

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE
April 16, 2017 Morning Service
I Peter 3:13-22

Last Sunday Coptic Christians gathered in Egypt. A bomb blast went off. Forty died, a hundred were maimed and injured. This week we've been praying for the persecuted church, praying for those Coptic Christians in Egypt. Out of Egypt came a statement from the church. This is what they said. "We love Egypt. We will not leave Egypt. We cast out the spirit of fear by the power of His love. We will go to churches on Easter and beyond to worship the name of Jesus. We will spread the light we were given by His grace in every street, village, town, and city. We will keep praying for all Egyptians, especially for those dark-minded, brainwashed, misled so that our Father may cleanse their minds and their hearts." My Lord, what would keep a mother going back to church in Egypt this morning when their 10-year-old baby boy died last Sunday? The resurrected Christ.

It was to that same kind of persecuted people that Peter wrote his first epistle and we read this morning in I Peter 3, beginning in verse 13 what Peter said to those being persecuted in the first century like these Coptics in the 21st.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [an apologia, an apologetic] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.¹

What would keep that Egyptian mother in church? The resurrected Christ. What would keep a first century believer coming back after having been tortured and some killed, sewn in half? What would bring them back even when they had lost family and friends? The resurrected Christ. Dear friend, if Jesus is risen from the dead, He demands and commands and deserves our full allegiance whether we live or whether

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we die, whether we're fat or whether we are starving. Whether we are exalted or whether we are persecuted, Jesus, if He is alive, demands our allegiance. No matter the circumstance, we exalt His name because as the text says, He is gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers have all been made subject under Him and He sits at the right hand of the Father.

Now on this Easter morning not everyone believes that Jesus got up. I understand that. But those of us that are Christ followers and Bible believers know that He is risen from the dead. You may be in here this morning having come out of curiosity or out of friendship with a family member or at the invitation of a neighbor but yet you are not convinced that Jesus is risen from the dead. I'm glad you're here. Thank you for coming.

You may be here on this Easter morning and you've been going to church not only on Easter but every Sunday and other days of your life knowing that Jesus is alive. There are many who believe. Charles Colson, that hatchet man for Nixon in the Watergate days said it this way. "I know the resurrection is a fact and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead. Then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured it if it were not true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me that 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible." Colson said, "If those men could all but die for 40 years and stake their life, they didn't stake it on a lie. They knew He was risen from the dead."

The former chief justice of the nation of England, Lord Darling said it this way. "There exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring a verdict that the resurrection story is true." German theologian, Paul Althaus, said the claim of the resurrection could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single solitary day or for a single solitary hour if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned. From Harvard Law, Simon Greenleaf many years ago, that law professor said it's impossible that the apostles could have persisted in affirming the truth they had narrated had not Jesus actually risen from the dead and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. Greenleaf goes on to conclude the resurrection of Jesus is one of the best supported events in history according to the laws of legal evidence administered in courts of justice across America.

I tell you I don't believe the resurrection because some politician that got saved said it's so. I don't believe it because some lawyer said it stacked up with logic. I don't believe it because some German theologian in the midst of liberal theology arose to say that Jesus got up. I believe it because I believe the word of God and in Matthew 28:6 there was an angel there that you heard from the scripture earlier this day that when those ladies came running to the tomb, that angel sat on the rock and made a pulpit out of that stone and said, "He's not here for He is risen just as He said. Just as He said,

come and see the place where He was lying. He is not here. He is risen. He is risen. He is risen." Dear friend, if He is alive, then you must face the fact. What will you do with Him? If He died and stayed dead, let's go to the beach. It's a good day for it. If He's dead, let's go play golf. Dear friend, if He's alive He demands our allegiance.

