



Easter Day  
20 April 2025

Best. Day.  
Ever.

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

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Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Chris is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Are you ready? I mean I have everything written out but the Holy Spirit has this way of changing things up. And, well, six shots of Starbucks finest, blond, ristretto shots are just now kicking in so – here we go. Last Wednesday, I had this mountaintop moment of joy. I know, I know, it was the middle of Holy Week. We were running the first of almost a thousand bulletins for the last three days - proofing, doublechecking, inviting, counting lilies ordered, and tending a family who was just beginning to understand what life would be like without their husband, father, and grandfather who had loved them for more than 86 years. We were getting ready to watch our Savior betrayed, arrested, beaten, abandoned, die on a cross, and be buried in the grave. The story of the very end of hope was about to be spoken into the world again. Out of nowhere, I found myself on the mountaintop – joy and grief were about to come head-to-head and honestly, I was ready for it. Maybe because I already knew this day was coming. That we would once again hear the shouts from this mountaintop moment, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia.” Now, you know, if you have spent any time around this place, that out of the three pastors at Ascension, I am usually the pastor who will tell you the whole story. But last Wednesday, I was leaving the drive-thru, attempting to not drive and text at the same time, so while I was still in the parking lot, I could only type fast enough on Facebook to share my joy with the world in three words. Best. Day. Ever. At least one member was like, it should be illegal to post this without explaining. Well, Natalie, I got you.

To be honest – the day did not start out with all the “best day ever” feelings. It was Wednesday of Holy Week – which means it was the “calm before the storm” in the church world. At Ascension - Holy Week is the Superbowl, your wedding, the birth of the first born, your fortieth birthday, and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary all rolled into one glorious day. Everyone has expectations and at Ascension, we do our best to meet every one of those expectations. Well, almost. I mean some of us be crazy – and the guy in the pulpit is the king when we start dreaming about stepping up one more level each Easter Sunday to a new level of “did they really just do that?”. Come on now, it is Easter. Empty grave. Resurrected Savior. Power of death defeated. Promise of eternal life revealed! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! What more should we ask for? But our very best on this day over every other day of the year. Wednesdays in Holy Week are meant for coffee and comfortable clothes and clean-up from Palm Sunday shenanigans and last-minute questions for fellow pastors about plans for our worship services on Thursday and Friday nights and questions for musicians about how many verses in how many songs and questions for the administrators about the number of ushers and acolytes and how many bulletins to print. And that doesn’t even start the conversation with Pastor Edwin about how many pounds of sawdust on how many alfombras and what happens to the outdoor procession when it rains and if we walk on the newly poured sidewalk can we keep it from getting muddy because...people. So, with all of that swimming in my head, I made my way to Starbucks. It is, after all, a holy pilgrimage during Holy Week. I ordered ahead. I hit the drive-thru only to realize that the person in front of me had not ordered ahead and probably had not been pondering their order for the past half hour and truthfully, as the minutes ticked by, somehow found themselves wandered into the drive-thru without a clue what Starbucks even serves. “Uhhhh, hold on,” I heard the driver in front of me say. Buddy, you are not getting chicken tenders and fries – it’s coffee – multiple flavors and fragrances of coffee to your heart’s



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delight. Order already. And when the person in front of me received their drink and drove off – I drove up to the window. One of the best ever baristas greeted me with my drink. As I thanked her she said, “hey, what church are you a pastor at?” Ascension. Four minutes, 24 seconds from here. Dopp Street. Down from the hospital by Woodfield Park. “Right, okay,” she said. “Some of the partners were asking, maybe you will get a few visitors on Sunday.” I tried to contain my joy. “Really, well that would be great,” I said. And as I drove off – I completed my three-word text – Best. Day. Ever. I thought, “My God, I have finally done it.” After fifteen years of visiting this Starbucks on the corner of Moreland and Delafield, I have brought enough joy, enough laughter, been significantly annoying or obnoxious, saturated the space with enough sarcasm that someone who works at the Starbucks wants to check out the church where I serve as pastor. Best. Day. Ever.

