

Rules Are Made To Be Broken

April 5, 2026—Easter

In the days after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, efforts quickly turned from rescue and recovery to simple search. Teams were no longer really listening for life. They were moving through what used to be neighborhoods, now fields of splintered wood and glass and mud, recovering bodies. More than two thousand were found along one stretch of shoreline alone.

So it didn't even register when someone thought they heard a cry. It didn't make sense. They kept working.

Until they heard it again. And this time, they stopped.

They started pulling things apart, carefully, slowly lifting boards, moving stones, brushing away debris. And there, somehow, impossibly, they found her. A four-month-old baby girl, wrapped in a pink bear suit, alive. Swept from her parents' arms by the wave...and still breathing.

And just like that, everything shifted. The rubble was the same. The devastation was the same. The loss was the same.

But they started listening differently, looking differently, searching differently. Hope showed up—not because the math worked—but because one small life refused to follow the rules. By all accounts, that baby should not have been alive. And yet...

Motivational speaker Wayne Dyer says, "Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change."

But Easter takes that to another level. Easter says, "Sometimes, it's not just that we change how we look at things; sometimes God changes the rules altogether." But before we rush to the empty tomb, we have to tell the truth about Good Friday.

As Barbara Johnson says, "We are an Easter people living in a Good Friday world."

And that's not abstract, especially not this year. The war that our leaders are engaging in is nothing short of incomprehensible and reprehensible. States are trying to legislate trans people out of existence, all the while putting this vulnerable population in unnecessary additional peril. And good people who simply want a better life for themselves and their children are being terrorized to fuel some cruel fantasy of dominance.

We don't have to stretch to find Good Friday. It finds us.

And Good Friday runs on a pretty consistent set of rules. Violence wins. Power protects itself. Truth gets buried. And death...gets the last word.

That's how the system works. Which is why Mark's Gospel feels so honest. Because it doesn't skip over that reality.

Three women come to the tomb. They find it empty. They hear something they cannot possibly make sense of. And instead of running out with clarity and courage...they freeze.

“They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

That’s where the Gospel of Mark originally ended. Because when the rules of the world get disrupted, our first response is rarely celebration. It’s disorientation. It’s...wait, what just happened?

But here’s where everything turns. Because Easter is not just a surprise ending. It is a rule-breaking moment.

Think about it. According to Genesis, God created everything. Light and darkness. Land and sea. Time itself.

God set the patterns. Day follows night. Seasons come and go. Life begins...and life ends. That’s the structure of creation. That’s the rule.

And, for as long as humans have been human, we’ve lived under that assumption: death is final. Death gets the last word.

But then comes Jesus. Love in the flesh. Healing. Justice. Mercy.

And the world does what the world so often does to that kind of love. It kills it. Publicly. Violently. As a warning. Good Friday is the system working exactly the way the system is designed to work.

And God looks at that. God, who created the system. God, who set the laws of time and space and life and death. And God says...No. No, I will not let that be the last word. Easter is God breaking God’s own rules. Out of love. Death does not get the final say.

And why? Not to show off power. Not to prove a point.

But because God, the Creator, the Source and Summit of All That Is Good, refused to accept a world where love could be destroyed. That’s the heart of Easter. God breaking the rules, for the sake of love.

And once you see that, you start to see it everywhere. You see it in that pile of rubble in Japan. Because according to every rule—of nature, of physics, of probability—that baby should not have been alive. And yet she was. And her life changed how everyone saw everything.

You see it in our passage from the Prophet Ezekiel. “I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” The world has a way of hardening us. It teaches us the rules. Don’t feel too much. Don’t hope too much. Don’t risk too much. Protect yourself. Shut down.

But God breaks that rule too. Softens what has hardened. Opens what has closed. Brings life where we had learned to expect numbness.

And you even see it in Mark's strange, abrupt ending. Because fear should have been the end of the story. Silence should have sealed it. But it didn't. The women may have said nothing at first—but eventually, someone spoke. The story got out. The silence was broken.

We're here today because fear didn't get the last word there either.

And that brings us to us. Because if Easter is God breaking the rules for love, then the question becomes what does that mean for how we live? Because the world is still running on Good Friday logic. Still telling us what's possible and what's not. Still insisting that some people don't belong. That some systems can't change. That some wounds won't heal. Still insisting that death, in all its forms, gets the last word.

And Easter says: not necessarily.

What if part of being an Easter people is learning which rules deserve to be broken? The rules that say some people are less worthy of dignity. The rules that say violence is inevitable. The rules that say you should harden your heart just to survive. The rules that say nothing will ever really change.

What if we followed the God who looked at the most fundamental rule of all—death wins—and said: No. Not when love is on the line.

Now, to be clear, this is not easy. Because breaking the rules of the world for the sake of love will put you at odds with the world. It did for Jesus, and it still does.

But it is also where life is. It is where God is.

The rescuers after the Japanese earthquake didn't create that miracle. But once they heard the baby in the teddy bear suit, they refused to keep operating by the old assumptions. They listened differently. They searched differently. They hoped differently.

That's Easter.

Not pretending the world isn't broken. Not ignoring Good Friday. But refusing to let it be the final word. Because God already broke that rule.

So maybe this year, Easter is this: Pay attention to where love is asking you to break the rules. To soften where the world says harden. To hope where the world says don't bother. To act where the world says stay quiet.

Because the resurrection is not just something that happened just once. It's something we step into. Again. And again. And again.

Christ is risen. The rules have been broken. And love...love is still writing the story.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Alleluia and Amen!

Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels
Union Congregational United Church of Christ
Green Bay, Wisconsin
Ezekiel 36:24-38, Mark 16:1-11
April 5, 2026