



EASTER

A Bless-ed Invitation

March 31, 2024

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

PRELUDE – Yes and Amen by Housefires

WELCOME |

We are grateful to be together on this special day! On this day, we celebrate Jesus alive, His tomb left emptied save only the end of our enemy (all that controls through fear of losing or longing to extend life) left as evidence that:

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”¹

What seemed like the end on Good Friday, Jesus dead and buried, has become our beginning on Easter Sunday. This day marks the beginning of the Christian, Jesus-joined life and calendar. Our spiritual, forever, and practical beginning is marked and marveled at by what ends on this day: separation. It is a day that opened a way to live with God, whole and holy and always.

And so, as you know, this day is special to the billion-plus Jesus-joined around the globe gathering to “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love,” made evident through the life given and lived again in Jesus, “endures forever!” (Psalm 118:1). Will you pray with me

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 118:19-24

Swing wide the city gates—the *righteous* gates! I’ll walk right through and thank God! This Temple Gate belongs to God, so the conquerors can enter and praise. Thank you for responding to me; you’ve truly become my salvation! The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone! This is God’s work. We rub our eyes—we can hardly believe it! This is the very day God acted— let’s celebrate and be festive!

Song #1 – Springtime by Chris Renzema

Song #2 – You Are With Me by Leslie Jordan

Dismiss Kids

¹ T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, 207.

CALL BACK & INTRO |

We expected to get here, to arrive at the start of genuinely living through the journey into death and out new. Easter morning arrives not so much like an out-of-the-blue surprise but rather a long-anticipated arrival, a “Finally! We are here!”

The last forty days, and in truth, our entire lives, have prepared us to be here and to find that on this day, “The end...make[s] our beginning. [Is an] end from which we start.” And what do we find on this day focused on God’s action for us? A marriage supper!

A meal in celebration of union, of lives separate coming together in love and commitment...the end of living in isolation and the beginning of making a life good together with family and community, forging something more than what was possible before: a future that will flourish in lives joined, working, making life good, together.

That’s the vision Revelation 19 paints for us on this day we have expected to arrive and from where our lives begin. A vision that _____ will read for us on Easter morning!

PRE-SERMON READING | Revelation 19:6-10, 22:21

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy...The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

(Revelation 19:6-10, 22:21)

Song #3 – To Hear Your Voice by Young Oceans

SERMONETTE |

Hallelujah!... For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy...The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.
Amen. (Rev. 19:6,10; 22:21)

Prophecy foretells, not just in a predictive manner, like naming outcomes or “fortunes,” but through revelation, calling attention to and shedding light on what’s at play in reality. Prophecy is why we are not surprised to be here today. The words of Jesus, from Genesis to the Gospels, have shed light on our arrival here to the day made for us. All the words before finding their summation in Jesus’ opening words of the Revelation:

I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17-18)

Yet prophecy does more than predict; it prepares us to live in what it reveals. Prophecy is a speech that calls us into and shows us the reality of life, how it is, and how it can/should be. Speech that calls and shows, clothes us in a clear way of living, righteous deeds making a life good in healthy and whole relationship with God, others, ourselves, and our world. We immersed ourselves in such speech throughout the Letters of Lent, which has prepared us to arrive here at the end, from where we make a beginning to the final words on life as it really is and will forever be.

But today, I want us to pay attention to the last words of that beginning end—the words that bracket a marriage supper.

Hallelujah...Amen.

Praise God...Yes.

Two words that, if we listen on this day, a day when division is replaced with union, separation, isolation with marriage and covenant, have the power to animate our living tomorrow, the day after, and the day after and the day and the day after...

Hallelujah! That’s the first word at the end. *Hallelujah* is a Hebrew word that has kept its origin, though it is spoken in every language, tribe, and tongue across our globe. It is a word and experience so universal that it fills songs and books with little to do, on the surface, with the word’s meaning.

“Praise God” is what the word means: an overflow of vitality expressed when the end, the terminus (goal, longing, what we anticipate/expect), and the future come into sight together. Think about the last time you heard or said the word. Was it a response of relief, excitement, and expectation met at the moment of receiving, of remembering? *Hallelujah* is a word so familiar and universally human that we’d assume our scriptures are overflowing with it. Yet, while it has many appearances in the Psalter, in the language of prayer,

it is only used four times in the New Testament, every occurrence being here, in Revelation 19, beginning the description of the vision of the end.

