

Straight from the "Hart"

April 9, 2023 – Son Rise - Easter



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this service script. Our Lenten Series is called "Journey of Stones" and is very loosely based on a book by the same title, written by Steven Molin.



He is risen. **He is risen indeed.** I'm very glad you are here to worship with us on this special Easter Sunday morning, whether you are turning in at home or sitting in the pews in the sanctuary. Everyone in the room should have gotten a polished stone with a cross on it.

Opening Prayer Almighty God, we come to give thanks by offering ourselves to you -- because through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate to everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord's resurrection, -- by the renewing of your spirit -- that we may rise from the death of sin and to the life of righteousness, through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Call to Worship Come to the Lord, for his wondrous birth means nothing unless we are born again. Come to worship, for his death and sacrifice mean nothing unless we die to sin. Come join in the Lord's presence, for his resurrection means nothing if he alone is risen. Come to let the Lord lift you up, now to live in his grace, and someday to live in his glory. Come and worship the risen Savior.



Music So let's join in the song of life and resurrection....

Christ the Lord is Risen Today (with He's Alive)

Words: Charles Wesley,
New Words and Music: Kirk Kirkland
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Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Dying once he all doth save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O Grave? Alleluia!

He's alive, he's alive! Night has gone and dawn has come.
He's alive, he's alive! Death has lost and life has won! He's alive!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

He's alive, he's alive! Night has gone and dawn has come.
He's alive, he's alive! Death has lost and life has won!

Repeat

He's alive, he's alive! He's alive, he's alive!

Easter Affirmation (C- Congregation, P – Pastor)

C: We believe in God,

P: who lights the dawn to chase away the darkness; who rolls away each stone of doubt; who brings sunshine after rain and works healing in the midst of pain; who looks into each soul with love, touches each memory with blessing and longs for us to know we are beloved; who surprises us with incredible gifts of family and friends, silence and laughter; who raises us from sadness and despair to the possibilities of blessing and joy, who splashes the world with springtime color and fills the air with the singing of birds and the roar of the ocean; who meets us at the tomb of our fears and sends us out with hope and joy.

C: We believe in Jesus,

P: the risen Christ, the Friend of the poor and the forgotten, searcher for the lost, Savior of the world; who loves us without judgment, yet persuades us to change; who joins us as we walk and work with the poor and oppressed; who comes to us in our grief and longing, befriends us when we feel lonely, surprises us when we feel bored, prods us when we get complacent; who loves all children, dances with the elderly, shows compassion to the dying. He calls us by name and sends us on the paths of peace to speak of an awesome love that is not overcome by death.

C: We believe in the Holy Spirit,

P: The hidden partner, the gentle messenger of God, who fills our every breath with blessing; Who guides us in the dark, beckons us to do good, speaks to us in dream and image, and watches over us with tender compassion, who weaves us into communities of faith of all ages, nations and races; who is the stillness in every silence, the breath in every deep sigh, the love in every tender embrace.

C: We believe we are called to be an Easter people --

P: challenging despair with glowing hope, acting peacefully in the midst of painful Good Fridays and living joyfully even in the midst of harsh realities, becoming the hand-holding, heartily singing and passionate, caring fellowship of seekers and finders.

C: We believe in Christ's Church,

P: an instrument of God in this present moment, striving for justice, celebrating in joy, clawing at despair, living in hope, praying for healing and forever proclaiming Good News of God's persistent and redeeming love.

C: This -- we believe.

P: Therefore, shouts of joy and victory abound!

C: The Lord has done mighty and wondrous things!

P: God has conquered sin and death once and for all time!

C: Let us proclaim the good news with joyful hearts!

P: Jesus Christ is risen today!

C: Alleluia! He is risen indeed!

