

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**SECOND SUNDAY of EASTER**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The news astounds us, yet still we proclaim it.  
**All: He is risen! He is risen indeed!**  
One: Christ is no longer dead, but alive, and living in our midst.  
**All: He is risen! He is risen indeed!**  
One: So rejoice, and sing alleluia.  
**Unison: For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers” GtG 231 [*Tune 509*]

**1. Christ has risen while earth slumbers;  
Christ has risen where hope died,  
as he said and as he promised,  
as we doubted and denied.  
Let the moon embrace the blessing;  
let the sun sustain the cheer;  
let the world confirm the rumor:  
Christ is risen, God is here!**

**2. Christ has risen for the people  
whom he died to love and save;  
Christ has risen for the women  
bringing flowers to grace his grave.  
Christ has risen for disciples  
huddled in an upstairs room.  
He whose word inspired creation  
can't be silenced by the tomb.**

**3. Christ has risen and forever  
lives to challenge and to change  
all whose lives are messed or mangled,  
all who find religion strange.**

*(continued...)*

**Christ is risen, Christ is present  
making us what he has been:  
evidence of transformation  
in which God is known and seen.**

Words: John L. Bell and Graham Maule, 1988  
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## **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Even as we rejoice in your victory in Jesus Christ, O God, we confess to you our sin. You say you will be with us, but we do not trust in your word. We turn our backs on you. We fret and worry over so many little things in life, yet we fail to focus our attention on the importance of life itself. Forgive us, gracious God. Tap us on the shoulder and return us to your side. Warm our hearts that we might learn to trust in you. Open our eyes to the path you would have us choose, and assure us of your presence; then grant us the courage to follow in the way of Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

## **SILENT CONFESSION**

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Romans 5)*

**One:** "God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."  
**All:** "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of the Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."  
**One:** Rejoice and believe in the good news.  
**All:** **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are reconciled, we are given new life!**

## **THE PEACE**

**One:** The peace of Christ be with you.  
**All:** **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## **THE WORD**

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

SERMON “Our Road to Emmaus ... and Beyond” by Pastor Bill Vincent  
(Luke 24:13-35)

Luke 24:13-35 (Today’s English Version/Good News Bible)

<sup>13</sup> On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup> and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to them, “What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?”

They stood still, with sad faces. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?”

<sup>19</sup> “What things?” he asked.

“The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered. “This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. <sup>20</sup> Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. <sup>21</sup> And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. <sup>22</sup> Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, <sup>23</sup> but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. <sup>24</sup> Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; <sup>29</sup> but they held him back, saying, “Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark.” So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They said to each other, “Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?”

<sup>33</sup> They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others <sup>34</sup> and saying, “The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!”

<sup>35</sup> The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

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On the first day of the week, they headed westward out of the city, through the hilly country. Up and down, around and through the rocky hills they travelled that day. Nearing, as it

was, the end of the rainy season, there probably was a certain freshness to the air, cleansed and revived by the rains of the preceding months. The ground, too, may very well have been in pretty good shape, with the recent rains, and the budding of Spring – in pretty good shape, I say, for an area still considered desert. The landscape, brown and rocky, had splashes of color and green and life, here and there. The road was still hard, and still dusty, though not as dusty as it could get at the end of summer and the dry season. Periodically a breeze would blow in from the west, brushing their faces with a gentle coolness.

The road itself may very well have been alive. Passover had been celebrated just the week before, and most people were probably still in a festive mood, in spite of the continued occupation of the land by the Romans. These two probably would have passed a fair number of people on the road going in both directions ... and been passed themselves, as well. For it was the first day of the week, as I have said. Yesterday, the sabbath, had been a day of rest. Now it was time to head back home and back to work.

But I wonder if Cleopas and his friend noticed much of their surroundings. For, as alive as the countryside was, a dryness and stiltedness gripped their hearts.

*They were talking to each other about all the things that had happened.*

And as their words later on reveal, they were talking about those things with some dismay and disappointment – might we even say, despair? – with dreams shattered and in ruins.

*"...we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free!"*

Alas, it seemed, that was not to be.

Their voices low, their mood somber and muddled. Speaking in disbelief about what had happened. Shaking their heads. Talking in an animated fashion for brief exchanges: "And you remember when...?" "Yes, yes." "How could this have happened?" "I don't know." Then long pauses with nothing but silence between them. Confusion about the mysterious, strange things reported just this morning. What to make of it all?