We often stand and look at this flag. We put our hand across our heart. I pledge allegiance to the flag. I preached and used this illustration this morning. This place was packed full. You couldn't get another person in here and the 678 building was packed full of people. The foyer was full of people. I went over to greet the people that watched on the screens in the 678 building and a little girl, she couldn't have been, I don't know, 4 or 5, just a little girl. She took her wrong hand and she looked up at me and she said, "Pastor, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic. That's all I know." I said, "Sweet girl, you'll get the rest of it. You just keep working on it." You'll even get the right hand. I didn't tell her that but you'll even get the right hand over there.

We pledge allegiance to our country. We'll have Bible school and we'll pledge allegiance to the Christian flag. We'll stand. I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag. We'll have someone step out with a Bible and we'll put our hand on our heart. We'll say, "I pledge allegiance to the Bible." Hear me, dear friend, if Jesus is risen He demands allegiance. Now if He's dead you can let bygones be bygones and just go on but let me tell you, if He really did get up, He commands and demands our allegiance.

How do we pledge allegiance to Jesus? Our text today tells us how to do it. There are three levels of allegiance unto Christ in our text today. I want to lay these out for you and after I do I'm going to lead you in a prayer and I'm going to ask somebody that's in this room that you've never said yes to Jesus, I'm going to ask you to come with scores of others that have already done it today to come and take me by the hand and say, "Pastor, today I'm believing on Christ. I'm coming to join this church. I'm coming to make my allegiance known, that Jesus is my Lord. I bow in allegiance unto Him."

How do we pledge allegiance to Christ? Three things. Number one. The resurrected Jesus calls for allegiance. Number one, first He calls for allegiance in my heart. Notice what the text says in verse 14. Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed even in your hurting and don't fear their intimidation and don't be troubled but sanctify Christ as Lord, where? In your hearts. Yes, Amen. Always being ready to give that reason for the hope that's in you. In your heart. In your heart. That's where you pledge allegiance. It's internal.

It's not that you ask Jesus to come into the muscle that's in the center of your chest that's pumping just now and sending blood to your brain and down to your feet. Though the heart is the picture of who we are and the center of who we really are. I love you with all of my feet. No, we don't say that. I love you with all my heart. It's who we really are. It's our passion. We invite Jesus, we say, into our heart but it's really into

the inner man. We are body, we are soul, and then we are spirit, into the spirit, into the inner man, that we ask Jesus to come in.

When He comes in He forgives every sin. He cleanses every stain. He redeems us forever and you can never be lost again after Jesus steps into your heart. Have you pledged allegiance in your heart? Has there ever been a time when you've bowed your life and said, "Lord, step into my life. Forgive my sin. Save me, O God." You crown Him as Lord. You sanctify Him as Lord in your heart.

I was a 10-year-old boy sitting in Bible school, seventh row. Nolan Ford said, "How many of you are saved today?" and I sat there after the Thursday service. He came and said, "Ted." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You didn't raise your hand when I asked if you were a Christ follower." I said, "No, sir. I wouldn't lie to you, preacher. I've never asked Jesus to save me." He said, "When you go, you think about that." I went home and I turned and flopped and rolled all night long. I couldn't get away from it that Jesus loved me and He was calling me and my pastor was talking to me.

The next day when Brother Nolan explained the gospel, I got out of my seat and I walked down here and I grabbed his hand. He said, "Why have you come?" I looked at him like, "Well, you said." Like I'm thinking he's as dumb as a rock. He told me to come down here. He said, "I understand, son. You kneel down right there and you ask Jesus to save you." I just got in the altar in an old country, old-fashioned church. I've got a picture of that old church on the wall in my office at home, a white-framed building. Let me tell you, it was the cathedral of my soul that day. It was the place where heaven met me, where God saved me. I knelt down. There's nothing there but the steps now. The building's all gone. I've been back there. Every now and then I just walk out there to the steps and say, "Thank you, O Lord, that you let me walk in here one day." I knelt down and I said, "Lord, come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me."

