



# Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren

Continuing the Work of Jesus ....Peacefully, Simply, Together

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March 30, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren in the Diaspora.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will celebrate the resurrection of our Lord from the tomb on Easter, this coming Sunday. What a glorious triumph over death which enables us to join Him one day in eternity. Because He lives, we too can live for eternity. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life!' I trust that you can claim that promise.

A special SONRise service is planned for Easter morning at 6:30 am at the home of Alan Platt. Breakfast will follow the outdoor service. This coming Sunday the bell choir will provide special music at both regular worship services. My sermon is entitled 'From Tears to Triumph' based upon John 20:1-18.

After Easter we turn our attention to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit empowered the followers of Jesus and gave birth to the church. To encourage us along our journey from Easter to Pentecost a daily devotional booklet ***Our Pandemic Stories*** has been prepared with writings from members of our church which are stories of hope and encouragement based upon experiences during this past year's pandemic.

***Our Pandemic Stories*** booklets will be in the church mailboxes for all our church family on Easter Sunday morning. Please be sure to pick up your copy. You are also encouraged to pick up copies from the mailboxes of family and neighbors who are not here on Easter so that you can deliver their copy of the booklet to their residences. Booklets that are not picked up on Easter will be mailed next week. Extra copies of the booklet are also available in the gathering area.

I want to express my thanks to all who made contributions to the booklet and to the editors: Mary Etta Reinhart, Rita Carter and Kay Swarr. Appreciation also to Tina Herr for printing and assembling the booklets. May this devotional resource bring you hope and encouragement for your own spiritual journey from darkness to light.

I will be teaching an Adult Inquirers Class beginning April 11 through May 16 in room 24 during the Sunday school hour. The class is open to persons youth and adults from 9<sup>th</sup> grade and older. The class is open to anyone wanting to learn more about the history, beliefs and practices of the Church of the Brethren. Anyone desiring to join the Mechanic Grove Church will need to take the class but being part of the class does not mean one is expected to join the church. Please contact me if of your interest.

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For this week's piece of personal trivia, I would like you to know that I was a music major at Elizabethtown College and graduated with B.S. in Music Education in 1972. Organ and voice were my concentrations. I was never a fan of bands. The college had bands but no orchestra. As a student I inquired if Professor Otis Kitchen would form and direct a college-community orchestra. Otis told me he would accept my challenge if I would agree to be the manager of the orchestra. I consented and the Elizabethtown College Community Orchestra was born, making its debut in 1971 and it is still going strong today. I play none of the instruments in an orchestra, but I did help orchestrate the founding of this performing group many years ago. Thanks to Otis, for his many years as its conductor.

*"Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*  
Hebrews 13:20-21.

Bob Kettering, Interim Senior Pastor

#### FROM TEARS TO TRIUMPH

- I. In a world of fear with the current pandemic and many people who were locked down behind closed doors wondering what will happen next....we can identify with the fears and uncertainty which faced the disciples of Jesus following his crucifixion. John 20 verse 19 says 'the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews.' What they did not know at that juncture was what had just happened earlier that day. Jesus had risen from the dead and when he appeared before his disciples his very first words were: 'Peace be with you.'

-with the presence of Christ among them and his words of comfort...their fears turned to faith... their anxiety to anticipation...their feelings of being helpless to feelings of hope... their tears to triumph. Christ had risen from the dead just as he had said. And Jesus continues to give us hope in a world of uncertainty and fear...offering us his peace and his comfort. Therefore, as Jesus had said, he still says to us today 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid'. When we celebrate Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and our hope for the future for he is with us, within us, beside us and will never leave us or forsake us. This is our Easter hope and assurance.

- II. As we look to that first Easter morning, I have found John chapter 20, verse 18 to be one of the most significant statements of scripture regarding the resurrection of Jesus when it says: "Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!"

-in those five simple words we see: sorrow turned into gladness...despair turned into hope...defeat turned into victory...death turned into life...tears turned into triumph!

-Mary Magdalene declared the glorious words: "I have seen the Lord!" These words are the triumphant testimony of Easter. The crucified Christ has become the risen redeemer of the world. Because Christ lives, now we too can live. Death is not the end. And so, we can say along with the Apostle Paul: "O death where is your sting? O grave where is your victory?"

- III. Mary Magdalene had indeed literally seen the Lord....and her life would never be the same again. Because of that personal encounter with the living Lord, she would witness with a new boldness. I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! Her words are the essence of the Gospel message. For we too, like Mary Magdalene, can have a personal encounter with the resurrected Lord.