Theme The ancient pyramids were built a long time ago, about 4,000 years or so. They didn't have the kind of power tools and heavy cranes, and equipment that we have today. Actually, I don't think many of the cranes we have today would even work with those things. People have different ideas about how they must have been built. Someone made a contest to have some teams try out their ideas on how they did it. They were given a month to construct a miniature sized pyramid (and I don't mean like tabletop) I mean a big one, but small compared to the real ones, for the real ones – well, one pyramid in Giza rises about 481 feet high with stones weighting between 2.5 to 15 and some of the other pyramids had stones that were 25 and even 80 tons. The average gap between the joints -- .5 mm. They were pretty precise with what they did. Back to the contest -- So they were still making good sized ones, just nothing like the originals. They could also only use

tools that would have been available when they were originally built.

One group carefully measured all the angles and positions of where all the stones were supposed to go. They chiseled the stones and put them in place using a system of pulleys and ramps. They knew the first stone they laid was the crucial cornerstone because all the other stones would be cut to it and built around it. When they thought they had the first stone all set, they began to build their mini pyramid. They had laid about 15 blocks in place and had just a week to go they realized that their first corner block was cut at the wrong angle. But it was too late to start over -- so they just finished it up the way it was --- flawed.

Precise stonework was crucial to the construction of any building, especially back in those days. We've been talking about how Jesus is the cornerstone of our life and if we live our life according to his will, that is the first stone of our life, and we'll get everything lined up right, and everything else will fall into place. He won't throw our lives off if we follow him, and we will end up with something fantastic in the end.

Of course, we have stones piled on our cross to remind us that it is a process. We need imperfections to be polished out of us. [Pause] Joey had some mental issues. He was in a singing group, but because of his disability he sometimes caused such a discipline problem that the director thought of dismissing him from the group. Then the director met with Joey's dad, who said, "My boy's not as smart as most people, but he is responsible for leading his mother and me, his grandparents, 5 brothers, and a sister into a relationship with Jesus. We all have our own flaws, we all have our own gifts, and none of us function exactly the same – even if we have those same flaws and same gifts. We're all different.

Have you ever heard of clinker bricks? Clinker bricks are not precious stones. They are stones that came out of the kiln defective or discolored or distorted. They used to be rejected and thrown away -- before it became a "style". People in Gates, NY built their church with clinker bricks specifically to remind themselves that they were once rejected and without mercy and not a people but now they are people who have received mercy and are the people of God. In the midst of terrible even life-threatening cultural rejection, Peter paints a picture of acceptance and belonging, the rejected have become accepted, and important -- not only as individuals but individuals who have come together as one spiritual house. We are not just a random pile of rocks strewn across the landscape. God's salvation is not only a promise to individuals to offer individual hope but an offer that turns us living

stones into a collective that is built together just as he sees fit, so that together we become the holy Temple that contains the Holy Spirit, the presence of God. But it all starts when we choose to wisely build our sometimes weak, sometimes flawed life on the foundation of Jesus the Cornerstone.

Music So we are going to sing together as best we can this song we introduced last time – Cornerstone...

Cornerstone

Words and Music: Edward Mote, Reuben Morgan, Jonas Myrin, Eric Liljero
© 2012 Hillsong Music Publishing

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean in Jesus' name.

Chorus

Christ alone, Cornerstone; weak made strong in the Savior's love.
Through the storm he is Lord, Lord of all.

When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil,
my anchor holds within the veil.

Chorus

He is Lord, Lord of all.

Chorus

When he shall come with trumpet sound Oh, may I then in him be found;
dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless stand before the throne.

Chorus (2x)

Music As our Cornerstone, then, let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

2066 Praise the Name of Jesus

Text: Roy Hicks, Jr. Music: Roy Hicks, Jr.

Praise the name of Jesus. Praise the name of Jesus.
He's my rock, he's my Fortress, he's my Deliverer, in him will I trust.
Praise the name of Jesus.

