

# What's Today's Crisis?



## **Rollstone Congregational Church**

**United Church of Christ**

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# *Second Sunday after Easter*

## **April 26, 2020**

**Prelude:**           “Prelude on the hymn tune Martyn”           **Gordon Young**

### **Gathering Thoughts:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters let us gather together in spirit as we continue to celebrate the good news concerning the victory that was won when Christ rose from the dead. These are difficult times that will make us stronger and more appreciative of God’s gifts of mercy and grace. That statement requires us to remain steadfast in our faith that has God in control. Some may say that God is absent right now, but He is everywhere we are at this time. When we are able to reunite in person that occasion will be sweet and wonderful. Until that time please be safe, practice social distancing, and more importantly continue to pray for each other. Don’t forget to send in your prayer requests so that they may be added to the prayer list of Joys and Concerns.

*Please feel free to share this service with others who may not have the same opportunity to worship.*

### **Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:**

Leader: We gather to remember the ancient stories of revelation.

**People: We read from our ancient texts.**

Leader: We gather to interpret the meaning these stories reveal in our lives.

**People: We hear from our traditions.**

Leader: We gather to share the revelation of the risen Christ.

**People: We experience in ritual and story.**

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**Opening Hymn:**                           “Christ Is Alive”                           **Brian Wren**

**Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
The cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.**

**Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
but saving, healing, here and now,  
and touching every place and time.**

**In every insult, rift and war,  
where color, scorn or wealth divide,  
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, where even hope has died.**

**Women and men, in age and youth,  
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,  
and find the way, the life, the truth,  
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.**

**Christ is alive, and comes to bring  
good news to this and every age,  
till earth and sky and ocean ring  
with joy, with justice, love and praise.**

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**A Time of Prayer:**

All honor and glory and praise be yours, O holy God, for the tomb is empty, and Jesus Christ has been raised! By this one act you changed the course of human history. Once and for all, you bridged the chasm created by our sin. Finally, and forever, you shouted a resounding, “No!” to suffering, evil, fear and death. With authority and power, you ushered in your kingdom and proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord. We join all creation in singing our praise, pledging our allegiance and offering our lives in worship and service, for Jesus Christ is risen and lives among us! Amen.

**A Reading from the Scriptures**

**John 20:19-31 (NIV)**

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

36Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ 38Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ 40And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ 41So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

## The Message:

## “The Crisis”

What is today’s crisis? Whenever we turn there always seems to be some sort of crisis at hand. But not all crisis’ are the same. Many of the most notable seem to fall on or near Easter, so with that we might conclude that Easter was a crisis.

Exactly 100 years ago, Denmark experienced the Easter Crisis of 1920. The king and the cabinet had a conflict that escalated into a constitutional crisis, leading to the development of a constitutional monarchy in Denmark.

Easter was also a rising. In Ireland, the Easter Rising of 1916 was a bloody milestone in the struggle between the Irish and the British. Beginning on Easter Monday, thousands of Irish men and women seized locations in Dublin and proclaimed an Irish Republic. The British Army responded with force, leading to fierce street fighting and heavy casualties. Almost 500 people died, and 2,600 were wounded.

After six days, the British Army suppressed the Easter Rising. Thousands of people were taken prisoner, and most leaders of the movement were executed.

But Britain’s reaction to the Easter Rising was not popular. Public opinion began to shift, and the result was that Ireland moved steadily toward independence.

On the centennial of the Easter Rising, Netflix offered a mini-series called *Rebellion*, a drama in which “lover is pitted against lover, friend against friend, and brother against brother.” One of the creators of the series said that “there was a huge appetite for people wanting to learn more.”

So Easter was both a rising and a crisis. But not everyone today knows about the Easter Rising of 1916, and very few people have heard of the Easter Crisis of 1920.

Much better known is the Easter Rising and Crisis of the First Century, events that happened in Jerusalem. This rising was far more peaceful and full of genuine new life, as opposed to armed rebellion. And this crisis did not lead to a new form of government, but instead to a powerful new faith.

