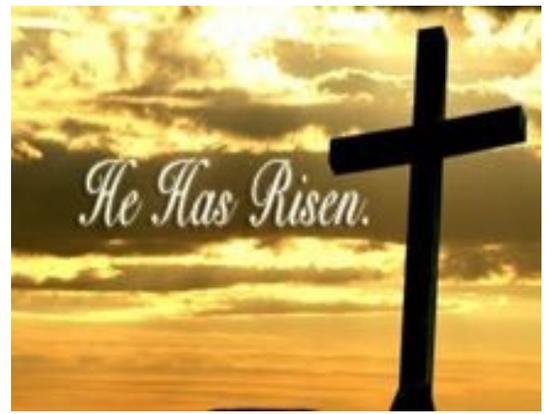


Zion United Church of Christ

Baroda, MI



EASTER MESSAGE

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary made her way through the deserted streets, moving in the shadows. Her heart was heavy, but she had a task to complete. She had stayed there, with the women, at the foot of the cross, while the disciples all fled, hiding for fear they might be next. She stood there with steel for a backbone and deaf ears to the taunts and jeers. She stood there, keeping watch, while her master and savior slowly died in the world's worst agony. He had saved her and she would not abandon him. Now she must finish the task of preparing his tortured body for burial.

She approached the tomb and felt that something was wrong. A woman alone knew to be careful, on guard against surprises. She could not name it, but Mary sensed something was amiss. Then she saw the horror: the tomb had been robbed! The body taken! It was open and empty; there could be no other explanation. Who would do such a thing? Jesus had enemies, yes, but they had already killed him. Why would they now steal the body?

She lingered there in the garden, not sure what to do. Who could she tell? Who would care? Then she heard a voice, "Woman, why do you weep?" It must be the gardener, hopefully the gardener, not one of the Roman auxiliaries posted as guard; that would mean a beating. Through her tear stained eyes, Mary looked. The word stumbled out, "Sir, if you have taken him, show me where you have laid him, that I may care for him."

Then she heard his voice a second time, clearer now, as the stranger whispered one small word: "Mary!" He said. He softly, gently called her name. "Teacher!" she cried.

It is striking to note in this account of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that we read at every Sunrise Service, that Jesus calls us each by name. Our faith is a personal faith, an intimate faith. We call God "Abba," not "Father" but "Papa." And Jesus, the Master and Savior of the universe, the one over time and space, the ruler of the cosmos, calls us each by name. God numbers the hairs on our head and names the stars in the skies. Christ triumphs over death, his death and our death, trampling down the grave and triumphing over the gates of hell, and calls us each by name.

And Jesus said to Mary, and to us, "DO not cling to me. Rather, go tell my brothers and sisters and tell them." And that is what Mary did; she went to them and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" To this day, Mary Magdalene is honored by Orthodox Christians as "The Apostle to the Apostles." She was the first to witness the risen Christ and she went and told them what she had seen and heard.

And now that is what we do. We too are apostles, "those sent." In all that we say and do, with friend or stranger, family member or co-worker, in every act and utterance, to our honor or our detriment, we declare, "We have seen the Lord!"

- Pastor Dave

MEDITATION FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Slowly the hammer rises,

Having fallen full force, crushing, smashing, breaking all in it's path;

Removing all that would oppose it, so that they cease to exist.

Crushing where'er it wills, smashing into nothing it's pre-selected target.

Tearing flesh from flesh, breaking bones in their joints,

Ripping tendons and ligaments, piercing blood from vessels, separating nerves from endings,

Smashing the hand as it lay there, limp,

Like a pile of dough, brutally kneaded, a mound of peat, ready for the testing of fire.

Slowly the Hammer rises,

And the man, beaten beyond knowing:

His face a mass of bruises, his brow sweating blood, his eyes swollen shut,

His back raw meat, hanging in the sun, his stomach quivering,

His lips broken, bleeding, drowning in his own spit and blood.

