them. There he is, undeniably real and alive and in the flesh. It is highly dramatic! Surely the disciples

want to show Jesus off to others and rush him back to Jerusalem. But Jesus doesn't go for that. So why did Jesus leave the big city Jerusalem? Most likely—to avoid precisely that kind of overly dramatic, loud, brash bashing of people with the drama of it all!

So it is no surprise to discover at the end of Matthew 28 Jesus authorizing something much quieter—though no less sincere, vital, and alive. So what did Jesus leave them with: just water and his words. Easter is not easy, nor is the Easter life we are all called to live easy too. But—we are not alone!

- ✓ We do have Jesus with us—after all!
- ✓ We do have Jesus' gospel!
- ✓ We do have Jesus' life to proclaim first and forever!
- ✓ And we do have each other—the Body of Christ at TFCCCH!

So what difference does it make to know that GOD entered fully into our human life—our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and disappointments, our love and losses?

- ✓ What difference does it make that GOD therefore understands us deeply?
- ✓ What difference does it make that GOD suffered even death as one of us?
- ✓ What difference does it make that GOD raises Jesus from the dead—signaling a new reality and new life that death cannot overshadow?

DISCUSS AND TALK STORY

2nd Lesson: Acts 10:34-43 (The VOICE Bible)

Peter: ³⁴ It is clear to me now that God plays no favorites, ³⁵ that God accepts every person whatever his or her culture or ethnic background, that God welcomes all who revere Him and do right. ³⁶ *You already know that* God sent a message to the people of Israel; it was a message of peace, peace through Jesus the Anointed—who is King of all people. ³⁷ You know this message spread through Judea, beginning in Galilee where John called people to be ritually cleansed through baptism. ³⁸ You know God identified Jesus as the uniquely chosen One by pouring out the Holy Spirit on Him, by empowering Him. You know Jesus went through the land doing good *for all* and healing all who were suffering under the oppression of the evil one, for God was with Him. ³⁹ My friends and I stand as witnesses to all Jesus did in *the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem*. The people of our capital city killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised Him up on the third day and made it possible for us to see Him. ⁴¹ Not everyone was granted this privilege, only those of us whom God chose as witnesses. We actually ate and drank with Him after His resurrection. ⁴² He told us to spread His message to everyone and to tell them that He is the One whom God has chosen to be Judge, *to make a just assessment of all people*—both living and dead. ⁴³ All the prophets tell us about Him and assert that every person who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

"He was not seen by all the people . . ."

This is what Peter is telling Cornelius here in Acts 10; including that Jesus has been raised from the dead and he arose—but Jesus was not seen by all the people. Jesus was only seen after the resurrection by a startling few people for the whole 40 days Jesus hung around on earth before going up to GOD the Father in Heaven.

So why does the New Testament present the grandest miracle of them all in such an understated and undramatic way?

Jesus does exactly what Peter says in Acts 10: Jesus relies on the witnesses of those he revealed himself to tell and preach the message and to let the Holy Spirit of GOD generate the faith among whomever the Spirit will—which in this case of Acts 10—ends up being a surprising group of Italians!

But why? Why rely on uneducated fishermen, women whose witness were always suspect in a patriarchal society; and the rest of *rag-tag-group of people* who went on after the Pentecost to tell the world a truth that the man at the center of that truth did not do it for himself? If the Bible proves anything—it is the reality of that says, “GOD’s ways are not our ways.”

- ✓ We never would have thought to launch and begin the salvation of the world with a childless pair of senior citizens—Abram (*Abraham*) and Sarai (*Sarah*)—but GOD did!
- ✓ We would never have tapped a *self-effacing stutterer Moses to become the leader who would take on the*

one of the most powerful men in the world—but GOD did!

- ✓ We would not have used madam Gomer, a prostitute whom God commanded Hosea to marry in the book of Hosea—but GOD did!
- ✓ And we would most assuredly have never sent the Savior of the world into a simple peasant girl Mary to become Jesus' earthly mother—but GOD did!