Repeat

Pastor's Prayer Heavenly Creator, Lord of life, in Jesus you are mighty in deed, healing, drawing, loving; serving those who followed you as an example for us to follow. We are humbled, because not only did you call us to believe in you -- you believe in us, and invested your life and Christ's death in us. Even in trials and terrors, failures, and all varieties of dark times, even when we have searched for meaning without seeking your call or anguished over decisions without seeking

your guidance; even when we disappoint you, you do not lose heart. Your constant mercy and unwavering love is the overcoming light that shines your presence within us. You never give up on us. Instead, we find in Christ the healing, loving, touching, working, laughing, dancing God. It is because of our confidence in who you are that we lift those that are heavy on our hearts today, or who we celebrate today..

Praises and Petitions * Bert offers praise for Valerie Carpenter who had her heart transplant and is doing well, and thank you for the prayers. * and Mary Jo Malott asks prayers for Jim's son-in-law Pat who is now in hospice care, and for strength for the wife, Sandy. * Today, we continue to pray the Jan Martin's son Brian's mother-in-law Fannie and Ricky Williams who lost everything in a house fire. * We also think about natural disasters, and conflict that is going on around the world and sometimes nearby, sometimes on a personal level, sometimes widespread, and we just pray for all those unnamed among us-- and beyond us -- who are recovering from illness or injury or facing other kinds of challenges or setbacks in their lives, and celebrating those things that are good and of course we have the list of those who donated flowers in memory or honor and we look through that list and think about ALL those people who have impacted our own lives through your grace that worked through them or in other ways. We are grateful for all that we have been able to experience because of those people being in our presence. [Brief Pause]

Lord, you are quick to hear the cries of humble and willing hearts, so we ask you to forgive us and cleanse us in whatever parts of our life need that, and continue to guide us in the ways that we should go. Set us on your pathway for our living -- that we may rise from our prayers with the light of hope in our eyes -- assured more than ever before, that we can, with renewed energy. strive to live as you taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER (Sung)**

Intro to and Bible Reading 3

On Friday, Jesus hung on the cross and finished his work of salvation. The Jewish leaders asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by breaking their legs. They wanted the bodies removed quickly because Saturday was a Passover week Sabbath. The soldiers broke the legs of the two men who were crucified on either side of Jesus, but when they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead. But to be sure,



one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. Nicodemus brought a lot of perfumed ointments, and with Joseph, a secret disciple, took the body of Jesus with Pilate's permission. They wrapped the ointments around Jesus body with long sheets of linen cloths. The place of the crucifixion was near a garden where there was a new, never used tomb. They placed Jesus there. (Sum of John 19:31-42) Now we pick up the story.

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed — for until then they still hadn't understood...

Music: So the joyful news begins to spread and as the truth and its implications begin to sink in, let's sing before the sermon

Christ is Risen

Words: Brian Wren, 1984 © 1986 Hope Publishing House

Music: Polish carol; arr. by Edith M.G. Reed, 1926

1. Christ is risen! Shout hosanna! Celebrate this day of days.
Christ is risen! Hush and wonder all creation is amazed.
In the desert all surrounding, see, a spreading tree has grown.
Healing leaves of grass abounding bring a taste of love unknown.
2. Christ has risen! Raise your spirits from the caverns of despair.
Walk with gladness in the morning. See what love can do and dare.
Drink the wine of resurrection, not a servant, but a friend;
Jesus is our strong companion, joy and peace shall never end.
3. Christ has risen! Earth and heaven never more shall be the same.
Break the bread of new creation where the world is still in pain.
Tell its grim, demonic chorus: "Christ has risen! Get you gone!"
God the First and Last is with us. Sing hosanna everyone!

Sermon The Living Stone: Too Good to be True

Words in boxes were not read, but are for easy reference to the verses being talked about at that point of the sermon.

We have surrounded ourselves with the evidence of Easter. The sacrament, the flowers, the hymns that we have been singing, the confident voices of our friends who boldly claim, "He is risen -- **He is risen indeed!**" It's easy to believe in the resurrection today, and next week during Bright Sunday as the news of resurrection spreads. The disappointment of Good Friday has been replaced with unspeakable joy! Actually they spoke quite a bit! But you just can't quite capture it with words.

