

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Today is April first, April Fools' Day. For Christ-followers, it's also Resurrection Sunday or Easter Sunday. It's quite unusual for Resurrection Sunday to fall on April first. The last time that happened was in 1956 more than 60 years ago – 62 years ago to be exact. Much has changed in the last 62 years! The world of 1956 is not the world of 2018 as many of you can testify to.

Yes, today is an uncommon happening in our lives: Resurrection Sunday and April Fools' Day. When you stop to think about it, Jesus' resurrection was, to say the least, an uncommon happening in the lives of those who followed Christ. A very unexpected happening. A startling, singular event. The world was changed by that one-time, startling, unexpected event.

You may have wondered why I chose the reading from Acts for today's scripture. Traditionally on Resurrection Sunday, one of the stories of the resurrection from the Gospels, or stories of the life of Jesus, is read. I chose the Acts reading instead of the Gospel, because I wanted us to think about how this singular event – Christ's resurrection – was indeed unexpected. It caused the disciples and the world to rethink their view of God. With Jesus' resurrection, God had indeed done the unexpected, the unbelievable.

I also want us to think about and look for how God is still doing the unexpected in the world today – in our lives, in the lives of others and in this church.

Mary, a Christ-follower, came to the tomb to mourn and discovered the stone sealing the grave rolled away, leaving the grave open. The grave was empty. Mary then met the risen Christ whom she thought was the gardener. Could it be that she couldn't imagine that Jesus would be alive; that God would raise Jesus from the dead? Probably so. Christ was alive. What a surprise to Mary. God did the unexpected.

Mary wasn't alone in initially puzzling over the empty grave. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, saw the empty tomb and didn't understand what had happened. The dead alive? Not possible. It wasn't until Jesus appeared to Peter and the disciples and the Holy Spirit came upon them that they began to understand what Jesus had already told them. God would raise Jesus from the dead. God did the unexpected.

When we look at the Acts verses for today, we see that God continues to do the unexpected. These verses are taken from the Bible story of Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman soldier who worshipped the same God Peter worshipped. Cornelius was a

Gentile, not a Jew. Gentile in Jesus' day meant anyone who was not a Jew. It was Peter's belief that Jesus was the expected Messiah that the Old Testament prophets had foretold. Peter also believed the Messiah was for the Jewish people, not the Gentiles. After all, God's covenant was with the Jews, the Hebrew people, not with the Gentiles.

But much to Peter's surprise, God showed Peter that, as verse 34 states, **God shows no partiality**. Earlier in Acts, Chapter 10, God had revealed to Peter that there were no unclean foods. This was a shock to Peter who had always followed the Jewish food laws. Next, Peter learned that Gentiles could be Christ-followers as well when God sent the Holy Spirit on Cornelius' household right in front of Peter. God did something that Peter had not at all expected. By sending the Holy Spirit before Cornelius' household was baptized, God was showing Peter that Christ came not just to be the Messiah for the Jews, but to be the Messiah for the Gentiles – all people. **God shows no partiality**. God sent Jesus to save all people. As Acts, verse 36 says, Jesus was **Lord of all** – not just the Jews. God did the unexpected

When I was growing up, I often travelled to Cairo, Illinois, a town in Southern Illinois where my father's brother lived and near the little town where my father grew up. The state of Illinois ends at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. That's the location of Cairo, Illinois. I've stood in that park in Cairo where you can see these two mighty rivers flow together. You can see the less muddy water of the Ohio meeting and mixing with the muddy Mississippi's water. At Cairo, these two mighty rivers join together forming one river that continues down to the Gulf of Mexico.

These two powerful rivers combine to make one more powerful river. Similarly, we see in these verses from Acts 10 that God brings together the Jewish and Gentile Christ-followers as members of one church. We are all part of a single river.

God is the God who raised Jesus from the dead, an unexpected event for the disciples and all who witnessed his bodily resurrection. God did a new thing, an unexpected thing.

Does it surprise you that God is the God of the unexpected? What about today? Is God still the God of the unexpected? Are you, like Peter, being transformed by the new things that God is doing in the world today?

It's easy to see how we might develop habits and traditions that need adjusting from time to time. In this chapter of Acts, we read about traditions and beliefs that Peter held about food and the Messiah that were adjusted by God. Later in Acts we find that there were those in Jerusalem who didn't think Gentiles should be welcomed into the church. They were convinced by Peter and changed their way of thinking, opening the church to all. Thank heaven they did or we most likely wouldn't be sitting here today.

What about you and me today? I believe God is acting in our world today. God is creating a new thing. God continues to do the unexpected. Are we prepared to see the unexpected? Are we prepared to change?

Examples from this church where God has done a new thing. Look at our quarterly food distributions we did last year – and will continue this year. God brought Kevin’s talents to this church enabling us to do a new thing. Quite unexpected for a church our size. Look at our children’s program. Many of you may remember Esther who was our children’s minister. Think about how God brought Esther to this church enabling us to start something new – a children’s program – something many thought we’d never again have in this church. Quite unexpected. And though Esther is no longer here, her work is carried on by volunteers. Look at the New Worshipping Community this church is starting. God gave us the vision to reach out to a community that the church had rejected, a community that wanted nothing to do with the formal church. We are the only church in the Riverside Presbytery sponsoring a New Worshipping Community. Quite unexpected for a church our size.

These are three examples of the unexpected, new things God is doing and has done in this church. As we begin this season of Easter, we need to ask ourselves some serious questions. What unexpected door is God opening for us as members of Community Presbyterian? Who is God unexpectedly inviting to God’s table today who are not here to join us in the Lord’s Supper? Who in this community is God presenting this church with the unexpected opportunity to serve?

These are the questions this church’s governing body, the Session, has been and continues to examine in light of the study we completed last summer. That study was the New Beginnings study. Many of you participated in the small groups formed for that study.

Over the next several months, keep these questions in your mind. Keep your mind open to God’s voice in your life. The resurrection caused Peter to look differently at the world. How has the resurrection caused you to look differently at your world and what God is doing in it? Look past your assumptions and look for and embrace the new ways God is showing you and me and this church.

I’m sure some of those ways will be very unexpected. But you can handle it. Peter did as many of the saints have done through the ages.

Resurrection Sunday. Much has changed since 1956 the last time that Resurrection Sunday and April Fools’ Day coincided. One thing that has not changed. God is still the God of the unexpected. God of the new thing. The disciples changed the world once they grasped the significance of the resurrection. What will you do with the news of the resurrection? What will you do with the news that **God shows no partiality** and that **Jesus is Lord of all**? How will that news affect your actions, your life?