But what would they find on this Easter morning? Hope. Of course! “If you only carry one thing throughout your entire life,” writes one author, “let it be hope. Let it be hope that better things are always ahead. Let it be hope that you can get through even the toughest of times. Let it be hope that you are stronger than any challenge that comes your way. Let it be hope that you are exactly where you are meant to be right now, and that you are on the path to where you are meant to be... because during these times, hope will be the very thing that carries you through.” It is a start for sure. But I need a little more. Hope. All by itself? It’s okay. But what do I hold onto? I mean hope is the moment. Hope is the hunger. But what is our hope anchored to this day?

To every one of you visiting for the first time...

To every one of you who came back for Easter because the bilingual first communion Sunday two weeks ago was just a little bit gloriously crazy.

To every one of you who have called this church your spiritual home forever.

To every one of you who became members of this community last Sunday.

To every one of you facing a life-altering surgery in the days ahead.

To every one of you grieving the death of someone you thought you could not live without.

To every one of you experiencing the celebration of Easter for the very first time.

To every one of you wondering if there is place, here, for you.

There is hope. Of course there is hope. But it is not just a word— a hope that is windswept and withered as days are hard and living hurts. In this place, we do not whitewash this hope or pretend that this hope is always enough. Because there are days when even this hope feels unequal to the task of moving us forward. Ask anyone of us and we will tell you. In this place we have known both joy and sorrow, love and loss, and still, we hold onto hope. This hope, we speak of, stands on solid ground. This hope, we believe, is anchored by love to the bedrock of this life we live. Jesus, the very Son of God, betrayed by someone he loved. Falsely accused. Abused. Suffered for our sins. Sentenced to die on a cross by the hands of those in power. Buried in a grave that was not his own. When the world went silent; when the shadows sealed off every shining light; when the tears had been shed, and the last friend left their watch; when the despair of his death was confirmed with the stone sealing the grave – we thought all was lost. Until! God spoke a word of hope into the night. We thought all was lost. Until! God spoke a word of a life into the silence of our suffering. We thought all was lost. Until! A light began to shine in the darkness. We thought all was lost. Until! Brave women broke the rules to visit the grave of their teacher and friend. We thought all was lost. Until! Mary, weeping at the empty tomb, spoke to a stranger. We thought all was lost! Until! Come on now! We thought all was lost! Until! Our



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Savior, Jesus, spoke the name of someone he loved. He called her by name – Mary. It could just as easily be your name! Amy. Paul. Al. Jim. Kathy. Eleanor. Lisa. Edwin. Linda. Maria. Ryan. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This is what Easter is all about. This is what it means to anchor our hope in Jesus, the Savior of the world, who died on a cross and rose from the dead to save us from our sins and promise us a place in heaven with those who have loved us in this life. A Savior who, out of great love for us, calls each of us by name. And when he calls us by name. Chains break. Dry bones wake. The gates of hell shake. Every time he calls us by name. The good news, this day, for you, is that you, too, know a name. I know a name that can silence the roaring waves. I know a name that can empty out a grave. I know a name; it's the only name that saves. And it's worthy of all praise. Something comes out of the grave every time I call you, Jesus. I call you, Savior. Worthy of glory forever. Something comes out of the grave. Every time I call your name. Dead things come alive. Dead things come alive. What? Dead things come alive in the name of Jesus.

People of God, if you really want to follow Jesus: be the one who stays, when everyone else walks away, be the one who forgives, even when it is undeserved, be the one to show grace when everyone else is casting stones, be the one to show love, even when they betray you, because that's who Jesus is. That is who Jesus asks us to be.

I don't know if there are any Starbucks partners here today. But I was wrong. Finding out last Wednesday that a Starbucks employee was asking what church I served as pastor because they might have wanted to visit that church today. Oh, that is a very good day. But, my friends, make no mistake. This day. This Easter day. We thought all was lost. Until! This celebration of our Savior rising from the dead day. This is – hands down - the Best Day Ever. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.