

**Devotions for the Week of April 21, 2019**

**LARGE-PRINT**

**Easter Sunday**

**North East United Methodist Church**

**By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

*Read & Study John 19 & 20 This Week...  
Hear & Embrace the Easter Story!  
and Throughout this Week Reflect on the  
Following Excerpts from Past Easter Messages*

**Sunday, April 21, 2019**

And God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into him..."So God created people in his own image."

God had put so much of Himself into His creation that on the seventh day God rested.

And then we know what happened...evil in the form of a snake tempted Adam and Eve with an apple and they bit...and in that one act of disobedience a chain of events began to unfold driving people...humanity...further and further away from the love of their Creator...

So what did God do...He got more creative...God began to paint His masterpiece...

An eighty-year-old woman got pregnant by a hundred-year old man...a young boy sold into slavery became second in command to Pharaoh...a bush caught fire but did not burn...the Red Sea was split in two and a stuttering murderer lead hundreds-of-thousands to freedom...a donkey talked...the walls of Jericho fell...a young boy with a sling and stone killed the giant...prophets told of a coming Messiah...

God, using all His creativity, was reaching out...continuing to try to connect us back to Him...

But people still failed to see...

So, God did the most amazing, creative act ever conceived...God became man...took on flesh...and as Eugene Peterson writes, "*moved into the neighborhood.*"

The one who created and hung the stars in the heavens, took on flesh and became Jesus. And Jesus taught, healed, loved, performed miracles, raised the dead, and showed the people the love of God in action. People began to listen...perhaps this was the coming Messiah...the One...God was calling for repentance...a change of heart...an offering of self to the One who had given so much...

And then Jesus did the inconceivable...He willingly went to His death...was nailed to a cross, having been beaten and whipped...and He cried out, "*It is finished.*"

"*It is finished...*"

The plan begun at the moment of rebellion...the plan to bring us back to the garden where we rebelled...the plan to connect once more creation with its creator...the plan to restore what was lost had finally come to fruition in the death of Christ...

"*It is finished...*"

We were no longer slaves to sin...no longer lost for eternity...no longer under the law...but justified by faith in Christ...heaven's door was opened...and we were given the choice to walk through...

"*It is finished...*"

Those words were also a cry of relief...from a very divine, yet also human Jesus...He had

done everything...He had completed His mission...traveled to Jerusalem...met His death head-on...He had accepted His mission...His death...in the garden of Gethsemane...crying out to God, *"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine."* (Luke 22: 42). He went to the cross willingly...chose the nails for us willingly...allowed Himself to die for us willingly...His mission was completed...

*"It is finished..."*

The Creator had finished paving the way...creating a way...for the creation to come home...the road to heaven was paved with the blood of the Savior...

**-From Sunrise Service, April 8, 2007**

### **Monday, April 22, 2019**

Pilate had a choice to make. *"What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"*

Choices. You have the same choice to make. *"What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"*

Pilate made a choice. He tried not to...We read...beginning with Matthew 27:22-24, *"What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah? And they all shouted, "Crucify Him!" "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the crowd only roared louder, "Crucify him!" Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So, he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours."*

And then Pilate turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him.

Pilate thought he could avoid making a choice. He washed his hands of Jesus. He climbed the fence and sat down. **But in not making a choice, Pilate made a choice.**

That's where many people are today...perhaps many who have come this Easter morning..."*What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"*...

And many will leave here...will go about their day...will go about their week...will go about their lives...having not made a decision about what they should do with Jesus...and in not making a choice, they make a choice...

C.S. Lewis writes, *"When the author walks onto the stage, the play is over. God is going to invade all right; but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else come crashing in? This time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side."*

Pilate missed his opportunity. History is filled with men and women that missed their opportunity. They missed their moment. By not making a choice, they made their choice.

Jesus said, in Matthew 10:32-33, *"If anyone acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will openly acknowledge that person before my Father in heaven. But if anyone denies me here on earth, I will deny that person before my Father in heaven."*

We must make a choice. We have two choices. We can reject him. That is an option. We can, as have many, decide that the idea of God's becoming a carpenter is too bizarre...that this Jesus who taught and died was a great teacher and leader...that the resurrection is impossible; moreover, what does it really have to do with me...

Or we can accept him. We can journey with him. We can listen for his voice amidst the hundreds of voices of the world and follow him.