But GOD did it all! And it worked! Thanks be to GOD!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us on this Easter Sunday 2014?

1. ONE: JESUS' RESURRECTION CHANGED EVERYTHING!

- ✓ Resurrection gives us a future and a hope!
- ✓ Resurrection does not deny that there will be tragedies and injustices in life—but there's hope of us!
- ✓ Resurrection brings people together—Chinese-speaking and English-speaking together to be TFCCCH?
- ✓ Resurrection makes all things new and miracles happen around us, in us in our Church and in our neighborhoods where we live!

2. TWO: RESURRECTION CHANGED AND CHANGES LIVES!

- ✓ Resurrection points us to a new vision of GOD's work in our neighborhoods and world!

- ✓ Resurrection is GOD's pathway of rebirth, new beginnings and renewal!
- ✓ Resurrection changed everything—yet everything remained the same.
- ✓ Resurrection bring all kinds of people together—including people who are not in our circle of friends—homeless and houseless people around our sidewalks and neighborhoods!
- ✓ Death as tough as it is in the death of our loved ones—become healed because of sisters and brothers who pray and who embrace us with love and aloha!
- ✓ Our lives have been changed because of Jesus!

SHARE STORIES IN PEWS; TALK STORY WITH EACH OTHER!

3. THREE: GOD MAKES EVERYTHING WORK!

There are always and always will be challenges in our lives, in our family and in our church family. We normally would say—"that no can work or happen" or "we gotta do this way!"

- ✓ But GOD did and it worked!
- ✓ Don't say NO to GOD! Say yes!
- ✓ Be GOD's Easter presence to people around you today as you leave Easter worship – there are many lonely people in our church and neighborhoods—be Christ's resurrected presence to them!
- ✓ So after a great Easter lunch at home or at a restaurant today—be Jesus' resurrection presence to those the Holy Spirit bring to you this afternoon and tomorrow!

AMEN! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

Sent in the Word

Today on this Easter 2014 morning, we are called to be resurrection partners with GOD: to roll away the stone—imprisoning marginalized people and to open pathways to the future for all creation. We are called to be GOD's celebrative companions—to say "YES" to life in all its complexity, contrast, and beauty!

On this Easter Sunday we rejoice in birth and rebirth! Our GOD is a GOD of new life and never-ending-possibilities! The good news of Christ's Resurrection does not take away our fears—though sometimes we wish it would—but Christ's Resurrection does offer us courage and hope by anchoring us in the sure promise that GOD has the last word—and that word is one of light and life and grace and mercy and forgiveness and aloha and peace!

This is the Easter day story that tells us that God's capacity to redeem a situation is greater than the combined capacity humanity's ability to screw up. There is no place on this earth that God's love does not shine. It is in the light of that love that we can help people to begin to write their story of how in the midst of a very bad thing a new much greater thing can begin to emerge and come into being. This is the essence of resurrection. It is when people say: "I wouldn't have wished this bad thing on myself or my enemies but I know I am a better person for having been through it." It is Easter day which turns Bad Friday into Good Friday.

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

HALLELUJAH!

WOW! WHAT EXCITING ACTION!
AN EARTHQUAKE & THEN
AN ANGEL WHO LETS
JESUS OUT OF THE TOMB
RIGHT THERE, IN FRONT
OF THE TWO MARYS!



WWW.AJUSTIA.ORG

UHH- LOOK AGAIN TED.
THE STONE IS ROLLED
BACK TO LET THE
WOMEN IN. JESUS
IS ALREADY GONE!
THE TOMB HAS NO
POWER OVER HIM.



OH, RIGHT. I GUESS
JESUS ISN'T GOING
TO WAIT INSIDE,
LOOKING AT HIS
WATCH AND THINKING
"WHERE IS THAT ANGEL?
HE WAS SUPPOSED TO
BE HERE HOURS AGO."



MATTHEW 28:11-10

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