-have you seen the Lord? I have seen Him! I have seen the signs of Him at work transforming the lives of drug addicts and prostitutes and alcoholics and racists and hardened criminals. Whenever a wayward, wandering life is changed by Jesus into a loving, kind and compassionate spirit...we can say...I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! HE IS ALIVE AND AT WORK IN OUR WORLD TODAY. This testimony is not an idle tale but an eternal truth!

-the life of Jesus without the resurrection is nothing but a sad story of a young Jewish man with wild ideas and elusive goals who outraged his peers and got himself killed. And that's it!

- IV. >to the non-Christian world, Jesus was a good man...and that's all he was.  
>to the Moslems, Jesus was one of the prophets...and that's all he was.  
>to the Jews, Jesus was a misguided Messiah who got martyred...and that's all he was.  
>but to Christians, Jesus is more than a good man...more than a prophet...more...much more.

-to Christians, Jesus is the Son of God who conquered death and is alive today...and continues to reveal Himself to those who seek Him.

- V. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus implies that we share in its ramifications of love and peace and salvation wherever we go. As we go about our way, witnessing to our faith in Christ through word and deed, others will be able to see the living Lord IN US!

-this is the real proof and power of the resurrection. Through your life and mine; people should be able to exclaim: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! Christ is alive physically and spiritually! He is leading us...living in us.... lighting our way and lightening our burdens. This not an idle tale but an eternal truth! That traditional Easter hymn asks the question: "You ask me how I know he lives?" And then we hear the answer: "He lives within my heart!"

- VI. When I see people living out their faith in Christ through helping hands to a hurting humanity...then I know I HAVE SEEN THE LORD. The popular cliché we hear is: Seeing is believing...show me and then I will believe. Lay out the empirical evidence and then I will embrace it. In fact, the state of Missouri prides itself in its state motto: "The show me state."

-the disciple Thomas was not from Missouri, but he did not believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene of seeing Jesus, nor the testimony of the other disciples as proof of Jesus' resurrection. He needed to see and experience Jesus for himself. Thomas said: "I won't believe he is risen from the dead unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the nail prints and place my hand in his side."

- VII. John 20 verse 26 and following, records that a week later the disciples were gathered together; this time with Thomas among them. Mysteriously, on that occasion, Jesus appeared in their midst. Jesus goes over to Thomas and says: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe."

-Thomas was so overwrought with the evidence that he declared: "My Lord and my God." And then Jesus said: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe."

- VIII. There are many in our world today who doubt the resurrection of Jesus. There may be some of you hearing this message, who are not so sure about Jesus rising from the dead. There are many today who dispute the eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ. There are many who dismiss the authority of the scriptures which tell the Easter story.

-many would say the resurrection of Jesus from the grave is just another Easter fable along with the Easter Bunny or a fantasy fabricated by disheartened disciples to save face from the calamity at Calvary. Many people regard the Easter story as an idle tale.

- IX. But friends, I stand before you to declare that the empty tomb is NOT an empty promise! The force and fury of Satan has been defeated. This is an eternal truth!

-some will say: if that is true, then why is there still immorality, war, economic hardship, sickness, death, destruction, violence, brokenness and all manner of evil and corruption still running rampant in our world? Is the empty tomb just an empty promise...an idle tale? Has death really been defeated? Did the disciples really see the Lord or was the sighting of Jesus like the reports in our day of sightings of UFOs or Big Foot or the Loch Ness Monster?

- X. Have you ever heard of the phrase "running around like a chicken with its head cut off?" Let me tell you...I am no farm boy...far from it actually. A town boy like me would assume that if a chicken's head was cut off it would be instant immobilization and death. You know....kerplunk and that's the end of the cluck.

-however, if a chicken's head is cut off, I am told it will flail around for a while. Not a very pretty sight. But when its head is cut off, its ultimate fate is sealed...its destiny is determined...sure and certain death will eventually follow the convulsions. Sorry for the graphic description. But here is the point...the same situation awaits Satan.

- XI. Listen carefully: when God raised Jesus from the dead, the destiny of the devil was determined. His ultimate defeat and destruction is certain and sure. The world in rebellion today is like the headless chicken in convulsion.

-the head of evil was severed at the garden tomb. It is just a matter of time until God will bring all things under His reign. People who dedicate themselves to evil causes are clearly on the losing side. The decisive battle was won by God when He raised Jesus from the dead. The ultimate victory belongs to God!

