

## 5/3/2020 MORNING PRAYER

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB

God our refuge,

You are our strength and a very present help in trouble.

We feel afraid, because the world has changed.

But you have not changed. You are with us.

You tell us to be still and know that you are God.

We confess our weariness with restrictions on our lives, and our impatience for things to get back to “normal.”

We confess the challenge of having an imagination for how we can approach life differently. How we can refuse to go back to “normal,” and instead learn to approach life with the radical teaching of Jesus in mind – to trust You to provide as we recognize the inherent gift in each day, so that we can loosen our grip on possessions and control.

Help us to find courage despite fear like the courage Jesus practiced as he went to the cross.

Help us to find courage to grow in relationships even when we are physically apart.

We bring our requests to you, naming some of them, and trusting your Spirit to hold all prayers for help that are among the people of our church.

We pray for the family of Tom Hiebert and Ron Ediger with the passing of Alda Mae on Friday morning at Bethesda Home. Give them comfort and peace in this loss.

We pray for members of our sister church, Luz del Evangelio, as they deal with the reality of Covid-19. We especially for the family of Pastor Juan and Lupita, as Lupita recovers from the virus.

We pray for students, parents, teachers, staff, and administration at area schools as the end of the normal school year approaches. We pray for motivation and a sense of purpose in order to finish well, even though school is not meeting in person.

We pray for those needing to take the greatest measures to avoid getting sick or passing on sickness, without how long this will last: for nursing home residents as well as staff, for those in health care fields, and for those needing to be isolated at home.

We pray for those in our congregation or community with less hours or income, or job uncertainty.

Even in the midst of a pandemic, we know we have much to be grateful for. This season is forcing us to recognize the blessings we share of which you are the source. The lives you bless us with are colorful quilts of pain and blessing. Sometimes it is the seasons of pain or fear that illuminate the blessings we presently have and have had all along.

We give you thanks for sustaining relationships, and the opportunities that technology, phone calls, and conversations outdoors all us to have. Help us to use this time to be even more intentional about connecting with our families, close friends, and fellow travelers in faith.

In a season where we hear about higher death rates in the news, we give you thanks for new life. We give thanks for the entry of Myles Wayne, born to Kyle and Justine Unruh this past week.

Be with Justine, Kyle, big sister Lillian, and with Myles grandparents as they welcome him into this strange world.

We pray that we can learn from the complete vulnerability from a young child. From a child's receptivity, fascination, imagination, and love of life.

Maybe that's part of what you meant when you taught us through Jesus to become like little children in order to enter your Kingdom.

Your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth, and moreover in our hearts, minds, and actions.

Amen.

## STANDING AT THE THRESHOLD – PASTOR LOIS

Luke 24:13-35

For the last three Sundays we've heard stories from the gospel of John about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Today we move to the gospel of Luke and again find the disciples stunned, fearful and sort of immobilized – except for the women who had gone to the tomb.

But the two characters in our story today had left the city and were on their way to a town called Emmaus. Now, these two were obviously not part of the inner circle of the eleven who had stayed in Jerusalem. Cleopas and another – were walking and talking while they walked, (and maybe drinking coffee!?). They were talking, as people do, about current events, about all the things that happened in recent days in Jerusalem. And then... this weird, surreal, unexplainable thing happened. Jesus, the humiliated, crucified, dead and buried, we-thought-he-was-the-savior, Jesus "appeared" and walked and talked with them. But, as Caleb commented last week, and the week before – in each of these stories, Jesus is not immediately recognized.

So they kept walking and Jesus, this stranger to them, wanted to join in their conversation, but he must have seemed so odd to them, as if from another planet, or surely from another country because he didn't know what they were talking about! Try to imagine it this way; if you were out for a walk – to get out of your house for a bit – and a stranger suddenly appeared walking beside you. That would be the first weird thing. And then, what if this person didn't know anything about the Covid 19 pandemic? Claimed they'd not heard of the coronavirus, or social distancing? It would put you in an uncomfortable position, wouldn't it? It might make you question your own sanity – certainly you might question the stability of this stranger! You might feel as if you were in a sort of twilight zone, a kind of liminal space.

We could say that Cleopas and his companion were in a liminal space. And I think we could say that right now, in our current situation, we're all in a bit of a liminal space. The word liminal comes from the Latin *limen* that means threshold, the narrow part of a doorway that lies between two rooms or between the outside and the inside of a house. A person standing in a doorway is "in a liminal state" between two spaces. It means betwixt and between and it can refer to an inner state or an outer situation in which we've left behind one room or stage of life or experience, but we haven't yet fully entered the new or different stage. We're at the threshold between life as we knew it and some sort of "new normal" – but we don't know yet what that's going to look like. This seems like the same sort of space that Cleopas and his friend found themselves in. So, what can we learn from this story about being in liminal space?

