Calvary United Methodist Church
April 1, 2018

EASTER CANTATA
Rise Up! Rejoice!
Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks

Children’s Sermon: Matthew 28:1-8
The Kingdom, the power and the glory for each of us, regardless of our age and station in life. You know the drill, kids. Come on! Good to see everybody this morning. We welcome you to the front of the sanctuary at this time to share God’s Good News! (Are you tired?) Am I tired? Why, do I look tired? I am juiced, man! I am jazzed. I’m ready to rock. We are going to have eight more services today! We are just going to keep on going until somebody drops, that’s what we are going to do. How’s that? You guys are up for it, aren’t you?

So, today is a special day. Happy Easter to you. (Happy Easter.)

So, tell me, why are we celebrating in two words or less? (Jesus’ resurrection!) Wow! Jesus’ resurrection! Nicely done!

What I should have said is in eight letters or less, because here’s a guy who knew how to make that happen. This man’s name is Alfred Ackley. He was born in 1887. He died in 1960, not all that long ago, at least it seems like that for some of us.

Alfred was a glorious musician. He won a scholarship to travel to London, England to study cello at the Royal Academy of Music.
And then he got back in 1908 and not long after that he received a call to go into the ministry. Apparently he had a career crisis, so he went to study ministry at Westminster Theological Seminary, which is down near Philadelphia.

And then over the next couple of years he served Presbyterian churches in Wilkes-Barre and in Elmhurst. Apparently he wasn’t good enough to cut it in a Methodist church. Oh, that’s a joke. Come on!

So he served in those two congregations for a while and then a very famous minister, think Billy Graham, a very famous minister of that time named Billy Sunday called him up and said, “Hey, I need a piano player. Would you be willing to play piano at these revival meetings that I’m having all across the country.

So Alfred said, “Ok, I’ll go.”

And in one of those meeting, in the third row, sitting right where Alfred could see him was a young man. And the young man sat through the entire worship service, didn’t crack a smile, didn’t sing a note of music, just sat there. The next night, same guy, same seat, same reaction. Five nights in a row this went on. The man just sat there. He wouldn’t sing; he wouldn’t smile; he wouldn’t engage at all.

And on the sixth night, Alfred looked down and saw him right there one more time. And after the service was over, everybody was getting up to leave except for this one person who walked up to the stage as Alfred was gathering his music together and asked him the question that can be answered with less than eight letters. And the question was this:
Why should I worship a dead guy? Because as far as he knew, Jesus lived, was crucified, dead and buried. Dead and buried.

And Alfred said, after he kind of caught his mind for a second from being so surprised, he said this: Why should I worship a dead guy? He lives! He is more alive today than ever before. I can prove it with my own life.

They talked for a little bit and then Alfred shared with the young man the Easter story that we all know so well.

From Matthew 28: Dawn came on Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, They both went to the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake. And angel descended from heaven. He rolled back the stone and he sat down on it. And his face shone like the sun. The guards, they passed out. But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid. You’re looking for Jesus. He’s not here.” And a great cloud of the faithful joined in and said, “He lives! Rejoice!” Except they were much happier. “See for yourself,” the angel continued. “Go quickly and tell his disciples.” And you know what? That’s exactly what they did. The two Marys ran and told the disciples. And then the disciples, once they finally believed, they told others. And that story has been passed down from generation to generation.
But Alfred, as he was thinking about that story as the man walked away, thought this: Even after I told him the Easter story as I know it, he wasn’t sure, Alfred wasn’t sure that his Easter story was told or that it would make any difference, because Easter in Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, that’s Jesus’ Easter story. (How did Jesus get dead?) How did Jesus get dead? People who hated him hated him so badly they decided they were going to put him in jail, they were going to beat him and they were going to hang him on a cross, like that one right there in that glass window. (And then he died.) And then he died. That’s exactly right. That’s his story, and Easter is the celebration that he lives. But Alfred wanted to tell the Easter story as he knew it.

So he prayed a couple of weeks later one night: Lord, help me to share the Easter message, my Easter message.

Then a couple of weeks later, Alfred was playing on the piano and those two words popped into his head again:

He lives! It’s the shortest explanation of Easter you could imagine. And Alfred wrote a song that has become so much a part of Easter that I bet almost everyone sitting here, except maybe for you guys, know this song because it has been around for so long. So we are going to sing what’s called the chorus. This is the part that we all know the best. And so as Ms. Benedict plays the chorus, we are going to sing like we are filled with what? (Joy!) Thank you very much. Let’s sing!

He lives, he lives. Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks and with me along life’s narrow way.

He lives, he lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart.
Ah, those are the words that Alfred wrote because he knew that we all know the Easter story in the Bible, but there is another Easter story.

There is your Easter story and my Easter story and that’s the story we have to tell.

How do I know that he lives?

Alfred said he lives in my heart. He walks with me and talks with me.

How do you know he lives? He lives in my heart and your heart and he comes alive in the love that I share with you and that you share with others. That’s God’s love in there. And when we share it, he comes alive in the heart and in the love that we share.

He lives in our souls, in the way that we orient our lives.

And he comes alive in the faith that I bear to you, the beliefs that I have, the willingness that I have to serve and to be with you and your willingness to serve and be with me.
He lives in the work of my hands, in the work of my life.

