

For the nation of Israel, the actions along the route Jesus took into Jerusalem are probably connected to an event many Christians know little about. Less than two hundred years earlier, in 175 BC, a Syrian named Antiochus IV Epiphanes (which means “God manifest”), ransacked the temple treasury, set up an altar to Zeus and sacrificed a pig in the temple, made Jewish religious practices illegal, and began to force Jews to offer sacrifices to idols. In 167 B.C., an old man named Mattathias (a Levite) killed a soldier who tried to force him to sacrifice to an idol and also killed a fellow Israelite who was willing to offer the sacrifice. His four sons led an armed revolt that eventually liberated Jerusalem. The subsequent cleansing of the temple is still celebrated as Hanukkah (probably the “festival of the Dedication” referred to in John 10:22-23.). Two passages from the books of the Maccabees mention palm branches as part of the celebration (see 1 Maccabees 13:51, 2 Maccabees 10:7 in the *Apocrypha*).

The crowd’s expectation was for a political king who, like the Maccabees, would overthrow their Roman oppressors. But when Jesus entered Jerusalem he didn’t go to Fort Antonia; instead he went to the temple, which he then “cleansed” (Mark 11:15-19). When Jesus failed to meet their political expectations, those in the crowd may have felt as if they lost their voice. Perhaps some of the same people became the voices that, a few days later, were crying, “Crucify him!” and “We have no king but Caesar.”

Response actions:

- Print this question in the bulletin: How have you signed on with this Jesus? How might the Spirit be inviting you to sign on more deeply or fully than you have up until now? Allow time during the worship service for silent reflection.
- Invite people into a time of silent reflection. Then ask them to kneel if they are able and to “confess with their tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord.” You might consider using the Christian pledge of allegiance written by June Alliman Yoder and J. Nelson Kraybill: “I pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ, and to God’s kingdom for which he died—one Spirit-led people the world over, indivisible, with love and justice for all” (Peace pledge cards are available at <http://peace.mennolink.org/resources/toorder/index.html#pledgecard>. You might want to order one for each person or household and pass them out as a reminder of where our ultimate allegiance lies.) Alternatively, you can frame this invitation more along the lines of a traditional call to faith: “If you have never surrendered before, today is a day for a new beginning to sign on and submit on bended knee to Christ.”

Where do I sign?

Easter Sunday – April 8, 2012

Text: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

Focus statement:

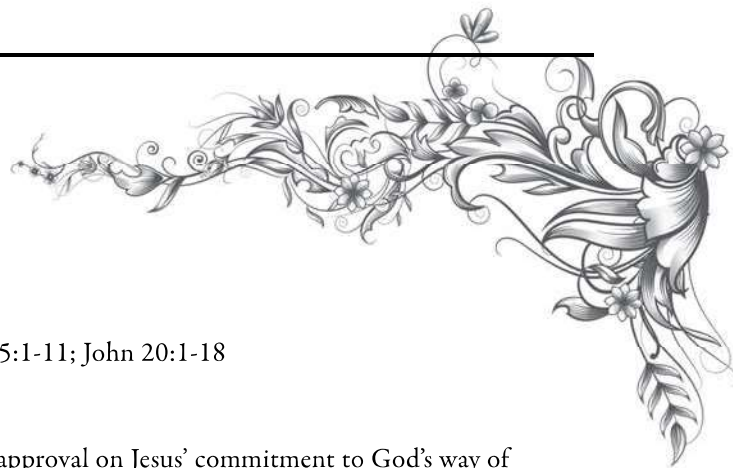
God said “Yes” to the world’s “No,” putting a stamp of approval on Jesus’ commitment to God’s way of life. We rejoice in the sign of the empty tomb. By the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, we are commissioned to witness to the new covenant. Will we, like the disciples and apostles, fully sign on and commit ourselves to proclaim and embody this good news to all nations?

Song suggestions:

Theme songs

SJ 44 *The love of God*

Chris Tomlin *I will follow*





Hymnal and supplements music

HWB 58 *This is the day*

HWB 263 *The strife is o'er*

HWB 264 *Come, ye faithful, raise the strain*

HWB 266 *They crucified my Savior*

HWB 267 *Christ has arisen*

HWB 269 *Thine is the glory*

HWB 281 *That Easter day with joy was bright*

HWB 335 *This is the threefold truth*

SJ 57 *Your will be done*

SJ 71 *Alleluia, the Great Storm is over*

SS 88 *That Easter morn at break of day*

SS 90 *O how good is Christ the Lord*

Contemporary worship band music

Not be shaken Norm Strauss

As for me and my house Ron Kenoly

We will remember Tommy Walker

Once again Matt Redmond

Lord I give you my heart Michael W. Smith

Hungry Kathryn Scott

They'll know we are Christians Peter Scholtes

God of this city Chris Tomlin

Call to worship:

Leader: We give thanks to the Lord who is good;
whose steadfast love endures forever!

People: **The Lord is our strength and our might,
and has become our salvation.**

All: *We give thanks to the Lord who has answered us
and become our salvation.*

Leader: The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

All: *This is the Lord's doing;
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

Children's time:

Supplies: A sign with an arrow point up and that says "Going Up" and a sand bucket to hold it up. See www.leaderonline.org for graphic files.