**-From Sunday, April 16, 2006**

### **Tuesday, April 23, 2019**

Lee Strobel, Investigative Reporter for the Chicago Tribune, as an atheist set out to disprove the resurrection. After years of research, this was his conclusion. Strobel wrote, *“I started my original investigation as a spiritual skeptic, but after having thoroughly investigated the evidence for the resurrection, I was coming to a startlingly unexpected verdict. One final fact – described by a respected philosopher named J.P. Moreland – clinched the case for me.”*

Strobel continues, *“When Jesus was crucified,” Moreland told me, “his followers were discouraged and depressed. So, they dispersed. The Jesus movement was all but stopped in its tracks. Then, after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, re-gathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message – that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them.*

*“And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways. For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead.”*

*“Yes, people will die for their religious convictions if they sincerely believe they are true. Religious fanatics have done that throughout history. While they may strongly believe in the tenets of their religion, however, they don’t know for a fact whether their faith is based on the truth. They simply cannot know for sure. They can only believe.*

*“In stark contrast, the disciples were in the unique position to know for a fact whether Jesus had returned from the dead. They saw him, they touched him, they ate with him. They knew he wasn’t a hallucination or a legend. And knowing the truth, they were willing to die for him.*

*“That insight stunned me. The disciples didn’t merely believe in the resurrection; they knew whether it was fact or fiction. Had they known it was a lie, they would never have been willing to sacrifice their lives for it. Nobody willingly dies for something they know is false. They proclaimed the resurrection to their deaths for one reason alone: they knew it was true.*

*“And based on the historical data I had examined, I became convinced they were right. Combined with the other evidence for Jesus I had gathered, I concluded that he really is the one and only Son of God, who proved it by rising from the dead.”*

Strobel, the self-proclaimed atheist, chose to believe. He took the next step. For decades, his prejudice, his skepticism, his selfishness held Strobel back from believing.

He writes, *“I had a strong motivation to ignore [the evidence]: a self-serving and immoral lifestyle that I would be compelled to abandon if I were ever to change my views and become a follower of Jesus.”*

What is holding you back from taking the next step?

**-From Sunday, March 27, 2005**

### **Wednesday, April 24, 2019**

Thousands of years before His birth, prophets predicted His coming. The prophet Isaiah cried out 700 years before Christ, *"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6). There were dozens of prophecies, written hundreds of years before Christ's birth. Many of them were fulfilled during Jesus' life.

According to Professor Louis Lapides, Jewish convert to Christianity, when asked if Jesus merely fulfilled many of the Old Testament prophecies by accident, *"Not a chance...The odds are so astronomical that they rule that out. Someone did the math and figured out that the probability of just eight prophecies being fulfilled is one chance in one hundred million billion. That number is millions of times greater than the total number of people who've ever walked the planet! He calculated that if you took this number of silver dollars, they would cover the state of Texas to a depth of two feet. If you marked one silver dollar among them and then had a blindfolded person wander the whole state and bend down to pick up one coin, what would be the odds he'd choose the one that had been marked? The same odds that anybody in history could have fulfilled just eight of the prophecies."* Yet Jesus fulfilled forty-eight of the Old Testament prophecies.

John writes, *"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:31). We know that Jesus himself, not just His disciples, believed He was the Son of God. John tells us, *"The leaders wanted to kill Jesus for two reasons. First, he had broken the law of the Sabbath. But even worse, he had said that God was his Father, which made him equal with God"* (John 5:18).

C.S. Lewis wrote, *"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic...or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

At the critical moment when His life was at stake, the high priest questioned Him directly: *"Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy"* (Mark 14:61-64).

Again, you must make the choice...was it just coincidence that Jesus' life fulfilled so many Old Testament prophecies...was Jesus mad...or perhaps deceived...or was He telling the truth...a truth that changed the course of history and changed my life...