The rising and the crisis worked together to launch a movement and change the world. And right up to the present day, there is “a huge appetite for people wanting to learn more.”

So, what is the crisis for us today? The Easter Crisis of 2020?

First, the Easter Rising. Standing in the streets of Jerusalem, the apostle Peter raised his voice and boldly addressed the people of Jerusalem. “Peter’s speech is the first public disclosure of Jesus’ resurrection,” says New Testament Professor Robert Tannehill. “This message is a shock to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

Yes, a shock. The rising is a shock.

Peter spoke about “Jesus of Nazareth” and accused the Israelites of crucifying and killing him. “But God raised him up,” he said, “having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power” (vv. 22-24).

The resurrection was a rebellion — a successful revolt against the oppressive power of death. “This Jesus God raised up,” proclaimed Peter, “and of that all of us are witnesses” (v. 32). And having conquered death, Jesus now sits on the right hand of God in heaven. “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (v. 36).

Like the British Army in Dublin, the power people in Jerusalem thought they had crushed the rebellion. Jesus was killed on a cross and laid in a tomb. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and public opinion began to shift. More and more people were seeing that Jesus had conquered death and been made both Lord and Messiah.

- The rising was a liberation movement in which God freed Jesus from death.
- The rising was a revolution in which a crucified criminal became Lord and Messiah.
- The rising was a grassroots rebellion in which a man from Nazareth became the right-hand man of God.
- The rising was a promise of freedom for everyone who follows Jesus — freedom from sin, freedom from oppression, freedom from death itself.
- The rising was a first step toward the transformation of the entire world: One in which suffering is replaced by joy, injustice is replaced by justice, violence is replaced by peace, discord is replaced by harmony, and death is replaced by everlasting life.

Yes, the Easter Rising does all these things, and in the process it shakes up the established order. The Rising creates a Crisis.

Second, the Easter Crisis. The book of Acts tells us that when the people of Jerusalem heard the words of Peter, they were “cut to the heart” (v. 37). The words of Peter created a crisis for them, throwing them into a time of intense difficulty and trouble. As they faced this crisis, they knew that they had to make an important decision — in fact, the Greek word *krisis* means “decision.” They asked Peter and the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” (v. 37).

Peter had an immediate response for them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). He challenged them to repent, which means to make a complete reversal of course and move in a new direction.

- If you have been opposing Jesus, begin to support him.
- If you have been the lord of your own life, begin to live for a new Lord.
- If you have been serving an earthly ruler, begin to serve a heavenly Messiah.
- If you have been putting faith in yourself and your own abilities, begin to put faith in Jesus and his power.

After you repent, said Peter, then be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

This sacrament gives you forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once cleansed of your sins, you go forward knowing that you will never walk alone, but that the presence of God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, will always be with you.

The Easter Rising created an Easter Crisis, one that forced the people of Jerusalem to decide whether they were going to oppose Jesus or support him, whether they were going to serve an earthly king or a heavenly Messiah. The situation was unstable, and they knew they had to choose. But Peter encouraged them to make a decision for Jesus, saying that “the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (v. 39). Wanting them to move in a new and life-giving direction, he concluded with the words, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (v. 40).

Yes, the Easter Crisis was a turning point, one that had enormous consequences for the people of Jerusalem. The choice was bigger than any crisis points in U.S. history, times in which people had to choose. The Boston Tea Party. The Declaration of Independence. The Abolition Movement. The Civil War. The First World War. The New Deal. The Second World War. The Civil Rights Movement. The Environmental Movement.

All have been turning points. Shocks to the system. Times of decision. Crisis points. But they are no bigger than the question raised by the book of Acts: What would the people of Jerusalem choose?