They were well into their journey, and their mixed mood, when another traveler, going their way, seemed to join them. Unlike the other people on the road that day, who ignored these two and passed them by without so much as a nod, this man seemed to want to walk with them, seemed desirous of their company and of entering into their conversation. As they acknowledged him, he asked,

*"What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"*

His question, and seeming ignorance of the past days' proceedings, stopped them up short. "You don't know?"

*"Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"*

*"What things?" he asked"*

When they recovered from their astonishment, their tongues tripped over themselves to get the words out. About Jesus, a great man and prophet. Yet their leaders turned against him, handed him over, had him condemned and crucified. Our hopes that we had placed in him, dashed, shattered, splintered, broken, all for naught. Then strange reports this morning that his tomb is empty. Women who report having seen angels who say that somehow, incredibly, he is alive. But no one's seen him.

Then this stranger – the eye of calm in the midst of their storm of confusion – says,

*"How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said!"*

And the certainty and calmness in his voice is riveting. And they listen with rapt attention as he explains passage after passage of their scriptures, opening their minds and their hearts to the message about God's savior. As the lesson continues, they experience a strange stirring within their hearts.

They are fast approaching Emmaus now, their stop for the night, but the stranger appears to be going on further. Now they are the ones desirous of his company, and they plead with him to stay with them and join them for the evening. He agrees.

They gather at the table to eat. And then the stranger takes the bread, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread, and gives it to them, all in a way so very, very familiar, and near and dear to their hearts. And as soon as it dawns on them who he is, he is gone from their sight. They look at each other in wide-eyed disbelief yet certain recognition. "Do you know who that was?" goes the unspoken question.

*"Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"*

Gone is the growling of their stomachs. Gone is the tiredness of the day's journey. The adrenaline is pumping, the excitement and energy, as they literally run back to Jerusalem. When they find the others, even then they do not get the first word in, for these others have a wondrous experience to share, too:

*"The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!"*

they say. Then Cleopas and his companion spill their news as well, about *what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.*

How so very much like our lives this story is.

Traveling through life, up hill and down hill. Ofttimes with our heads bowed, failing to see the splashes of life around us. Oblivious to God's reviving Spirit blowing in our faces. So wrapped up in our problems and concerns and our own shattered hopes that our sight is glazed over and we cannot see the obvious: the presence of the Lord in our midst, to teach and comfort, to assure and direct us on our way, maybe even to turn us around to head us right back where we came from.

In some ways we may have some excuse for our lack of sight, for there are times when that just may be the way things are,

**that Jesus isn't always that easy to recognize – even among those who think they know him well.** (David S. Cunningham, "Theological Themes," *Lectionary Homiletics*, April 1996, p.22)

Then there are other times when we are simply stupidly blind, and can't see our faces for our noses. Like the glasses that are lost, all the while propped on the top of our heads. "If it had been a snake, it would have bitten us."

And Jesus's words come to us, too:

*"How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe...."*

"Here, let me help you understand."

Yes, sometimes it is hard to see Christ is here with us, in the midst of our dull and boring lives, but then again, our tumultuous and topsy-turvy lives.

We don't feel him here, even in prayer.

We don't see him here, especially on those particularly tough days.

And we feel lost and alone.

And then something happens. Someone points out the obvious. Someone reminds us what we already knew. Someone shares something from their story.

And our hearts burn within us. And our eyes are opened. "Yes, now I see. Now I understand."

We may be like Mary, weeping in the garden, over-wrought that the body of her beloved master is gone. Through her tears she sees someone, and, thinking it is the gardener, asks him where they have taken the body. All the while – for the moment at least – unaware that the very one she seeks is standing right there before her.

So it is with us.

Christ is here, in the midst of our sorrow when someone we love dies, in the midst of a gut-wrenching decision that could have adverse consequences for many people, in the midst of being confused and befuddled regarding our direction in life.

He is here, though we may not see or feel him at the moment. But look more closely, maybe even after the fact.

**"Christ will not leave us [abandoned],"** writes Thomas Troeger.

**Are you in a cemetery weeping? Look closely at who you think is only the gardener tending the place. Are you locked in a room with a small group of frightened friends? Behold who stands in your midst. Are you devastated by a tragic death that shattered your best hopes?**

**Listen to the stranger who joins you and interprets your life in ways you never could on your own.** (Thomas Troeger, "Themes for the Season: When The Trumpets Stop Playing," *Lectionary Homiletics*, April 1996, p.2)

And know his presence. And know his promise that "you'll never walk alone."