**-From Sunday, April 8, 2007**

### **Thursday, April 25, 2019**

Let's go back a couple days... Good Friday... by the end of Friday the disciples were alone, shattered, hopeless. On Saturday, they were still alone, shattered, still hopeless. As Tony Campolo has shared in his most well-known sermon, *"It's Friday... Jesus was nailed dead on a cross... but Sunday's coming. It's Friday... Mary's crying her eyes out cause her baby Jesus is dead... but Sunday's coming... The disciples are running in every direction, like sheep without a shepherd... but Sunday's coming... It's Friday, Pilate's strutting around washing his hands cause he thinks he has all the power and the victory... but Sunday's coming... It's Friday... Satan's doing a little jig saying, "I control the whole world... but Sunday's coming..."*

*"Perhaps you understand how the disciples felt... Today is Friday because you lost your job... Today is Friday because your son is in prison... Today is Friday because you have bills to pay and no money... Today is Friday because your husband left you for another woman... Today is Friday because you are suffering with sickness and disease... Today is Friday because you can't seem to break free from addiction... but Sunday's coming... Sunday's coming..."*

*"Well, here is the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... It's Friday... the temple veil ripped from top to bottom – the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs opened. The centurion screamed in fear... "Truly He was the Son of God"... Sunday's coming... It's Sunday... the angel like dazzling lightening rolled the stone away exclaiming... "He is not here! He is risen! It's Sunday! It's Sunday! It's Sunday!"*

The message of the Gospel is that "Sunday is Here!" Amen!

We're Easter people. There is no gravestone with Jesus' name on it. Jesus' bones aren't resting somewhere in a tomb in the Middle East. God raised Jesus from death and God has promised that He's also going to raise all of His people.

Paul writes, in I Corinthians 15:20, *"But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died."* And in Romans 8: 38-39, *"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. Not power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

In the midst of your Fridays, in the midst of your tears, in the midst of the dark tombs you face each day, may you experience the JOY of the Risen Christ. Sunday is Here!

**-From Sunrise Service, Sunday, March 27, 2005**

### **Friday, April 26, 2019**

So, what now? Where do I go from here? John 1:12 – *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

Believe + Receive = Become

Believe – first understand need for a Savior – How good is good enough - all fall short – said it ourselves – Nobody's perfect –

Receive – every other faith system based on the "do" plan – uses a Tibetan prayer wheel, pay alms, go on pilgrimages, undergo reincarnations, work off karma from past misdeeds, reform their character – try to somehow earn their way back to God – despite best efforts some would still now make it – Christianity unique – based on the "done" plan – Jesus has done for us on the cross what we cannot do for ourselves – he has paid the death penalty that we deserve for our

rebellion and wrongdoing, so we can become reconciled to God – free gift – cannot be earned – amazing grace – read Romans 3: 21–28.

Become – grow into likeness of Jesus Christ – Romans 8:11 – *“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by the same Spirit living within you”*

Charles Spurgeon wrote – *“Ah,” saith one, “you don’t know what I am.” No, and I don’t want to know what you are; but if you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere bout you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon him, and he will carry you in his bosom. Cast your whole weight upon his atonement; it will bear the strain. Hang on him as the vessel hangs on the nail, and seek no other support. Depend upon Christ with all your might just as you now are, and as the Lord liveth you shall live, and as Christ reigneth you shall reign over sin, and as Christ cometh to glory you shall partake of that glory for ever and ever.”*

**-From Easter Sunday, 2004**

### **Saturday, April 27, 2019**

#### **Read Luke 23: 44-49.**

Jesus says, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* Jesus, in His death, modeled for us how to live. If anything happens in your life this Easter, may it be your making a deeper commitment to God, to Christ. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he surrendered His life to His Father in heaven. Once Jesus told Peter and the other disciples that He would have to go to Jerusalem where He would be arrested and killed. Peter said, *“No, Lord...you shall not go.”* Jesus turned around and said, *“Get behind me, Satan.”* Jesus understood He would be tempted not to go...Jesus knew the horrible death that awaited Him...yet, Jesus had surrendered to do His Father’s will. In the garden of Gethsemane, in Luke 22: 39-44, Jesus prayed that *“this cup”* be taken from Him...yet, *“not my will, but yours be done.”* Now on the cross, Jesus commits His spirit into God’s hands. Have you committed your spirit into God’s hands? Have you surrendered your life to God’s will? Is your daily prayer, *“not my will, but yours be done?”* We are Easter people; we serve a risen Lord. We are also a surrendered people; we surrender our lives to the one we follow, the one who loved us so much He gave His life for us. What part of your life have you yet to surrender to Him? What’s holding you back from giving Him everything?

***Don’t Forget  
To Invite  
Someone  
to Church  
Tomorrow!!!***