Why, then, is this word so universal to our humanity? Why does everyone at some point cry out ‘Hallelujah!’ as though it is a mere reflexive response to life at that moment? Why is “Praise God” such a common human experience, even for the godless, across every language while cursing God or another or earth has to be learned in each particular tongue? Could it be that we are not created for curse and gloom? That we are not made for division and autonomy, for isolation, despair, and the anxiety of fragility; but the wholeness and holiness of life with purpose and relationship? Expanding on the words of Rabbi Heschel, commenting on the prophetic words of our shared beginning,

“We are not taught to feel accused [that’s what the enemy does], to bear a sense of boundless guilt [that’s what shame does]. We are asked [invited] to feel elated [to celebrate, praise!], bred to meet the tasks that never end [conquer in the words and way of Jesus].”²

Life's essential and eternal experience is not accusation and rejection of another, but joy, gratitude, response to God for us, and participation in life with God. “Praise is universal...Gratitude for life is deep, pervasive, and healthy” because it is our reality. As one pastor notes,

“The word is here because God is here and life is shaped by God for eternal goodness. Grace and love are the centers of existence. *Hallelujah* expresses gratitude toward that reality. You don’t have to wait until you feel good to say *hallelujah* [as the psalms teach us]. And you don’t have to wait until you are good to say it [as the gospels teach us]. You can say it now [whenever you are on this day] and begin to shape your language and your life around the truth of God in your personal history...God is the reality of life [as the testimony of Jesus/spirit of prophecy teaches us]. *Hallelujah* is a good word to describe our knowledge and response to that reality.”³

Speaking of response, “Amen” is the second final word. A yes to the reality that we see before us on this day.

We cannot deny the hallelujahs, those reflexive shouts of praise, no matter our beliefs. But to live in them, to make our home in the reality of life that our natural spontaneity opens our eyes to, requires that we say *Amen*.

Amen is another Hebrew word that has kept its origin across its global use. It is simply our “Yes” that life in union with God is for me; I’m in favor of that, and with the One, I’m saying Yes to. We say Amen, says Heschel, “to keep alive the higher Yes...to teach our minds to understand the true demand [of life, the righteous living which the words and way of Jesus show us] and teach our conscience to be present,”⁴ to God’s yes:

² Abraham Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 13.

³ Peterson, 149.

⁴ Heschel, 7.

For all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ...given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:20-22)

Hallelujah and Amen. Praise God...Yes.

These are words that encapsulate this day, the day God acted for us, bringing us together whole and holy, revealing the life we long for, are made for, and live in with him. **So, what will our/your words (experience and response) be on this day?**

In the revelation, the light of this day that marks the day which we now know nothing can separate us for the love of God in Christ Jesus, nothing we've done or done against us, no force or power or perversion, *nothing but* our shallow and temporal no, our apathetic or route reaction. A day that, as the psalmist sang and ___ read for us earlier, invites us to walk right through the gates into life with God, festive and free.

REFLECTION w/ SONG | Love Divine by Ben Cantalone

As Chaz comes up to play, we want to take a moment, especially on this day, to consider what has been revealed to us in the testimony of Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection—before we respond to His invitation. Let us consider,

In this the love of God was made manifest [real!] among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loves us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin...So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them. (1 John 4:9-10, 16)

COMMUNION |

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb...These are the true words of God. (Revelation 19:9)

To be invited to a meal is to be invited into communion and community at the expense of the one who extends the invitation. The one whose life was given as the meal, broken so that what is fractured might be made whole, poured out that what is emptied on its own might find fullness in its receiving, in covenant communion. This is the invitation before each of us this day. To praise God and say yes to his yes...Blessed—already happy—are those invited here. So will you? Will you join in the most genuine human expression, hallelujah, and say yes to life today, tomorrow, and forever more?

I invite you to respond to the invitation by making your way to the front to receive your symbols of our communion, the meal of this union, taking them back to your seat and remaining standing before we give our collective hallelujah and amen.

Together, we say,

Almighty God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to see our death in his death, so that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our King, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Hallelujah! Amen.

Song #4 – Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

Song #5 – I Lose My Ability by Johnathon and Melissa Hesler

BENEDICTION | Hebrews 13:20-21

As we rest in this day that God acted for us, we prepare to enter into the life for which we are truly made to live with Him, **[LIGHT THE CANDLE]**:

May God, who puts all things together, makes all things whole, Who made a lasting mark through the sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrifice of blood that sealed the eternal covenant, Who led Jesus, our Great Shepherd, up and alive from the dead, Now put you together, provide you with everything you need to please him, Make us into what gives him most pleasure, by means of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah. All glory to Jesus forever and always! Oh, yes, yes, yes.