- XII. Remember, the evil we experience is only the convulsing and flailing of the devil whose destiny and death is sealed. Before the resurrection of Jesus was made known to the disciples following the crucifixion of Christ, it looked like Satan and the forces of evil had won the day again.

-the disciples locked themselves behind closed doors because of their fear of violent forces that had just destroyed their leader. Their hopes were dashed and their plans for a kingdom were shattered. It appeared that Rome had triumphed. Did Satan succeed in defeating God's design for humanity?

- XIII. And then it happened! News came of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene came proclaiming the news: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! The forces that sought to destroy, were themselves defeated. God spoke...and the earth stood still. The change that came over the disciples cannot be explained except in terms of victory for Christ over the powers that opposed Him. Night turned to day...tears to triumph...sorrow to joy...despair to hope...death to life.... defeat to victory! These are the themes of the Easter message.

-Nazism.... communism.... totalitarianism.... evil empires and emperors have come and gone....but the testimony of Mary Magdalene remains true when she said I HAVE SEEN THE LORD! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Those two phrases are the traditional Easter greetings in Christian churches around the world.

- XIV. On Easter morning in many churches the pastor will declare CHRIST IS RISEN, to which the congregation responds: HE IS RISEN INDEED! The news of Christ's resurrection is so glorious that we just cannot keep it to ourselves. The news of Christ's resurrection is so powerful that it cannot be suppressed no matter how hard some have tried to suppress this message across the face of history.

-the location of the story I am about to tell has been in news in recent years. It is in Kiev which is presently the capital of Ukraine but at the time of this story it was under the control of the communist and officially atheist country, the Soviet Union. This story may help you understand the present distrust and dislike of Russians by Ukrainians.

- XV. This true story was told by Nicholas Goncharoff, a former Soviet Army tank commander. One Easter Sunday in a day when the communists were in power and Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, Goncharoff was in Kiev. All of the church buildings had been closed by the communists in that city of Kiev except for one...a large Russian Orthodox Church. It was the only house of worship for over 300,000 people in that city. The church building was soon crowded to overflowing with Easter worshippers.

XVI. Many who could not fit into the sanctuary had to stand outside. In the street, however, the communist party had organized a demonstration. Fireworks exploded and a band played patriotic music loudly to disrupt the Easter worship service inside the church building.

-the next day, the communist party ordered the population to come to the city square. Communist leader, Nicolai Bukharin and other prominent communists lectured for four hours, promoting the traditional propaganda that religion was the opiate of the people...a crutch for the uneducated and weaklings.

-when they were finally finished with their insidious indoctrinations, the chairman of the communist party asked the crowd: 'Are there any questions?' No answer. 'Do you have any comments?' Not one reply from the massive crowd.

-and then a small thin man from the crowd said: I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THREE WORDS. This meek man came to the platform, he turned and faced the thousands of silent, stoic citizens. He leaned into the microphone and said distinctly in his language CHRIST IS RISEN!

-without hesitation...without rehearsal...without prompting...thousands on that town square in Kiev, in the heart of the atheist Soviet Union roared back in triumph: HE IS RISEN INDEED! HE IS RISEN INDEED! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

XVII. The police quickly emptied the square and that bold little man was hustled away by the authorities. But the people of Kiev on that day after Easter had given testimony to the pent-up passion of a persecuted people that Christ is indeed alive.

-now several decades later...communism in the Ukraine and Russia is dead but Jesus Christ is still alive! Hallelujah!

XVIII. My thoughts turn to that hymn by Bill and Gloria Gaither: "Kings and kingdoms will all pass away but there's something about that name...the name of Jesus which will endure!"

-friends...I want to tell you an eternal truth...Christ wants to have a personal relationship with you.

-when you surrender your life to Jesus...he comes to live and dwell within you. Paul said in Colossians 1:27 "Christ in you, the hope of glory". You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart! This is not an idle tale but an eternal truth! He has risen from the dead to turn your tears into triumph. The most beloved verse of scripture is John 3:16- "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

-death need not be the final chapter. When life on earth is over Christ will welcome you into his eternal presence. When you put your trust in him, you make a reservation for that heavenly home. That is why Paul says when death comes to a believer we do not weep as those who have no hope. Christ can turn your tears into triumph by claiming the words of I Corinthians 15 "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death, is your victory? Where O death, is your sting? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

-up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!