

4.23.23 – Easter 3
“An Important Walk with Friends”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (NIV)

¹ I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
 he heard my cry for mercy.
² Because he turned his ear to me,
 I will call on him as long as I live.
³ The cords of death entangled me,
 the anguish of the grave came over me;
 I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
 “Lord, save me!”

¹² What shall I return to the Lord
 for all his goodness to me?
¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
 and call on the name of the Lord.
¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his faithful servants.
¹⁶ Truly I am your servant, Lord;
 I serve you just as my mother did;
 you have freed me from my chains.
¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
 and call on the name of the Lord.
¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people,
¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the Lord—
 in your midst, Jerusalem.
 Praise the Lord.

Leader: These are Sacrificial Words of and for God. All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 24:13-35 (GNT)

The Walk to Emmaus

¹³ On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; ¹⁶ they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?”
They stood still, with sad faces. ¹⁸ 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?”

¹⁹ “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. ²⁰ Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. ²¹ 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. ²² Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, ²³ but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. ²⁴ Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?” ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. ³² 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?”

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

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

Leader: These Were Amazing Words of Christ! All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Oh Lord, you are risen! Be present to us now as we study these Scriptures that tell yet again of your Resurrection. They continue to give us hope and courage to be the evangelists you have called us to be. Let us receive these two disciples' experiences to assure ourselves of the reality of your divine presence. Keep moving us past the cross and news of the resurrection toward Pentecost when the Holy Spirit will come. Thank you for our faith upon which your church is built and help us to share our hearts with those who do not know you. May your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

One more time! Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Hallelujah! After the friends' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, I am sure those are the words the disciples were shouting to confirm what they had heard to

be true and had hoped to be true in their hearts. The psalm we read today, although from the Old Testament, expresses what I believe the disciples may have been feeling after the cross and news of the resurrection. The poet shares his gratitude to Yahweh after experiencing troubling times, likely a severe illness that brought him close to death. The psalmist (presumed to be David) calls on God to ease his suffering and he did. God is kind, merciful, and compassionate, and this psalm affirms those characteristics. Then he asks how he can give a proper thanksgiving for saving him. He suggests a sacrifice, perhaps a drink offering or a “cup of deliverance.” The bottom line is that there is NO way to pay God back for his grace or mercy. This is why I love to read the psalms; they are like the voices in my own head setting out arguments and propositions in an attempt to understand a God beyond our understanding. The psalm works all this out in the verses, the questions, the doubts, and finally the answers. In this psalm, the final answer is to love and praise God no matter what difficulty. Don't you all have arguments in your head or prayers with God that start out one way (questions or doubt) and end another way, usually with a better understanding? When that happens, you should try to write them down. You will probably have a God-inspired psalm you prayed or wrote yourself!

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples for the second reading. Most were hiding and afraid of their own persecution; some were together trying to make sense of this Messiah. The resurrection had occurred, and Jesus had begun to appear to several disciples. Two of the broader group, the 70, not the eleven, had just left Jerusalem after all that had happened, to go back home to Emmaus, about seven miles from

Jerusalem; it was northwest through natural green areas. Scholars' resources don't agree on the specific road, but most agree now that the town they were approaching was what is today, Emmaus-Nicopolis. We saw that sign on one of our bus rides. Nicopolis was the city's name from the 3rd century CE until the Muslim forces conquered Palestine in 639. The site was the location of a Palestinian Arab village (Imwas), between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, until it was destroyed in the Six Days War of 1967. Today, Emmaus-Nicopolis is part of Canada Park, maintained by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, with the archaeological site being cared for by a French Catholic community since 1993.

Back to our story: Cleopas and his friend were sad and visibly upset trying to make sense of things they witnessed in Jerusalem when a stranger walked up to them. Two thousand years later, we know that stranger was Jesus in non-corporeal form, but they just saw a fellow traveler, and invited him to chat. The sun had not yet broken the morning sky when they set out, because although they had to walk in the daylight to see, they were still hiding from soldiers and moving about cautiously (Matthew says walked "in the shadows"). They welcomed this outsider, who asked why they were so upset. He addressed them as friends and wished to console them. Cleopas couldn't believe that even this stranger did not know what had happened to the innocent man in Jerusalem. So, they told him all about losing their teacher/Rabbi: the trial, the cross, and the women finding an empty tomb!

They had walked the entire day and assumed the visitor was going on further and would need to rest, so the two invited him to stay with them the night. They showed him generous hospitality with a meal.

During that meal and the breaking of the bread (which the stranger did), their eyes were opened, and they realized it was their Savior, Jesus Christ! Can you imagine? It was like they had passed a test of evangelism and faith! Then he vanished and they did not see him again. They could have kept this news to themselves, savoring their good fortune and protecting their reputations, but no. Later that night, they made the return journey back to Jerusalem to tell the other eleven disciples. They excitedly explained what they had experienced and how they had had a meal with the risen Lord! This confirmed the other visions where Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter or others. They must have felt a little like the psalmist: crying out for deliverance from the horrible circumstances, and then praising God with joyful gratitude, trying to thank him for his son's sacrificial offering on the cross!

There are many lessons in this account, so we read it every couple of years to remind ourselves of Christ's presence even when we may not recognize him. For us today, note that the two disciples made room (physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually) for the stranger, who was Jesus. They invited him into their fellowship; Jesus did not force himself upon them either. We must make room for the stranger, yes, but we must also make room (more than just once a week) for Jesus in our own lives, our schedules, our homes, neighborhoods, and circles of family and friends. The journey to Emmaus was a "Divine Experiment" of sorts; the two were open and willing to receive this stranger no matter the risk, and Christ's divinity opened their eyes and hearts to receive him as the risen Lord. And they told the story! That's another lesson for us: invite people and share the Gospel. Yes, it was risky for them to return to

Jerusalem, but Jesus transformed and redeemed them through the miracle of resurrection (as we too are redeemed). We say as the men did “The Lord is risen indeed!” Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, we are grateful that Jesus taught his disciples the prophecies and to have the courage to share the story of resurrection and redemption with others, so that we too might live and share eternal life with him. Let us be more hospitable to the strangers among us, using Cleopas as our model. We know that you are present in all our trials, joys, and hospitality. Let us be the first to share the Good News with others, in **your** name, we pray, **Amen**.