But what about tomorrow, next month, next year? What about when people let us down ... or when circumstances wound us... or when the sins of our lives or our world overwhelm us? What will we believe about Easter then? Will it be just a distant memory, a past grand event -- in Shakespearean language -- a walking shadow that strutted on the stage full of sound of fury but in the end signifying nothing?

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb

It certainly wasn't easy for the initial Easter people to believe -- they were still in the depths of grief when Mary showed up early that morning still in the dark. At times like this, there is comfort and strength in friends. As John tells it, Mary went early while it was still dark. Sometimes people need to be with others, but sometimes people need to be alone, needing that time for personal reflection by themselves -- to reflect on what happened and what might have been.

This Lenten season we have been on a journey of stones. Each week as we walked into the sanctuary, we brought a stone in with us, and each week we recognized a potential stumbling stone in our relationship with Jesus. Things that take up space in our life, that weigh us down, that keeping us from flying to God.

Our spiritual pilgrimage has taken us far and brought us many rewards, I hope. Hopefully, we have already been tossing aside many of the rocks with the help of God, family and friends. We can't remove these stones of sins and struggles by ourselves; so we have been laying them at the cross, symbolically asking for Christ's resurrection power to help us cooperate with him to remove those stumbling stones from our life ... and the rock pile has become the visible evidence of spiritual growth in our life.

And having removed all else, Mary has come fully expecting that only one immovable tomb stone remains between God and her. But for this one rock, we will experience the resurrection power of the Risen Christ! Just one rock.

and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

But we cannot remove it in our power. We cannot remove the stoniness of our heart. But when Mary arrived at the tomb, the large stone which sealed the entrance to the tomb was gone.

It was not removed to let Jesus out. In his glorified state, he was no longer limited by closed doors, thick walls or stone-sealed tombs. The rock was removed so that everyone else could see that he wasn't there, that it was empty.

This is the ultimate message of Easter: what we could not do by ourselves, God does for us. God is in the rock removal business. But it is way too easy for us to let the rock roll back in front of the tomb, to hang on to stones that seal us off from resurrection and new life.

We don't recognize what has happened and so we come up with other explanations for life.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!"

Mary concluded that grave robbers had stolen the body. She sprinted back to tell the others. Isn't that just like us sometimes? God clears away all the barriers to get to his Son, and everything is taken out of the way -- everything that we couldn't possibly move by ourselves, and all of a sudden it is gone, but instead of seeing the resurrection, we assume God has been stolen out of our grasp!

Instead of the mild comfort of being one stone away from a dead God, we now don't know where to look for him, to be close to him -- he is still dead to us, irrelevant, so we run to our friends and throw up our hands in total confusion...

I heard about an egg hunt once where someone had gone out pre-hunt and took all the treasures from inside the eggs. How would you like to go on an egg hunt and find nothing inside? Some people claim the Easter story is like that. They hear the story but don't experience God's love because they think it is an empty story.

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

Peter and John were not content simply to hear what for right now is still horrible news; they had to go and see it for themselves. They *ran* to the tomb. The reading says “the other disciple” – that is John, that is just how he refers to himself in his book.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

John got there first, but then he stopped and only peered in. He saw the grave clothes, but he wouldn't go inside, so he waited for Peter.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Peter didn't even break stride! (as usual) He just burst right in so he could take his look! He looked at the evidence.

Now in the original language, John carefully chooses his words to convey a progression of sight. Mary saw the situation. Peter and John come running. John arrives first, and from the distance of the entrance peers in, and so, so far we have conclusions drawn from simple observations. Then Peter goes in and looks -- and the word changes from merely seeing, to mean a critical examination of things. Peter was playing CSI. And then in the final verse of today's story,

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

John now goes in and saw – and the word changes again, and it is a word that means not just sight, but insight, understanding, and belief. John was the last one in but the first one to figure it out.

