Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

April 1st, 2018 Easter Sunday

1st Reading; Acts 10: 34-43

Responsive Reading; Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Epistle Reading; 1st Corinthians 15: 1-11

Gospel Reading; John 20: 1-18

Sermon Title: APRIL FOOL!

Summary: The best laid plans of mice and men, or should that be rats?

This is Easter Sunday and this is April fool’s Day. The atheists will be saying that this is the biggest April fool’s joke in history and they are right. Where they are wrong is that they think it is a joke on the believers when actually it is a joke on the non-believers.

It is a loving joke on the loved ones of Christ and an earth shattering slam to the enemies of Christ.

To Mary and the women that came to anoint the body of Jesus and were worrying about who would roll away the stone, April fool, he is not here, he is risen, was the gift of life. Although this would take a little time to sink in.

To the enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees, the scribes and the Sanhedrin it was like losing the Super Bowl in the last second of the game when they were already doing their victory dance.

They thought that they had won. They thought that Jesus was dead. They thought that this whole reorganization of religious thinking had been nipped in the bud. They thought that they were safe. They thought that they had covered all the basis.

They had humiliated him. They had whipped him almost to death. They had crucified him and seen him die. They had arraigned for solders to guard the tomb so his followers could not steal his body and claim he had risen from death. They believed that they had negated his effort to make being a “servant to all” to be a noble thing, and actually the noblest thing anyone could do. They thought they had preserved their status of grandeur. They thought that they had won.

April fool! He is not here, he is risen. You lose.

Later the apostles are infused with courage and enthusiasm to proclaim the gospel. In our reading from Acts Peter gives proof of the resurrection by relating the Christ alive and well after Easter was witnessed by over 500 people, and that this fact assured that all that believed in Christ would also be given eternal life.

In 1st Corinthians, Paul relates how Christ is not dead but lives and acts within us, even those of us who have hurt him in the past. “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed.”

This is where I am going to throw in a slightly different twist on Easter. We have all looked at the physical pain endured by Christ at his crucifixion and though that was the worst pain he ever endured in his life on this planet.

I would like to inject the thought that the worst pain that Christ suffered was that of seeing others suffer. Jesus wept when he saw the friends of Lazareth weeping. Jesus took his disciples to a secluded place to rest just to find that 5000 people had beat him to it. “Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” So instead of resting he taught them all day long and into the evening when it became necessary to feed the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes.

Jesus knew that the only way that there would be harmony on earth was if everyone lived to serve each other. “If you would be 1st you must be last and a servant to all.” “Jesus gave up his Godly status to become a servant to all.” “You must take up your cross and follow me.” Follow me as I serve everyone.

When Wanda and I adopted our son Jamie everyone said that we were so wonderful to do that. Bull feathers! That was the most selfish thing we ever did. We got a son. We got to know the love that one experiences by being a parent. We got a thousand times the joy out of adoption as we would have by being “unhampered” by parenthood.

More recently I got to know the greatest joy of my life. That joy came from the year and a half that I got the privilege of serving Wanda in her time of need. When I got to change her dressings on her legs and drive 5 hours to Erie and back and sit with her for 6 hours I finally got to show her how much I loved her. Serving is so much more satisfying than just saying, “I love you.” Paul said, “It was not me but God with me.” It was God letting me get an idea of the joy that Jesus could feel when He said, “It is finished.” Which translates to, “Paid in full.”

Christ knew that he had just been given the privilege to roll away the stone on every grave that ever was, that was and that would ever be. That means that Wanda’s stone has been rolled away. Peter’s stone has been rolled away. Tom’s stone has been rolled away. Clyde’s stone has been rolled away and the loved one that you are thinking about right now, their stone too has been rolled away. Every single one of them has been freed from death and is eating Easter dinner with Jesus right now. They are eating with him in person as we are about to eat with him in spirit.

Jesus also knew that he had been given the privilege of showing us how we could experience same joy if only we would follow his example and be servants to all.

This is Easter. This is the day that the world got to start over. This is the day that we gained eternal life. This is the day that we gained the right to live that eternal life with purpose. Today starts the life of loving and serving others as Jesus loved and served us.

Hallelujah and amen!