I'm telling you, Jesus stepped out of heaven and stepped into my soul. He saved me. I didn't know everything that happened. I still don't know everything that happened. I wasn't made perfect but I was made redeemed. I was adopted. In my heart I started my journey with the Lord Jesus and some of you have never done that. It's Easter morning. You've come here and today ought to be the day that you say, "I want to crown Him King and I pledge allegiance in the inner man, in my heart, and I sanctify Him as Lord. I put Him in first place. Above everything I put Jesus in my heart." If that's your desire today I want you to pray with me in a few minutes and I want you to walk down here and tell me. Say, "Today." There's not a better day in all the calendar than Easter morning.

Jesus, the resurrected Jesus calls for allegiance in my heart. Number two. He calls for allegiance in my church. In my church. Where do you get that? Oh yes. People ask me all the time. "Pastor, I like the church. How do I join the church?" Well there's two prerequisites for joining Olive Baptist Church. Number one, you must give confession that you have received Christ. You're redeemed. You're born again. You're a saved man or woman and secondly you must be then baptized by immersion. Like

you saw these four to begin this service. That's how you pledge allegiance to the church is by baptism.

Now look at it right here in our text. I want you to see it. Verse 20: *who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.* The ark, they put eight in it, shut the door, and they went through the flood, safe on the other side, eight people. *Corresponding to that* [verse 21 says], *baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It does not mean that baptism saves you spiritually. The context is the ark. The ark is moving them through judgment. Judgment was coming in 70 A.D. to these first century Christians and the only way to be safe was to be baptized and be a part of the kingdom and therefore you're going to miss the judgment and through baptism you would be safe. You're saved by grace through faith but then your allegiance to the church and to Christ who is the head is by baptism.

You saw these baptized. You are placed under the water and if you've never been baptized this way, you should come this morning and be ready. We place you under the water symbolic of the death of Christ, the burial of Christ. Raised out of the water symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. Going into the water, symbolic of you dying, dying, dying to your own sin and being raised to walk in newness of life.

The only Bible way to be baptized is by immersion. That's the only way you find people being baptized in the Bible. I know some of you were baptized as infants but that was your parents' allegiance, not yours. You should make your pledge of allegiance unto Christ and you do that by asking Him first in your heart and then in your church you are baptized.

I have baptized people all over the world. Most of the people I have baptized have been right here but I've baptized people in the South Sea off the southern coast of Australia as a young preacher there on a missionary trip. I preached and two deacons came forward when I preached on the Great Commission and said, "We have never been baptized." I was amazed. You could be a deacon in the Baptist church in Australia having never been baptized by immersion. The church is very weak in Australia theologically and every other way. I thought, "My Lord, how could you be a deacon and having never been baptized?" But they weren't. I baptized them.

The easiest baptism I've ever done. The seas were over my head. We walked out in that water. It was the easiest getting under I've ever done but the timing was another thing. You'd see that big wave coming and you'd say, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." They had a man on each side of me because they didn't want to lose the missionary preacher. He went out there with me and held onto

me. I baptized those two deacons and then two guys got me and hauled me back in. Man, that water was cold.

I've baptized people here. I've baptized people in that South Sea in Australia. I've baptized in the Jordan River in Israel. I've baptized in my first church in Sportsman's Lake in rural northeast Alabama. I've baptized in Texas in a borrowed baptistry. I've baptized in lakes. I've baptized in swimming pools. We baptized at the Aquatic Center at the University of West Florida a few years ago. It was the cleanest baptism we've ever had, the most chlorine I've ever smelled in all my life. We waded into that baptistry, that pool that's there that some of you go exercise in and we baptized them.

Let me tell you, it's not the place. It's the picture. In our early service we baptized two, in this service four, and seven on Friday night. Those two we baptized this morning, I know them all. I know both of them. One is a marine. You know, we look at those guys, ladies. The other was a lady that came last Sunday and she's out of a very checkered past on the streets, difficult. She told me things that would make you blush when she came forward to make her profession. My administrative assistant led her to Jesus right back here. She called me yesterday. She said, "I can't wait to be baptized Sunday." That marine did the same thing. I texted him and he texted me and said, "Pastor, I'm looking forward to being there on Sunday."