There is not only a progression of vision, but a progression of love -- for it was Mary, who loved Jesus so much, who arrives first that morning, and it was John the beloved, who outran Peter to the tomb, and it was John who first came to faith in the resurrection because he had become so sensitive to Jesus through love.

It was love that gave him the eyes to read the signs and the mind to understand. When so much of our love “is blind”, here we see love as the great interpreter. Love can grasp truth when intellect is left groping and uncertain. Love can realize the meaning of a thing when research is inconclusive, not that research and keeping our eyes open and looking carefully is wrong or not helpful, it is – so don’t go down that track. It is very helpful and needful at times. But don’t settle for only simple sight that knows about Jesus, or that examines Jesus critically (even in the best sense of that word) as an intellectual exercise, but with a sight that knows him personally through the eyes of love.

Then we’ll know that he is no longer in the tomb because someone carried him off, but because he has risen. And in so doing, He becomes the King, the source of salvation, the victor over the sting of death, and all is well because God has validated the life and witness of Jesus by raising him from the grave.

Look with the eyes of love, and we’ll find the empty tomb is just not an empty story. We hear later, if we keep reading on, that Mary, not quite yet to the insight of John, is sobbing. She has gone back to the tomb to look again for him. She has been to the tomb, she’s been to the disciples, she’s back to the tomb, now she sees “the gardener”, searching everywhere for Jesus’ body, but without luck. (See John 20:11ff)

I wonder how many times we make the same mistake -- the only Christ we know lived 2000 years ago. We may be moved by how he lived and what he taught, we may stand before the cross and moved to emotion and inspiration by the example of his love and by the hymns that we sing. But it ends there, for we only encounter a historical figure, and inspiring legend of someone long ago.

We need to find more than a dead memory of someone who was great in his time. We must search for and find the living Lord. And this is the clincher. For all of Mary’s searching, it was not she who found Christ, but Christ who found her and revealed himself to her and called her by name. It was then that she experienced the living, glorified Lord, and may that be for us as well when he calls us.

Communion

Music And one of the traditions Jesus started to help us future generations experience his living presence is the sacrament of Communion. Let’s prepare our hearts for Communion by singing,

Christ is Alive

Words: Brian Wren Music: Psalmodia Evangelica

1. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing. His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring. His love in death shall never die.

2. Christ is alive! No longer bound to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim that here and now and dwell in every place and time.

5. Christ is alive, and comes to bring good news to this and every age,
till earth and all creation ring with joy, with justice, love, and praise.



Invitation (Congregation joins in reading **bold** font)

All are welcome to participate, you don't need to be a member of this church or denomination, but only want to find Christ and his resurrection power. Through this sacrament, we are reminded of the price Jesus paid for our freedom from sin's power and penalty. He invites all who believe in and who strive to follow his ways to participate to be strengthened by his love and life. Let's prepare our hearts through confession.

Confession Redeeming God, you bring life out of dead ends, and hope in the midst of despair. Forgive us for doubting, for our hesitant obedience, our cautious compassion, our too-frequent reluctance, for failing to live in tune with your love. Even when our faith falters, you do not lose faith in us. You continue coming to us, offering to form us in your love, acting with justice, living out hope, inspired and inspiring others.

Assurance Christ forgives us, overcomes fears, comforts cries, and breaks down barriers to his love and peace. Know that through the risen Christ, we are forgiven and at peace. Let's give thanks:

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. You formed and breathed life into us. When our love failed, your love for us did not. You deliver us from slavery and sin and lead us to a full, abundant life.

By the resurrection of your Son, we are born anew into a living hope to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. You have made us your people to declare the wonderful deeds of the living Christ who promised he would always be with us.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

By your great mercy, you raised Jesus from the dead and he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread. And in the power of your Holy Spirit your church continues to break the bread and share in the cup.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died Christ has risen Christ will come again.