Hold up the sign for today, and ask the children if they have any idea why this would be the sign for today. As they connect it with Jesus' resurrection, talk with them about Jesus dying. Do they think Jesus was afraid to die? Do they ever think about dying? Let them know your own feelings about dying—and if there have been any recent deaths in the congregation, this may be a good time to mention them. Tell the children that we can celebrate even when death scares us and makes us sad, because God doesn't let death, or anything else, stand in the way of God's love. You might also want to think together about the pattern of dying and rising that we know from the natural world: seeds being planted and "dying" to turn into plants, caterpillars spinning chrysalises and "dying" to turn into butterflies, tadpoles "dying" and turning into frogs. God raising Jesus from the dead is a great way to show us how much God loved Jesus and loves all of us—and to demonstrate that God doesn't let the story stop with death.

Confession (unison):

God, with all creation we rejoice that in the resurrection,
in your "Yes!" to the world's "No."

Yet we also confess that we often choose the path of death
instead of allowing you to transform us
with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Honor our pledge to love you,

to become witnesses to your good news,

as we sign our names in bold script on your new covenant. Amen.



Assurance:

Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news through which we are all being saved: Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared to the disciples. By the grace of God, this is the message that we hold firmly and that we proclaim.

Drama:

See www.leaderonline.org for a brief conversation between two friends. Now that Lent is over, it's all back to normal—or is it?

Sermon starter:

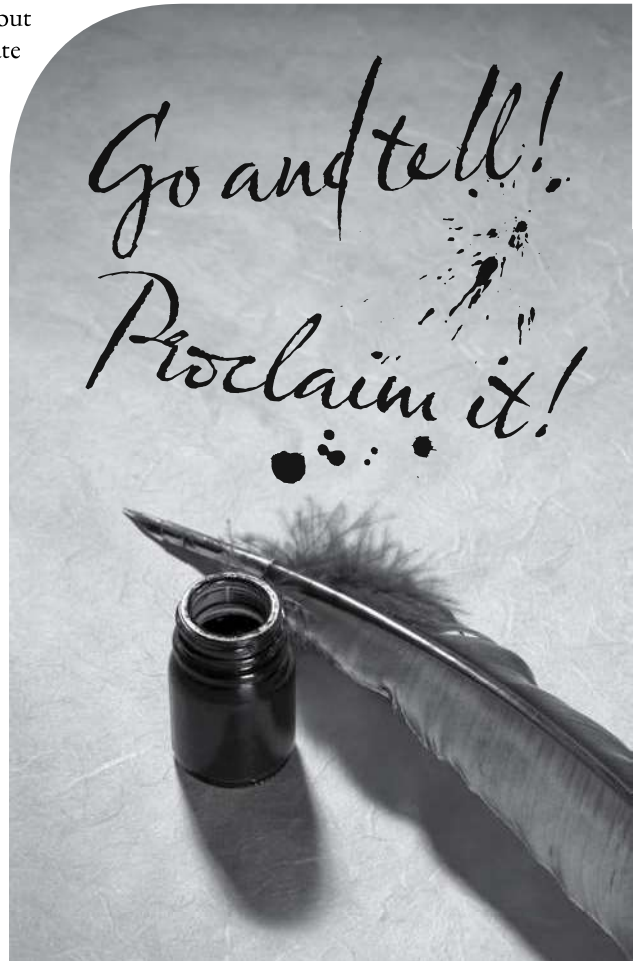
Perhaps you've been part of a tug-of-war game when, instead of the expected resistance provided by the other team, they let go of the rope. Your team can't help itself; it just falls down. This is accompanied by some laughter, some embarrassment, and perhaps some anger. Your complaint is probably that they didn't "play by the rules." And it's true. They didn't—which changes everything.

When Jesus refused to fight back, instructed Peter to put the sword away in the garden, and healed the one who was injured in the fight, he changed the rules. To our normal way of thinking, we know we are powerful when we are able to force our way—when we demonstrate our ability to overpower the other. But in the face of those who don't "buy" our power play, who won't play the game, the reality is exposed. Coercive power can only compel those who go along with it and its ultimate weapon, the threat of death. Those, like Jesus, who have "died to the fear of death," cannot be coerced. Punished, yes—even killed. But never coerced. The psalmist gets it right in 118:22-24: "The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." On this resurrection day, we remember that God raised Jesus from the dead, putting God's stamp of approval on Jesus' way of nonresistant love.

The new covenant is not a law of rules written in stone but a law of love written on hearts. Hallelujah! Today we celebrate our renewed covenant with God, sealed with the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who took the sins of the world on himself rather than fight back. What a wonderful and glorious day of freedom, salvation, reconciliation, renewal, restoration, love, grace, and peace. There's a new movement of God at work in the world; how do I sign up, where do I sign?

Response actions:

- Using the Plexiglas visual option, have someone clean off the graffiti as part of the response and write in bold letters: **Proclaim it!** or **Go and tell!** Then invite worshippers, if they're ready to sign on, to come sign their name either right on the Plexiglas or on additional blank wall space provided by large sheets of paper, a fabric sheet, tablecloth, scroll, etc.
- Invite worshippers to think about the Easter message they'd like to share with someone if they have a chance. Have them write it on the scroll on sticky notes you provide, then commission these witnesses in a prayer asking for God's empowering and energy for their testimony.



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