

## ***“Easter is for Everyone”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015

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**Holy Scriptures: John 20: 1-18 Acts 10: 34-43**

*John 20: 1-18 -- The Resurrection of Jesus*

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.

*Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene*

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup> They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are

you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” <sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

*Acts 10: 34-43 -- Gentiles Hear the Good News*

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**-1-**

As soon as Sophia got a break between chores

she thought she'd settle down for a brief rest.  
No sooner had she closed her eyes when her phone jolted her wide awake.

As Sophia reached for her phone

she wondered, why didn't I turn off the ringer?

The voice said, *"Sophia, this is your denominational spiritual director.*

*We are so proud of you for your recent graduation and ordination, and now I have a charge for you.*

*It's a congregation that, well, it is going to close soon.*

*You can grow it or close it, and we both know what that means.*

*The members are graying and the neighborhood is changing so quickly in race and ethnicity and income, well, the church is like a dinosaur.*

*So go ahead and help them close the doors, and when you're done I'll recommend you to our mega church as an associate pastor.*

*Go on out there into the land of the dying.*

*I'm sure you will learn lots. We'll be praying for you."*

The first thing Pastor Sophia did when she arrived

was to ask the congregation, *"What do you need?"*

A voice in the back yelled, *"We need Jesus!"*

*"Okay," she said. "How about if we open some church doors and see if Jesus will come in?"*

They started by opening the doors and their cookie jars on Saturday nights.

The fellowship hall functioned as both a sanctuary and meeting room.

They set out decks of cards, chess and checkers sets, a PS4 with Madden Football,

plates of cookies and cups of punch,

and welcomed in local kids and their families for  
games and talk.

As their sacred space welcomed a new generation it took on new  
meaning and purpose.

The so-called graying church members turned out to be experts:  
they were experts at being grandparents.

Every child and teen whose shadows crossed the doorway  
discovered they had instant Grandmas and Grandpas.

Pastor Sophia announced that creating a holistic relationship is  
quite simple:

just add Living Water.

On the Saturday evening before Easter,  
while festivities and fun were in full swing,  
two teenage boys from rival gangs got into a  
scuffle.

They began wrestling and swinging wild haymakers.

People scattered, chess pieces and cookies rolled across the floor,  
and chaos reigned.

Pastor Sophia quickly made her way in the direction of the scrap.  
She arrived just as they tumbled and rumbled toward the  
communion table.

One teenager grabbed the Chalice and held it over his head,  
poised to strike.

Sophia reached up with one hand to rescue the Chalice  
and used the other to squeeze between them.

She said, *"Stop! You may not use the love of God as a weapon.*

*Jesus came that you may have peace.*

*Jesus is here, now, with you.*

*He wants you to love Him and to love one another.*

*Put down your fists. Open your hands.*

*Love God. Love yourself. Love one another.*

*Since Easter is for everyone,*

*we expect to see both of you here tomorrow morning.”*

The next morning everyone was all aflutter with Easter preparations.

As Pastor Sophia and her Eldership set the Lord’s Table they discovered that the Chalice was chipped.

An Elder said, *“Oh, my, that is too bad. It just doesn’t look right. We can’t use it because we don’t have time to fix or cover up the chip.”*

*“Well, you do have a good point.”* said Sophia.

*“We don’t have time or tools to fix it.*

*And yet what if we did use it anyway, today, on Easter Sunday?*

*Can you imagine a more visual, vivid reminder than a broken Chalice*

*of how much God loves us, even and especially in our brokenness?*

*I recall reading somewhere that the Church of Jesus Christ is a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.*

*Can you think of a more powerful symbol than*

*a broken Chalice in a broken church in a broken community in a broken world?*

*How about this:*

*What if we stand together at the Lord’s Table and lift up this Chalice and pray,*

*‘God, we love you. Please come into our chipped homes and hearts.*

*Please, Jesus, make us whole as only You can.’”*

Just as the organist played the opening notes of “Christ the Lord is Risen Today,”

the hem of Jesus’ robe crossed over the shadow of the church doors.

Isabella skipped as she went home afterward.

She had a chocolate Easter bunny in one hand and a worship bulletin in the other.

Isabella fanned herself with the bulletin while nibbling on the chocolate ears.

She noticed her friend Peter sitting on his porch steps.

She thought he looked different, not his jovial self.

Isabella said, *"Hey, Peter, whatcha doing?"*

Peter said, *"I'm going to the lake with Caden in a while, but I don't feel like it."*

*"Are you kidding? You love the lake!*

*You are always telling me how you like to jump off the dock, and how cold the water is. You call it in...invig-a-something."*

*"Invigorating. Yeah, it's awesome there. But I am bummed. My auntie died."*

*"I'm sorry,"* said Isabella. *"Tell me about her."*

*"She was my favorite. Auntie cared about me. She was always so nice."*

*"Do you know where she is now?"*

*"Isabella, she is D. E. A. D. I told you that."*

*"I know that, Peter. What I mean is do you know where she is now?"*

*"What are you talking about?"*

*"Anyone ever tell you that our last breath on earth is followed by our first breath in heaven?"*

*"No."*

*"Today in church Pastor Sophia said that God's love means that Easter is for everyone.*

*Thanks to Jesus your Auntie lives again.*

*She said our family members who died live again.*

*She looked at us and said, 'Your son, your daughter, your sister, your brother whose burial you witnessed lives again.'*

*She said the people who died in Kenya and our neighbors who pass away live again.*

*While she was talking I was steady writing it down in my bulletin in pencil.*

*Here, you can have it.*

*Only I'm sorry I got chocolate on it."*

Peter took the bulletin, careful to avoid the sticky portion.