We can learn to look more closely. We can ask God to open our eyes. And even in those times when we cannot, or do not, see, we can believe in Christ's promise: *"Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

And hear about another time and another place, and someone else who experienced the journey in this way:

**ONE night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.**

**WHEN the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path**

of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

THIS really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

THE Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."  
("Footprints in the Sand")

Look around you – look back on your life – and recognize the Lord in your life. And even when you do not see him, trust that he is there, here, with you...always.

\*HYMN "Day of Arising" GtG 252

1. Day of arising,  
Christ on the roadway,  
unknown companion  
walks with his own.  
When they invite him,  
as fades the first day,  
and bread is broken,  
Christ is made known.
2. When we are walking,  
doubtful and dreading,  
blinded by sadness,  
slowness of heart,  
yet Christ walks with us,  
ever awaiting  
our invitation:  
Stay, do not part.
3. Lo, I am with you,  
Jesus has spoken.  
This is Christ's promise,  
this is Christ's sign:  
when the church gathers,  
when bread is broken,  
there Christ is with us,  
in bread and wine.

*(continued...)*

**4. Christ, our companion,  
hope for the journey,  
bread of compassion,  
open our eyes.  
Grant us your vision,  
set all hearts burning  
that all creation  
with you may rise.**

*Text by Susan Palo Cherwien.  
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#### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.  
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,  
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**With believers in every time and place,  
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death  
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

*(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)*

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** God of resurrection presence...  
**All:** ...hear our prayer.

#### **THE EUCHARIST**

#### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*



*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We bring our gifts to you, O God, in response to good news. Christ is risen indeed and abides in us still. May all that we do be in response to new life. As you accept who we are, receive what we offer, and transform all of our being to conform with your will. May your resurrection never stop surprising us, disrupting us and transforming us, until Christ's kingdom comes. In his name we pray. Amen.**

**SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

*Invitation to the Lord's Table*

**Sing** "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread" GtG 500

- 1. Be known to us in breaking bread,  
but do not then depart;  
Savior, abide with us, and spread  
your table in our heart.**
- 2. Here share with us, in love divine,  
your body and your blood,  
that living bread, that heavenly wine  
be our immortal food.**

Words: James Montgomery, 1825

Music: ST. FLAVIAN, Day's *Psalter*, 1562

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*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

**Leader:** The Lord be with you.

**People:** **And also with you.**

**Leader:** Lift up your hearts.

**People:** **We lift them to the Lord.**

**Leader:** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People:** **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*(The prayer continues...)*

*The Lord's Prayer* (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

(With the passing of the bread and the passing of the cup, please partake as soon as received as an expression of our personal relationship with Christ.)

**Sing** “We Gather Here in Jesus’ Name” GtG 510

**1. We gather here  
in Jesus’ name;  
his love is burning in our hearts like living flame;  
for through the loving Son  
the Father makes us one:  
come, take the bread;  
come, drink the wine;  
come, share the Lord.**

**(1) No one is a stranger here;  
everyone belongs.  
Finding our forgiveness here,  
we in turn forgive all wrongs.**

**2. He joins us here;  
he breaks the bread;  
the Lord who pours the cup is risen from the dead;  
the one we love the most  
is now our gracious host:  
come, take the bread;  
come, drink the wine;  
come, share the Lord.**

**(2) We are now a family,  
of which the Lord is head.  
Though unseen, he meets us here  
in the breaking of the bread.**

**3. We’ll gather soon  
where angels sing;  
we’ll see the glory of our Lord and coming King;  
now we anticipate  
the feast for which we wait:  
come, take the bread;  
come, drink the wine;  
come, share the Lord.**

*(next page...)*

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Jeffery Leech, 1984  
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*Prayer*

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “God, Be the Love to Search and Keep Me” GtG 543 (*Verses 1, 4, & 5*)

**1. God, be the love to search and keep me;  
God, be the prayer to move my voice;  
God, be the strength to now uphold me:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.**

**4. Walking behind to hem my journey,  
going ahead to light my way,  
and from beneath, above, and all ways:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.**

**5. Christ in the eyes of all who see me,  
Christ in the ears that hear my voice,  
Christ in the hearts of all who know me:  
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...  
All: ...**Amen.**  
One: For Christ is risen!  
All: **He is risen indeed!**

**POSTLUDE**

*(next page...)*

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