I want you to hear me. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you. I don't care who you are, if you're up and out or down and out. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. It doesn't matter if you're black or white. What matters is that you come and pledge allegiance unto Christ. You invite Him in your heart. He says, "Whosoever will let him come." I'm telling you, He's died for all. Anybody that will come, He'll save you today. He will do it.

There is no prejudice. The only prejudice is when you refuse Christ, He refuses you but when you receive Him, He says yes to you. Thank God, the just died for the unjust. That's what he says in our text, that we pledge allegiance when we invite Him into our heart. We pledge allegiance in our church when we're baptized and some of you need to walk right down here in a moment and say to me, "Pastor, I'm ready. Next Sunday I'll do it. I'll do it." Somebody's going to walk down here and say, "Can I do it this morning?" We'll hang around and baptize you after church if it's the only time you can do it. You ought to be baptized. It's the way of pledging allegiance unto Christ.

The resurrected Christ calls for allegiance in my heart. The resurrected Christ calls for allegiance in my church. The resurrected Christ calls for allegiance in my world. Oh yes. Many of you are saved and you've been baptized and if Jesus is the King and Lord of your life, it makes you walk different when you walk out of here. You crown Him. Notice what he says in verses 14 and 15 of this text. *But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.*

Dear friend, we live, we live in a fire of Daniel kind of culture. If you're going to stand for Jesus today and pledge allegiance, you better get ready because the fire of Daniel is coming against you. This culture that we are in today is not friendly to Christ. It is anti-Christian but the living room where you reside, allegiance to Jesus. The classroom where you're educated, allegiance to Jesus. The boardroom where you work, allegiance to Jesus. The highway you walk down, allegiance to Jesus. The recreation that you participate in, allegiance to Jesus. The group you play tennis with, allegiance to Jesus. The team you travel with, allegiance to Jesus.

You get ready because when you say that Jesus is your hope, the old fire of Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is going to come against you. Nebuchadnezzar set that thing up and said, "Everybody that doesn't bow down will be thrown into the fiery furnace." Everybody bowed down except for three Hebrew boys. Those teenagers said, "We will not bow, we will not bend," and we found out, bless God, they wouldn't burn. They threw them in the furnace. They looked in there and they said, "It looks like there's four. We only put three in and the other one has the image of the Son of God."

Let me tell you, friend, you show up for Jesus and He'll show out for you. You can count on Him. Hallelujah. You need to stand for Him but notice the text says in verse 15, do it with gentleness and reverence. Don't be a smart aleck about your faith. You let Jesus be the hammer. You be the honey.

Yesterday my wife fixed a phenomenal lunch. It was homemade exquisite. Last evening we were home alone and I said, "What's for dinner?" She said, "We're having leftovers." Well I didn't like what was left over. I said, "I think I'll go get me a sandwich." So I went down and when I got around I thought, "I don't want to go that way. I want to go..." I went all the way around down south on the highway and I pulled into a place where I like to get a sandwich and made my order and I rolled up to the window.

A big, jovial, African-American teenage boy with a big smile said, "Sir, that'll be," and he told me how much. I said, "Thank you." He said, "We're so glad you came," and called the name of the place. He said, "Can I just get you anything else?" I said, "No, that's all I need." He said, "Have you got anything big planned for the weekend?" So I reached over and got one of the Easter cards and I said, "Yes, sir, I'm going to be preaching right here." He didn't even look at the card. He just pointed his finger. He said, "You, you, you are that preacher at that big church down there, aren't you?" I had on a UWF ball cap. I hadn't shaved in two days. I had on an old nasty, long-sleeved shirt. I'd been working in the yard a little bit. He said, "You're that preacher." I said, "I am." He had a big smile.