Acts tells us that those who welcomed Peter’s message “were baptized, and that day about 3,000 persons were added” (v. 41). Three thousand new Christians! An unexpected and truly stunning response. And then we learn that they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (v. 42). As with the Netflix series *Rebellion*, “there was a huge appetite for people wanting to learn more.”

The Easter Crisis led to the rapid growth of the Christian church, from a handful of apostles to a crowd of newly baptized Christians. But instead of creating chaos, this explosive growth was quickly organized by teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

This story from Acts reminds us that the days after the Easter Rising were not just a happy time in which the followers of Jesus gave thanks for the gift of the resurrection. No, the rising created a crisis, and the church responded by organizing itself to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the world.

We can do the same, as we adopt a crisis mentality and make a faithful response to what God is doing in the world. Our focus should be:

- The apostles’ teaching, such as the words of Peter: “God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Messiah” (v. 36). Jesus remains the one leader who both deserves and rewards our deepest allegiance.
- Fellowship, which in Greek is *koinonia*. Within the Christian



community, fellowship means sharing, contribution and spiritual communion. It is the mark of a self-giving and generous community.

- The breaking of the bread. Since the best path to unity is through the stomach, we should never miss the opportunity to gather around tables for food and conversation.
- The prayers. God raised Jesus up and is the power behind our new life in Christ. Our prayers keep us connected to the God who continues to raise us up and send us forward.

Today, we are experiencing a crisis — the Easter Crisis of 2020. So let's respond by imitating the Jerusalem Christians, who followed the risen Jesus and launched a movement that changed the world.

### **Organ Interlude:**

**“Two Variations on Regina Caeli Jubila”**

**Thomas Anderson**

***A Time of Prayer** – let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at [dbhanks92@comcast.net](mailto:dbhanks92@comcast.net) or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.*

### **PRAYER LIST**

**Amy Belli**

**Carolyn Barney**

**Jack Brigham**

**Becky Colwell**

**Cathy Fontaine**

**Chuck Funk**

**Paula Gaudet**

**Bob and Pat Goguen**

**Linda Hurd**

**Sarah Kee**

**Kyle, a.k.a, Kippy**

**Bob and Doris Lane**

**Diane Lane Cormier**

**Linda Long**

**Lorraine Michaud**

Family of Stephen Pacheco  
Cathie Perra  
Family of Constance Pettingell  
Maria Piazza  
Melanie Pouliot  
Alex Robinson  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry  
Donna Thorne  
Marilyn Wales  
Patty Westerman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

Those who are currently unemployed because of the virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

Those whose livelihoods have been impacted through lost jobs or  
reduced financial stability

Our government – that they may make timely and wise decisions

Our Church and all of its members

O Lord, we see that at no time in history has there ever been such a movement and displacement of people. People from all over the world are moving: from rural areas to urban centers and from one nation to another, and all around us cultures are colliding. God, grant us eyes to see these spiritual opportunities! People are longing for a place of unity, a place of rest, a place where there is real equality and reconciliation .... Let your church, your people, be the answer to their prayers. Let us be found to be a people of love, of unity, of grace and truth, of hope and help. O Lord, will you please love this broken world through us? Make us one, Lord, make us one. Amen. We pray in the name of him whom you raised from death that, in him, we might have life, and now let us pray together those words that he taught us to pray in saying.....“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”



**I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save.**

**I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?**

*(refrain)*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.*

**I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people’s pain.  
I have wept for love of them, They turn away.**

**I will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love alone.  
Who will speak my word to them, Whom shall I send?**

*(refrain)*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.*

**I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them, My hand will save.**

**Finest bread I will provide, ‘Til their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them, Whom shall I send?**

*(refrain)*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.*

**Benediction:**

May we continue our journey of faith.

May we share the Good News of our risen Lord.

May we be a beacon of hope and may we be peacemakers.

May we live as an example of reconciling love and may we  
feed the hungry.

May we care for our families and friends and care for the stranger  
as well.

Let us go forth now with hope and confidence as servants of the  
risen Christ. Amen.