

A BIMONTHLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED ON THE WESTSIDE, FOR THE WESTSIDE!



As a church family we pray a very blessed Easter for you and for your loved ones! May you know in fullness God's blessing through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Easter festival, celebrated by the Christian church since at least the second century, highlights in various ways how the blessings of nature, which we enjoy at this time of year, point to the best blessings of God's grace (unmerited favor) experienced in the Lord Jesus.

**Think of the SEASON of Easter.** The fact that Easter occurs following winter is significant. We have not endured the worst winter, nevertheless the sun and blue skies are returning, the temperature is increasing, the buds are appearing, the grass is recovering, and neighbors are reconnecting. This movement in nature from darkness to light, and from death to life is amplified in the background of Easter.

From what we know, Jesus most likely died on April 21, A.D. 33. The Gospels tell us, significantly, that this was the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Passover (cf. Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16). Just as the Passover celebrated the deliverance (redemption) of the Hebrews from depressing enslavement in Egypt, so the death of Christ secures the liberation of believers from bondage to sin. Those looking to Christ, says the apostle Peter, are called out of darkness into marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

**Think of the EXPERIENCE of Easter.** Easter offers a

wonderful opportunity for families and friends, and church families, to fellowship together in freedom and in peace. How different was the climate surrounding the first Easter.

The Lord Jesus preached and ministered in an occupied land. He was loved by the ordinary people, but hated by the religious hierarchy and subject to the ire of the pagan Roman occupiers. Betrayed by Judas, no charges could stick against him. His accusers thus brought forth false witnesses to indict him on two accounts: speaking against the Temple (and the religion of the Jews), and, when that failed, speaking seditiously against Caesar. Although the governor, Pilate, found no fault in him, he was crucified. Amid such hostility, Peter denied him, and the majority of the disciples fled, spending that first Easter in hiding.

Today, many Christians in Iran, Iraq, and Syria are under pressure to do the same. Yet, we have the freedom to hold our egg hunts, to distribute our Easter lilies, and to hear the best news God offers us. How blest we are!

**Think of the MESSAGE of Easter.** While the season and experience of Easter point indirectly to the best blessings of Easter, it is the message of Easter—the very component we are prone to play down—which highlights most clearly that the best blessing on offer is the gift of personal salvation. This salvation entails total forgiveness of sin, and is received through faith in the Christ. He bore sin's full cost, as is confirmed by his resurrection.

The happiest Easter is found, then, not in the post-Christian or cultural-Christian Easter (I went to church at Christmas and now again at Easter). It begins when we realize that its "solid joys," to quote John Newton (author of "Amazing Grace"), are in reach of those who, in faith, rest their burdened souls on Jesus (Matthew 11:28). Hear Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me all you who are weary"!

## ***“I DON’T GET IT! WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?”***

Actually, Jesus did not *have* to die. No one forced him to. As God’s Son he was in full, loving agreement with the Godhead to save sinners. Thus, he voluntarily laid down his life (John 10:15). That said, it was absolutely necessary for him to do so, if sinners are to be saved. Here’s why:

**1. *The nature of God.*** God is not only love but perfectly just. Indeed, justice is the very foundation of his throne (Psalm 89:14). God, then, for all his almightiness, cannot “turn a blind eye” to sin or pretend it never happened. He would then no longer be just, nor the unimpeachable Judge of all the earth. Put simply, he would cease to be God. Rather, he is bound by his perfect righteousness to demand satisfaction for all breakages of his law. Since, says the apostle Paul, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), someone must die on account of sin. Either we die for our sins (ever dying but never dying in hell, unable ever to satisfy God’s perfect justice), or we place our trust in Jesus. As God, Christ satisfied divine justice, and did so, as man, by suffering the righteous penalty for sin.



**2. *The nature of sin.*** Since our age has swallowed the lie that sin is just a bit of harmless fun, we ponder why sin receives the sentence of death. It does so because sin entails the forsaking of God, the source of true life. Recall how Adam and Eve died physically and spiritually once they sinned. Since the spiritually dead cannot restore their relationship to God, God takes the initiative. In the wonderful exchange of the cross, Christ receives the sinner’s forsakeness, crying out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), and we, through resting in Christ, return to the fellowship of relationship with God.

**3. *The nature of salvation:*** Amazingly, then, this just God so loves that he has found a way through Christ of justifying every ungodly person putting their faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Having exhausted his righteous anger against the believer’s sin at the cross, the Father deems his justice fully satisfied. Thus, for the believer in Jesus there is now no condemnation (Romans 8:1)! Rather, believers are alive in Christ for fellowship with God. True, our bodies still die, but God has wonderful plans for them as well!

## ***“I DON’T GET IT! WHY WAS THE RESURRECTION NECESSARY?”***

Since our salvation requires absolutely the death of Jesus—“if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Galatians 3:21)—what part does Christ’s resurrection play in the gospel? It serves to:

**1. *Reward Christ:*** The New Testament tells us that it was for the joy set before him (i.e., beyond the cross) that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). That joy was not simply a return to what he knew before, but was and remains the reward of his work of atoning for sin. Recall how Jesus declared from the cross that his work was finished (John 19:30). Writes Paul in Philippians 2:8–11, “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. *Therefore* [italics added] God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

**2. *Reassure the believer:*** How else could believers know that Christ’s work for their salvation was accepted by the Father unless he came back to tell us? The resurrection is, then, a most welcome “confirmation slip” from heaven that all sins of all believers—whether of thought, word, or deed—are paid for in full. This assurance is greatly needed! Recall how, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his deeply discouraged follower, Cleopas. Leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus, thinking Jesus had failed to “redeem Israel,” our Lord drew near, telling him that he had exceeded expectations by redeeming a new Israel of both Jewish and Gentile believers (Luke 24:13ff.).