Being in this in-between place is vulnerable. It's fearful and out-of-control. When you're in liminal space it's nearly impossible to make plans because you have no idea what's next! You know how you used to do things and how you like to do things. You know where you want to go and what you want to do and with whom you wish to be! And, maybe most importantly, your life used to be predictable, controllable – at least we felt like it was. In liminal space, between here and there, none of those things hold true. And there's really no way to MAKE any of them hold true. To be on the threshold, betwixt and between, with the familiar behind us and the new not yet revealed is difficult. It's uncomfortable, unsettling, unfamiliar. It's not a place where most of us would choose to be. This liminal space is surreal – seemingly impossible for our rational, reasoning brains to grasp. And it's sad. We grieve what we've lost. We feel angry, anxious, depressed, unmotivated to try to move forward in a time and space where we don't know what we're moving towards.

I also submit to you that within this liminal space, as we stand on the threshold, it is the space and the time when we are, perhaps, the most available, the most humble, the most malleable, the most open to the movement and the teaching of the Holy Spirit, just as it was for Cleopas and his friend. They were disoriented, in need of some instruction and direction. They probably wished things would return to how they'd been before, not because things had been that great before, but because things had been predictable. They were in a posture of openness and humility, perfect fuel for their hearts to catch fire and just enough blindness for their eyes to be opened.

Cleopas and his companion could talk together about current events and all the things that had happened in their world, but they needed Jesus to interpret all of it in light of the scriptures. They could tell him what the women had said about finding the tomb empty and seeing the angels who told them he was alive but that reality didn't take on meaning until Jesus reminded them of the Biblical stories, "starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets". In the same way, I think we can tap into the resource of our biblical knowledge during this liminal time. What might happen if we would talk and think and dream and pray about the unknown "new normal" in light of the Biblical mandate to love God and love our neighbor as we love ourselves?

Cleopas and the other disciple didn't finally recognize Jesus until they experienced that act of the ritual of eating together. They offered hospitality and they broke bread together – perhaps the, single most important action that one can do in Middle Eastern culture and it continues to be very important both in that culture and in our own. In these days of Covid-19, hospitality and eating together, sadly, is something we're missing. But there are lots of other spiritual

disciplines, ways of tending to our spirits in these days. Are you finding ways to be attentive to your spiritual health? Maybe you want to try some spiritual exercises that you've never done before – this might be a good time to avail yourself to that. We're offering a time of prayer each Wednesday evening from 6:30-7:00. Feel free to zoom in on that call. Maybe a time of prayer and journaling would work better for you. Or maybe a spiritual friend would help you fend off feelings of isolation and help keep you focused – someone you could talk with regularly, sharing about the health of both of your spirits. If any of these practices sound interesting or helpful but you're not quite sure how to go about it, contact me or Pastor Caleb – we'd be happy to offer suggestions. The point is, I think we learn from our story with Cleopas and his friend that in their liminal time they needed both the strength of their scriptural understanding and interpretation AND the act, the discipline of a spiritual ritual in order to fully see and grasp Jesus' presence with them.

As we flounder and struggle through this strange and unsettling time, I pray that we might be attentive to standing on the threshold with the Spirit of Jesus surrounding us. And as we learn to navigate and even embrace this liminal space and time, if we can draw on the Biblical stories, and act to care for our spiritual health, perhaps we'll be in a position to recognize Jesus in ways we never have before. Maybe our hearts will burn as we realize that taking care of the earth is not a partisan political issue, but a Biblical mandate and it's in the best interest of ALL of humanity to work together to ensure that the next generations will have a healthy planet on which to survive and thrive. Maybe our eyes will be opened as we become more willing to break bread and be in relationship with our black and brown brothers and sisters and to pursue equity and justice. Perhaps our hearts will burn as we grasp the truth in the midst of this pandemic that none of us will truly be healthy until all of us have our basic, human needs met. Perhaps our eyes will be opened as we recognize Jesus in those we perceive as our enemies and remember that the arc of the Biblical narrative tells the story over and over of God's love and redemption for ALL people.

And most fervently I pray that as we move forward together across the threshold and into a new time and space we will receive, and share, individually and together, the peace of Jesus, as he promised. Amen.