So, pour out your Holy Spirit on these people and these elements. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, enlivening us to bring praise and honor that is your due, and to unite us with each other in ministry under your name -- until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet table.

We do not presume to come to this table by our goodness, but by your gracious invitation, Lord. So by your mercy, we participate in this Sacrament that we may walk in newness of life, grow into Christ's likeness, and we may evermore dwell in you and you in us.

We offer our heart, soul, mind and strength -- as a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to you -- that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

The Bread and Cup And so on the night in which he gave himself up for us, he gathered his followers into an upper room, where he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said “take, eat; This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: “drink from this, all of you; This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, drink it in remembrance of me.”



Stones

And the promise is, when he appears to us, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope purifies themselves: By God’s grace and direction, we allow him to keep tossing away the separating stones between God and ourselves. One image that we could have done for you is to remove all the stones we have been setting in front of this cross. Because Jesus died and took them on himself, and he buried them. and now he has come back – and they are gone! It would have been a powerful visual. That was on possible imagery that we could have done. All of your stumbling stones – gone.

But we talked recently about the stones that were piled up as a perpetual witness, a memorial that reminds us of what God has done, and reminds us too. So this pile of stones reminds us that we need to continue to trust in him in our covenant relationship with him. And now you have a different stone in your hand – shiny and polished, with an empty cross on it. I’ve heard some of you trying to pick the prettiest or shapeliest stones when you came in each week. I did too. But they were easy to leave here because they weren’t all THAT special. But now we have a different one – these are really nice. Now think about this as being a temptation – this is usually how temptation comes – we don’t want to leave this one here. Right? So just as a heads up – most of our stumbling stones probably are more like today’s stone than the one we actually grabbed each week – very attractive

and appealing and much harder to let go of than we want to admit, but just as crushing. But let's shift gears and go a different way with this imagery now --

In 1988, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Most of you probably remember that. When it happened, a friend pounded on Anna's door in East Germany, She said, "The Wall is down, and we have freedom! You must come and see!" They ran to the gate that had divided east and west for thirty years, and they celebrated. They ran back and forth between east and west and danced with soldiers.

The next morning, Anna awoke and thought she had dreamed it – it was too good to be true. Quickly, she got dressed and ran back down to the border and then -- obviously, it was true. But this time, before she went back home, she picked up a shattered piece of the Berlin Wall and took it home with her as a tangible reminder that she was free.

Today, I'm going to call it a prayer stone -- marked with an empty cross, empty because Christ is no longer dead, no longer crucified, but living and among us. Take it with you as a reminder that you are free from all the stones that hinder us and seek to make us stumble, and that, in the words of Peter, we are now living stones, built into the house of God, whose Cornerstone and foundation is Christ. May it be a reminder that we are released from the power and punishment of sin. We are free to be alive!

Music And if the Son makes us free, we shall be free indeed. We know it is true because God has left the cross and tomb and lives in us! Let's sing

He Lives

Words: Alfred H. Ackley, 1933 Music: Alfred H. Ackley, 1933

1. I serve a risen Savior, he's in the world today;
I know that he is living, whatever folks 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.

Refrain

He lives, (he lives) he lives, (he lives) Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life narrow way.
He lives, (he lives) he lives, (he lives) salvation to impart!
You ask me now how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

2. In all the world around me I see his loving care,
and though my heart grows weary, I never will despair.
I know that he is leading through all the stormy blast;
The day of his appearing will come at last.

Refrain

3. Rejoice, rejoice, O Christians, lift up your voice and sing
eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the king!

The hope of all who seek him, the help of all who find;
none other is so loving, so good and kind.

Refrain

Blessing One more time. Let's see how you do. He is risen. **He is risen indeed!** He is risen. **He is risen indeed!** Now as we go, glory in the hope and joy of Christ's resurrection. Because the stone was rolled away, the "stones" that threaten to stumble us will fail, for the power that raised Christ from the dead will also raise us from glory to glory through this life and into the next. Amen. **Amen.**

CCLI # 2561297