**3. *Remind the world:*** Christ’s resurrection is the “firstfruits” (or prototype) of the general resurrection of the Last Day. His rising again is the assurance that he is returning to raise bodily to life those who believe in him, and to judgment those preferring to stay in their sins and to be estranged from God. Says Paul, God “commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30–31). Are you ready for that Day?

## THE RETURN OF A PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

Gail Rozeboom

I grew up in Zeeland, and have always lived in West Michigan. I was taken to church and attended public school. My Dad's mother was especially a role model for me.

A "prodigal" used to live a reckless and wasted life, but has now returned to God.

However, I am a prodigal daughter of my heavenly Father. Early on I deserted him and went in search of the world's "riches." Instead, I found oppressing sin, heartache, and loss. I lost my direction, my sense of self, and nearly lost my life. I was most desperate and without hope.

But God, in His great mercy, lifted me from the overwhelming flood. He forgave my sin and saved my soul. I had nothing to offer in exchange. To draw from a hymn by Elvina Hall of 1865, "Jesus paid it all." A contemporary of hers, famous preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92), in his book *All of Grace*, states the way of salvation as follows:

*Do not look beneath the ice to find fire,  
Nor hope in your own natural heart to find  
repentance.  
Look to the Lord's shedding his heart's blood for  
you,  
Set before your mind's eye his agony and compas-  
sion.*

Now forgiven, I am learning to forgive, to let go of my grievances and the "right" to have my own way. It is with a grateful heart that I yearn to do God's will. Under his covenant of grace it is possible to learn from my mistakes. I learn patience from prayer. I take my fear to Him. This is the joy a Christian has. In her biography of Isobel Kuhn (a missionary to China and Thailand), Ruth Stuhl describes Kuhn's experience of fear: "The dangers she had feared never met her, but dangers far worse awaited her!" This struck a cord with me. Stuhl continues, "It does no good to imagine the evils that await us and for the unimagined ones the Lord is suf-

The "covenant of grace" describes the Christian's relationship to God. It has been planned by God, made possible by Christ's taking away of sin, and is entered through faith in Jesus Christ. Because the relationship is a covenant it lasts forever. God, for his part, remains unceasingly faithful to those to whom he binds himself in covenant. Those in covenant with him receive all the resources necessary to grow in faithfulness to God.

ficient. So let us be at peace" (*By Searching* [1959]).

Early in my Christian walk I also faced much temptation. A biblical truth that helped me see my way through is found in I Corinthians 10:12:

*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

This "hedging in" became very real to me.

Along the way, I have been blessed to hear sound biblical teaching preached so reverently each Lord's Day at Seventh Reformed Church here on the Westside. Bible study sheds new light on my path and I feel washed through the Word (Ephesians 5:26). I have also been blessed by the making of new friendships in the Christian community of the church. My nuclear family has stood by me as well and are supportive.

Looking to the future, I pray for humility. I pray to grieve for those who suffer. I especially pray to grieve for those who stand in harm's way for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and who suffer for their faith in their Savior.

But I also pray for the welfare of our city. I do so, because I have found hope which others, too, may have. It is a radical hope. It comes from the God of hope who fills his people with joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). By this hope I step out to do God's will, and by it I am revived when feeling weak. This God, my God, will never forsake me! I highly commend returning to him.



Note throughout this edition of *The Way* the different colors used: The deep red of blood for Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday, black for Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and Gold for Easter Sunday.

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## WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

### † Prayer

All ages

Wednesdays (except April 12)

Needing prayer? Bring your burdens along to our close-knit prayer group. A warm welcome awaits you. Just come as you are! We all need God's help. Call the office for times.



### † Westside Soccer Club

Grades 3–7

Fridays (except April 7, 14)

Girls 4:00–5:30 P.M.

Boys 5:30–7:00 P.M.

The vision of WSC is to create and nurture a valuable learning atmosphere, where Westside children can develop their soccer skills as well as character traits pleasing to God, such as good sportsmanship, fair play, teamwork, giving one's best, perseverance, respect for opponents and officials.



## INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

Thursday April 13, 7:00 P.M.

Maundy Thursday Communion Service

Friday, April 14, 12:00 P.M.–3:00 P.M.

Annual Community Good Friday Service

*Come when you can, leave when you must!*

Sunday April 16, 9:45 A.M. and 5:50 P.M.

Resurrection Day Services

Saturday May 13, 9:00 A.M.–12:00 P.M.

Youth Group Flower Sale

## ENDED UNTIL FALL

### † GEMS and Cadets—

Girls' and Boys' Clubs

Grades I–6

GEMS is an exciting, safe environment for girls to learn about God, His Word, and His world. Each meeting girls will have a Bible lesson, a time for crafts, and practice movement to our theme song for the year.



In Luke 2:52—  
“Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”—we find



THE CALVINIST  
CADET CORPS

the goal of **Cadets**, to help boys grow spiritually in all areas of life (devotional, mental, physical, and social) by providing Christian men with a uniquely designed structure, program, and materials.

### † English as a Second Language

Our all ages ESL class is available to any looking to improve English skills (reading, writing, pronunciation) in a casual individualized setting. Learners of any skill level are welcome to join the class!



**Questions about our worship services (Sundays 9:45 A.M. and 5:50 P.M.), other activities, or church? Contact us at 616-459-4451 or 7thref@7thref.org**