He lives in my handiwork and he comes alive in all that I say and all that I do.

He lives in my mind. He lives in the way that I look out and see all of you and think of you not as strangers or people I might know a little bit. No, no! We’re brothers and sisters; we’re family in God’s love. That’s how we think of one another. That’s how Christ taught us to care for each other.

We all know Jesus’ Easter story, but…

Only you can tell your Easter story and only I can tell mine.

And I tell it through the love that I have, though the faith that becomes a part of all that I do to everyone that I meet and the service that I render to God.
He lives!

Now, you’ve only heard that chorus one time. Do you think maybe you remember it or would you like to do something else other than sing? I have a feeling you’d prefer to do something else other than sing. These are great big “He Lives” kazoos. So, what we are going to do, everybody is going to grab one and then I am going to teach you how to play them.

Grab one, everybody get in here. And I want you to face the congregation. Come on around this way. We have plenty. There is a whole big box of them under the table if we run out. Alright? Hang on, we’ve got some more. Alright, bring them on out. Now, this is not a hard instrument to play. Go ahead, choir, you felt let out before, I know. Just pass, take one and pass them. Here’s the deal. Face this way if you would. So, here’s the deal. There are two ends. You place the small end in your mouth and you go like this: (Playing the kazoos.)

All great musicians follow their director. So, watch and play when I tell you too. You ready? Not until I say. Go! (Kazoos and music.) Let’s all sing:

I serve a risen Savior; he’s in the world today. I know that he is living, whatever foes may say.

I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer and just the time I need him, he’s always near.
He lives. He lives. Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.

He lives. He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart. (Applause.) It’s like being in a Christian beehive. Great!

We all know the story of Easter, but...

You have your own story to tell,

So make sure that you tell it in the love that you share, in the faith that brings us together, for everyone and in service to all. Thanks be to God. Rejoice! Thanks for sharing in our time this morning.

**Rise Up! Rejoice! Easter Cantata**  
Narration 1 (following *Rise Up! Rejoice!*)

Let the people proclaim and rejoice in the name of the Lord. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised is the power and promise of our God. Never content to allow us to wonder in the wilderness of doubt, our Creator brings light and hope to all who will celebrate Christ’s’ Resurrection. From the first breath of life when the world began to the first cry of the promised child in Bethlehem, history reveals the movement of grace in every time and place. Always in motion, the Spirit sings the tune of our salvation, inviting us to rise up and join the Lord of Dance.
Narration 2 (following *Lord of the Dance*)
The covenant Jesus established with his followers is simply stated: I’ll live in you if you’ll live in me. When we welcome the Risen Christ into our hearts, everything about us is recreated to fulfill the promise of his perfect love. Fear dissolves into faith. Doubt becomes determination. Indifference is hammered to the cross of boundless compassion. We die to self and rise to service. There is no longer a question lingering in our minds or lurking in our hearts. Our souls sing out the message of resurrection as we proclaim, “How Great Thou Art.”

Narration 3 (following *Then Sings My Soul*)
The cornerstone of our faith is a stumbling block to many: The world defines greatness in terms of power. The ethics of culture encourage us to elevate and advance ourselves. The famous are lauded and the wealthy are worshipped. Against this backdrop human pride and depravity, a humble rabbi gathers his disciples for a pauper’s feast. He shares a loaf with them as a symbol of the community God’s endless love has assembled. And he offers that same sacrament to us today. May we hold the bread until all have received, that we might share in our confession that Jesus is Lord.

Narration 4 (following *The Father’s Love*)
Held in the arms of Almighty God, we are enfolded in the warmth of his love. The bread in our hands reminds us of just how far our Savior would go to bring peace to our weary souls. Take and eat this gift of grace and rejoice in our communion as the body of Christ, gathering in His name and presence.

Lifting high a common cup, our Lord invites the faithful into a new covenant; a commitment to love others as he has first loved us. May we hold this symbol of his life poured out for us until all have received it.

Narration 5 (following *Crown Him/Majesty*)
The majesty of God’s plan for our salvation is beyond our comprehension. This cup is a symbol of the life of the Lamb of God, poured out for you and I that we may know forgiveness and freedom. Take & drink of it and rejoice! You are raised to new life in Jesus.
Christ is God’s greatest gift to a broken and hurting world. We neither deserve his sacrifice nor desire to share in it. And yet, despite our sin, denial and betrayal, there is only one reason for joy and thanksgiving. As we present our tithes and offerings, let us do so in the name of Jesus. Only Jesus.

Narration 6 (The Prayer of Dedication)
We present these offerings to the glory of God in gratitude for the great things He has done. May they serve to sustain and enlarge the fellowship of the Spirit and the harvest of the Kingdom. With these tokens of our commitment, we also place our hearts and lives before the throne of the King of Kings. All hail the power of Jesus’ name, through whom we are lifted to life everlasting. Amen.

**Benediction:**

Thanks be to God for the gift of the Easter story. We know the story of Easter from the point of view of Jesus and his resurrection and that’s what saves us.

What we share with others is our story of the resurrection and only you can tell it.

Tell it through the love and the faith that you share with all. Tell it through the service of your hands and your hearts.

Thanks be to God for the gift of Christ. He lives. Rejoice. Amen.