

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior.

Let me begin today with a test. Jesus is risen. Well, that was pretty good but my practiced ear heard something that will draw a brief comment a little later.

Wow – what a week, one almost entirely new to me. But first a little background info on me and then on the Bible in general. I am currently on the retired roster of the Alaska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and I am here as an interim pastor for a year or so. I have been ordained for just under five years after serving 30 plus years as a lay leader and liturgist or assisting minister in my home ELCA congregation. I often quipped that it sure is a lot harder to do than it looks. And, for the record, the transition to pastor is even harder.

I am sure most of you are quite aware that the Bible was written entirely by men living in patriarchal societies. I am also sure that the many of you near my age are familiar with the language conventions we learned, especially the use of male pronouns when in doubt as to the correct pronoun. You may notice that I try pretty hard to avoid the use of pronouns, especially for the Godhead. That was pretty much a personal decision but since I have been on island I was privy to a group of long time island pastors discussing that the Hawaiian language does not generally use pronouns but rather it uses names.

So back to where I started – wow, what a week – for me, for you, for this church, for all churches, and most of all for Jesus. And today, we begin a new week. There is an old cliché that says today is the first day of the rest of our lives but before we look at that can we look at the last week of our old life from several perspectives?

First, I became brutally aware this week that, for the most part, lay persons like most, if not all, of you can pick and choose what parts of Holy Week you want to participate in. I know I used to pick and choose, and generally not a lot. Pastors, well not so much picking and choosing going on there. Second, there are, however, some lay leaders in every church who make extraordinary contributions to the life and worship of a congregation. Many work behind the scenes, many have been right before your eyes today in this service, and many also do both behind the scenes and visual participation. You should be appreciative and proud of the work these leaders do on your behalf.

Finally, the reason for all this activity is, of course, the week that Jesus had. Roughly 2000 years ago last Sunday, Jesus had a triumphant entry into Jerusalem and then the week made this long, downward slide. On Monday, Jesus following the normal pattern went to the Temple where Jesus became angry at the abuse and corruption in the Temple, mostly in the name of God. Then on Tuesday, Jesus attempted to return to the Temple but because of a plan then to arrest Jesus, Jesus and the disciples went on to the nearby Mount of Olives where Jesus continued the farewell discourse. This is also the day scripture tells us that Judas negotiated his betrayal of Jesus with the Sanhedrin. The Bible does not really indicate what Jesus may have done on Wednesday so scholars theorize that Jesus laid low; probably at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany. Jesus probably needed some rest after three pretty hectic days and to prepare for the even more hectic next two days.

On Thursday, which is also known as Maundy or mandate Thursday, Jesus and the disciples gathered in the upper room where Jesus, in an act of love and servitude, washes all of the disciples feet, including Judas Iscariot's. Again, with all the disciples present, Jesus shares the passover meal and what we now know as the "Eucharist or communion" with the disciples, again including Judas. After this, Judas leaves to complete his betrayal and Jesus and the disciples also leave the upper

room - to go to the Garden of Gethsemane for Jesus to pray. It is either late at night on Thursday or early Friday morning that Jesus is arrested while in the Garden.

Friday consists of Peter's denials, the several trials of Jesus complete with multiple beatings and torments, the long trek to Golgotha, the crucifixion, death, and finally a simple but incomplete burial in a borrowed tomb.

And then there is Saturday while Jesus laid in the tomb. Some theologians believe Jesus spent time in "hell" ministering to those there. Chad Bird, on the other hand, makes an interesting connection between God resting on the seventh day or Sabbath after God's creative work was done. In the same way, Chad suggests that Jesus rests on the seventh day or Sabbath of this week after Jesus' work of re-creation is complete.

And so, here we are at today, Easter Sunday. Have you heard the phrase that "joy comes in the morning?" It is actually a verse in Psalm 30. A few weeks ago, I made a point of showing the real life that Lazarus had after Jesus raised him from the dead. You know, right after Jesus said I am the resurrection and the life. For the next few weeks, we will be reading about and seeing the real life Jesus had after Jesus' resurrection. It will be a chance for us to learn more about Jesus as the resurrection and the life and what those words mean to us, personally. In the here and now, and in the future.

Now, many of you have learned by now that I like to talk about the context of the stories in our scripture readings. An account of the resurrection does appear in all four gospels with a few similarities and some differences. There are really three similarities: all accounts have this event occurring on Sunday morning, all have Mary Magdalene present, and all have the tomb found empty. For differences: first; we find that the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke; have the women arriving early in the morning probably around dawn or sunrise meaning there was some light, where in the Gospel of John it is still dark; second, the number and names of the women present varies in all accounts except that Mary Magdalene is present in all four accounts; and finally; three of the gospels have the stone rolled away before the women arrive, except for Matthew, which has the stone rolled away by an earthquake after the women arrive.

Matthew's account is the most dramatic. If it were made into a movie we could expect Mary Magdalene to arrive at the tomb, the earth to shake, the stone to roll away, the angel to arrive, and the booming voice of God just as Jesus walks out of the tomb still wrapped in burial clothes, as in Lazarus' resurrection. Do you wonder why this is not the case? I suggest to you that this is because Jesus, the life, was already out living it up. Can you see Jesus glorying in the beauty of an early morning sunrise? I can. In fact, I imagine Jesus sitting on a rock, a tree stump, or maybe even a bench, by the beach, just taking in the rays of light and the fresh smells of morning and thinking what an absolutely wonderful world we made God.

This, my friends, is the uniqueness of Christianity. Jesus rested or Sabbath and now, now the tomb is empty. Listen to more from Chad Bird: "This was Jesus' Sabbath. And it is a Sabbath with no conclusion. Jesus' resurrection ushers us into the Sabbath that creation has been awaiting since Genesis. We who are weak and heavy laden come to Jesus, and Jesus Sabbath us. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I will Sabbath you in myself. On Holy Saturday, Jesus took a Sabbath in the tomb. And we who have been co-crucified with Jesus rest there also, awaiting Easter Day and our co-resurrection.

Hear then the good news:

Jesus is risen.

There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, not even death.

Jesus is risen and Jesus is life.

Joy comes in the morning and today is the first day of the rest of your life.

How will you live this new life for Jesus and for others?

No matter what happens today, or tomorrow, or the next day – joy will come in the morning.

Yes, joy will come in the morning, every morning and that day will be the first day of the rest of your life.

Trust and love God.

Love and serve others.

Jesus is risen and Jesus is life.

Amen