*"Thanks, Isabella. I gotta go now; we're taking my friend Caden to the lake."*

*"Bye! See you later!"* she said as she skipped toward her house next door.

She glanced at the park across the street and saw Jesus on the swings,

watching over His flock and smiling with joy.

**-3-**

Caden was already in the family minivan when Peter climbed inside

and went to sit with him in the way back.

The van took off down the street.

*"Hey, Peter."*

*"Whassup, Caden."*

*"Did you bring your swimming stuff?"*

*"Yeah. How about you?"*

Caden said, *"It's all right here in my backpack.*

*I got goggles, flippers, water bottle, bathing suit, sun tan lotion 50 SPF, towel...uh oh."*

*"Uh oh? Uh oh doesn't sound good."*

*"I don't see my towel.*

*Mom gave me a towel and said it was Mother's best towel, so I better not lose it."*

Peter said to himself, *"Mom? Mother?"*

Caden was digging around in his bag, flustered,

*"Mom said its Mother's best towel.*

*And I already lost it! I am in so much trouble."*

Peter said, *"Caden, your mom and your mother is the same person."*

*"Peter, I have a Mom and I have a Mother; what I don't have is a towel.*

*I am so like toast, burnt."*

*"Oh. What's that behind you?"*

*"Hey! Mother's towel! Thanks, man!"*

*"No problem,*

*Dude . Hey, where do y'all go to church?"*

Caden paused and said, *"Mother said that she doesn't want to go to church*

*and have people look at us funny, or with mean, dirty looks.*

*So we stay home and hang out."*

Peter opened up the worship bulletin, careful not to touch the melted chocolate.

*"This church sounds kinda cool.*

*My friend Isabella goes most Sundays.*

*They hang out on Saturday playing games and stuff.*

*She wrote here that the preacher said that 'Easter is for Everyone.'*  
*"*

Caden said, *"Mother would say that sounds like 'radical hospitality. ' "*

Peter paused and said, *"Isabella invited me to check it out. I'll go if you go."*

Caden said, *"I'll go if you go."*

*"I'll go if you go."*

*"I'll go if --"*

Suddenly a gust of wind blew through the van,

picking up the worship bulletin and tossing it out the



window.

The bulletin fluttered behind the van,  
    dancing around the motorcycle rider hot on their tail.  
Jesus, replete with flowing robe and piercings,  
    caught the bulletin with one hand and laughed.  
His joy could be heard over the roar of the engine.

**-4-**

The loud revving of a motorcycle going down her street startled  
Sophia.

Sophia awoke and looked around the room.

She was surprised to see on the floor by her open window a  
church worship bulletin.

She picked it up and glanced at the name of the church.

Never heard of it, she thought; I wonder if Jesus goes there.

Funny, the bulletin had what looked like

    a child's chocolate fingerprints along the edges,

and on the back were the notes to a sermon in pencil.

She read the notes and found herself nodding in awe and  
amazement.

The pastor had said that Jesus would want us to know that Easter  
is for everyone,

    that Jesus welcomes everyone to join Him for supper in His  
House,

        that Jesus heals broken hearts and broken homes  
and a broken world,

                that Jesus graces everyone with Life after  
Life.

She had a quick image of Jesus smiling,

    stepping into the church lobby to break Bread with His

people,

to hold high the Cup of Life,  
when suddenly her phone's ringtone  
jolted her out of her daydream.

The voice said, *"Sophia, this is your denominational spiritual director..."*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

### Communion Invitation

In the story we just experienced called "Easter is for Everyone"  
the three main vignettes are true.

Each scenario is based on real people and real relationships.  
While the names have been changed,  
the spiritual growth, the love, the presence of God: all  
true.

In the story of the life and ministry and resurrection of Jesus  
Christ,

we find real Truth and real Relationships.  
While we evolve and go through changes,  
we discover that the spiritual growth, the love, the  
presence of God: all true.

Open your heart and soul to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.  
Let him into your life, and you will never be the same again.  
Enter into deepening connection with God and one another.  
In Him discover your meaning and your Life after Life;  
in Him find grace for today and for every time of need.

Jesus said, *"I am the Resurrection and the Life.  
Those who believe in me,  
even though they die, yet shall they live,  
and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.  
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and  
the last.  
I died, and behold I am alive forever more,  
and I hold the keys of hell and death.  
Because I live, you shall live also."*

Easter is for everyone.  
That is why this Bread and Cup are extended to you with a warm  
invitation to partake.  
Come, taste and see that God is good.