I said, "Where do you go to church?" Immediately he told me where in Cantonment he goes to church. He told me the name of his right reverend pastor. He told me what his name was. He said, "I'll be there resurrection morning singing that Jesus rose from the dead." I said, "Glory to God. Here's an old boy doing what I'm going to preach about tomorrow. He's in the world giving allegiance to Christ."

That's what you ought to be doing. Whether you're working at the hamburger stand or whether you're working in the boardroom you've got to give allegiance to Jesus and get ready. Everybody ain't going to be as friendly as I was when they come by. The fire of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will descend on you but you'll have to stand. Sometimes you suffer, you must speak, but you must have a spirit of gentleness and reverence.

Now there's one more word I want you to see in this text. It's a very controversial text. There are people that believe a lot of different things about this text but I'm doing the preaching today and I am correct about this. I've read some good books on it this week and they affirmed what I believed. Verse 19. It says that after Jesus had been put to death in the flesh – have you got verse 18, Sharon? I'm sorry. *For Christ also died for sins once for all* [Friend, Jesus died for you. He just has to die once.], *the just for the unjust*. Can we get agreement that Jesus died for us? Amen. Can we get agreement that we are unjust and He is just? Can we get agreement that He died to bring us to God? We can't get to God but He died to bring us to God and bring God to us. *Having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit*. That He died and then God raised Him from the dead. Verse 19 says – here's the controversy. *In which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison*.

There's a lot of different thoughts about what this verse means. Well let me give you a little enlightenment. They killed Him. He died for you and said, "*Tetelestai*, it's finished." Everything need be done. He died. He became the Lamb and they slaughtered Him and then they took His body and they put it in a cave, a tomb and they rolled a big stone in front of it, heavy and they sealed it with a Roman seal. If you broke that seal without authority to do it, it was death, a death sentence if you broke that Roman seal without the authority of the emperor. The guard stood and they put Jesus in there late. It became midnight at noon time and the veil in the temple had been torn from top to bottom. Matthew says that the graves opened and the dead got up and walked out but Jesus was in that tomb.

What was He doing behind that stone on Saturday? I believe He was doing verse 19. I don't believe He just hung out in that old grave. I believe He got up and He didn't come out the front door. He went out the back door. He kept the front door sealed. I believe He went to Sheol. Now listen to me. When you die, you're not going to the celestial city of heaven. It's not ready yet. Heaven is a new heaven and a new earth and it's going to come down. When you die, you go to Sheol. You go to the place of the dead. There are two compartments to that. One is where God is and the other one is where God's not. You're absent from the body; you'll be present with the Lord.

Now let me tell you, if you're with the Lord God and King Jesus, that's heaven enough. But it's even going to get better than that. You'll come into the presence of God but there is a Sheol, there is a place of the dead where those that are lost are. That's where I believe Jesus went because the context of this is Noah and the ark. In Genesis 6, the Nepheline had come and it had relations with women trying to ruin the

race so that Jesus couldn't be born of human seed and God judged them and dealt with them and cast them into outer darkness.

I believe that Jesus walked in there and said, "Gentlemen, I've got an announcement to make. The front door of that tomb is still sealed shut but I left out the back door and came to tell you that in the morning the world changes forever. I've come to tell you that what you stood against was the greatest error of your life. I've come to tell you that you are condemned to death because you would not believe the promises of God. I'm going to go back up there and they're going to come looking for me but I will not be there."

I'm here to tell you, hell was on high alert. The demons said, "What's going on?" Satan himself said, "If that's true, the gig is up." The next day there was an earthquake. That that took several men to roll a stone in place the angel took a finger and moved it out of the way. The seal was broken, the soldiers fled, the women came, they looked in, and said, "Jesus was such a gentleman. He took the napkin that was on His face and folded it and put it in place. He left the grave clothes." The angel said, "Jesus the Nazarene that you're looking for, He is not here. He's risen."