Slowly the hammer rises,

Having fallen, piercing his hands, his feet,

The man cries out in agony, the last gasp of his life.

The breath that stills all time, only to begin it all again.

Slowly the Hammer rises,

Red from blood, splinters of bone, bits of flesh.

Slowly the Hammer rises,

In the heat of the Noon-day sun, in the dust of the road, in the dirt of the hilltop.

The end, and the beginning, of all things.

Slowly the Hammer rises, only to fall again.

“And Jesus Christ, having given up all things, having been made fully human,

was obedient, even unto death, even unto death on a cross.

Therefore God did raise him from the dead, bring him through the tomb, beyond the grave,

And set him above all things,

In heaven, on earth, and below, that were, that are, that are yet to be,

And gave him the Name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus,

Every knee should bend, every tongue confess, to the glory of God,

That Jesus is the Christ, the Lord, the One, in all of time,

Upon whom the Hammer has fallen,

And upon whom the Hammer has broken.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:7–15

We humans spend too much time thinking about the past, complaining about the present and fearing the future! —Antoine Rivarol

Wise men and philosophers throughout the ages have disagreed on many things, but most agree on one point: “We become what we think about,” Ralph Waldo Emerson said. “You are what you think about all day long.” The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius put it this way: “Your life is what your thoughts make of it.” In the Bible we read, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

One Sunday afternoon, a cranky grandfather was visiting his family. As he lay down to take a nap, his grandson decided to have a little fun by putting Limburger cheese on grandfather’s mustache.

Soon, grandpa awoke with a snort and charged out of the bedroom saying, “This room stinks.” Through the house he went, finding every room smelling the same. Desperately he made his way outside only to find that “The whole world stinks!”

This is a silly story, but it sort of illustrates what happens when we fill our minds with negativism. Everything we experience and everybody we encounter will carry the scent we hold in our mind.

It is quite possible that the challenges of living with an epidemic make it difficult to be thankful and to see what God is doing in our lives. That’s why —

*When we see the same blessings every day, we eventually stop noticing them.
When we stop noticing, we quit appreciating
When we quit appreciating, we stop thanking.
When we stop thanking, we start complaining.*

May we all find the grace, patience and love to appreciate God’s presence in our lives.
—Timothy Merrill

Prayer: O God, help me to see the wonders of your blessings in a new way. Amen.



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**All Are
Welcome!**

THINGS YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW . . .

Electronic Fund Transfer: If you would like to have your offering to Zion UCC automatically withdrawn from your checking or savings account (weekly or monthly), please contact the church office to obtain an authorization form. Once the form is signed and returned withdrawals will begin. You may change or stop this service at any time.

Zion's Web site: For the latest news at Zion, check out our web site at www.zionuccbaroda.org. If you have submissions for inclusion on the web, questions, or suggestions, please feel free to contact the office.

Privacy Laws Related to Hospitalizations: The laws have been in effect for quite some time, but the interpretation of those laws varies widely. In an effort to protect the privacy of patients, most healthcare providers will not release any information to churches and/or pastors. If you are hospitalized and would like the church and pastor to know, please be proactive with the admissions officer, and 1) tell them that you are a member of Zion, 2) you would like Zion to know that you are hospitalized, and 3) call the church office.



Wishing you all a very blessed and safe Easter!

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Zion United Church of Christ

The Chimes Newsletter is published at Zion UCC in Baroda, MI approximately every two weeks. Submissions are subject to editing. All submissions for publication must be signed. The office phone is 269-422-1590. E-Mail - zionuccbaroda@gmail.com.

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Prayer: O God, help me to see the wonders of your blessings in a new way. Amen.

Have extra free time? Has it been a while since you had a coloring page? Why not send a note to a friend or a member of our congregation who needs a smile in their mailbox! It might just make you feel good too!

Just a little note to say
hello!

And we know that for those who
love God all things work together
for good, for those who are called
according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28, ESV

