

04-27-2025 Worship Service

Morning Prayer

God of all creation, we thank you and praise you for your amazing creativity. We thank you for the beauty and the balance of the world you made and we confess that its beauty and balance is in jeopardy because we humans have not stewarded your earth as well as we could. Give us conviction and courage to make better choices every day as we strive to care for the planet and its resources.

We also acknowledge, God, that you have called us to love you and to love our neighbor. We pray for commitment and courage to live out those commandments, to follow in Jesus' footsteps as he taught us to share and reflect your love in the world.

We pray for our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters as they grieve the loss and celebrate the life and ministry of Pope Frances. We recognize that the Catholic Church has a large impact on people all around the world and we pray for your Spirit to guide them as they work to name his successor.

We pray, Lord, for those we know and love who are struggling with illness of all kinds – physical, mental, spiritual. We pray for Steve and Sandy, for calm clarity for them and the medical team as they continue with Steve's treatment. Lord, in your healing mercy, hear our prayers.

We remember those who are grieving losses, God. Losses of loved ones, of jobs, of hopes and dreams. Be with each one, Lord. Fill the void of loss with your love and comfort.

We pray especially for the family of Ama Reimer, for Anita, Alan and Sharon, Aileen and David and other family members, at the death of Ama's husband Murray.

We pray also for the family of Glen Unrau as we celebrate his life this afternoon – for Lynel and Vickie, DeAlan and Alma, Vance and Candy, Lucia and Peter and each of their children and grandchildren. Be present with your Spirit as we worship you and remember Glen and Mary Lou.

We thank you, God, for this Sabbath day, this time to gather and worship you and fellowship together. May it strengthen our faith and embolden our witness to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Offering Prayer – the text of hymn #758

Who will speak a word of warning to a world whose wealth expands,
As the growing wealth is gathered into ever fewer hands?
Christ, you speak a word of warning for the church to know and tell:
Greed is death and life is giving; hands that give receive as well.

Who will speak a word of wisdom to a world where truth gives way,
As the claims of power and privilege shift and shape the truth each day?
Christ, you speak a word of wisdom for the church to heed and share:
Truth is not the claims of power! Truth is hurt and hope and prayer.

Who will speak a word of welcome to the greatest and the least,
 Calling those with power to service, calling all to share the feast?
 Christ, you speak a word of welcome for the church to tell and live:
 All who hunger, come, be seated; take what Christ is here to give.

2025-04-27 - Luke 24:13-35, “We had been hoping...”

Pastor Lois Harder

This year the Emmaus Road story almost brings me more hope than the Easter story. Did you hear me? I said, this year, the story of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus almost brings me more hope than the Easter story. Here's why.

Cleopas and his companion were sad. Not just sad. They were deeply troubled. No... more than that. They were broken. Heartbroken. Spirit broken. Devastated. Scared. Hopeless. And this year, (in the last three months) I have felt more of those things than perhaps I've ever felt before. And it's not just my feelings, but also those I've heard from some of you and others that they're feeling this way too. The world seems mean, confusing, unpredictable and disappointing. It seems like there's sweeping injustice and sometimes punishment for those who seek justice, that arrogance far outweighs humility and that power that can be bought just might win over the power of due process. Now, please don't misunderstand me – the Easter service last week was beautiful and I thought, profoundly meaningful. So it wasn't that Easter wasn't hopeful. It's just that *these* days, this story of the walk on the road to Emmaus feels pretty real.

Cleopas and the other disciple were getting out of town. They were leaving Jerusalem, heading toward Emmaus, a small town about 7 miles outside of Jerusalem. They were returning to a life that was hard, but familiar, back to fishing nets, tax offices, bartering in the market, back to the ways things had been before Jesus came and interrupted their lives with hope and unrealistic expectations about an upside down kingdom of God.

It had only been a few hours since the women had found Jesus' tomb empty and claimed that they'd had a vision of angels who said he was alive. He was alive after having been murdered by the Roman state in the most humiliating and grotesque way. The women must have been crazy with grief. Grief can do that. So in their own crazy grief and fear, these two were walking away from Jerusalem where it had all gone down. They were talking about everything that had happened, as we do, trying to make sense of it, trying to understand, sort it out, process the unbelievable events of the day, the week they had just lived through. And just to add a little more weirdness, this guy, this stranger was there, walking with them, inquiring about what had happened – asking them to tell him in their own words what their experiences had been.

And they told him all about their deep disappointment and disillusionment – that they had thought Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that he would finally save them from the crushing oppression of the Roman empire. But as it turned out, they said, they killed him and now we don't know what we're going to do, because “we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel”.

The Greek word used here is in imperfect tense which we don't have in English, so it's been translated, "...we had hoped". But the more accurate translation is "...we had been hoping." We had been hoping that he was the one.

This is the first clue Luke gives us about what it looks like when Jesus joins us on this road of confusion, exhaustion and frustration. As one writer put it, "...when every ounce of hope has been wrung out of us and his presence alone is all we have left..." he comes to us, although we usually don't recognize him. But how could we? He doesn't show up with any fanfare. There's no big brass announcement or angel choir in the sky. He just appears, quietly walking alongside us at supper time.

And he asks Cleopas and the other disciple, "Man! Don't you remember any of the things I taught you? Don't you remember any of your Sunday school stories or the messages of the prophets? What book have you been reading? Y'all have to read and know the book! God gave it to you – and I gave you a refresher course – so that you wouldn't miss the signs.

This is the second clue Luke gives us to help us know when Jesus is near. As we study the scripture and learn and re-learn and begin to really absorb the overarching idea of it that God is love, that love is the central tenet of God's plan for the world and that ALL of the stories in the scripture are ultimately pointing us toward God's love, then we'll be able to recognize and reflect that Love much more quickly. This point returns us to the notion that Dale Schrag preached about several weeks ago, that we need both the horizontal perspective of our relationships, our human condition. And we need equally the vertical perspective of our relationship with God, through the scriptures.

As they continued walking, Jesus went on ahead, leaving the two disciples free of obligation and allowing them to choose their destination with no expectation or pressure to invite him in. God's Love is such that it's always our choice whether to invite him in, or close the door of our hearts, to open our minds to his teaching or to bolt our minds shut in fear of what inviting him in might involve.

Cleopas and his companion invited Jesus to stay. It was in their invitation to the stranger that the common meal happened and Jesus' Spirit was identified clearly and quickly in the breaking and blessing of the bread. When we extend welcome and inclusion to the stranger, we're inviting Jesus into our midst.

As much as our world might feel like a Good Friday world, we have to remind ourselves that we live in an Easter world, a world in which Christ is risen still. Not a world where Christ *has* risen, but one in which Christ *is* risen. The fact that Cleopas and the other disciple didn't recognize Jesus didn't prevent him from coming to them. He doesn't limit his appearances to those with full confidence in him. Thankfully, he comes to the disappointed, the doubtful, the disconcerted. He comes to those who don't know their Bible, who don't recognize him even when they're walking right beside him. He comes to those who've given up and headed back home. The Emmaus story is the story of a God who will not leave us alone, even when we cannot believe, even when we are hurt and disappointed, even when we cannot recognize Jesus in anything around us, when it seems that the brightest and best in life is over.

We're all on that Emmaus road, trying to figure out our fears and doubts and what happened on Easter Sunday. Whether we can see or not, the risen Christ is walking alongside of us, because he loves us more than we can image. And because he wants us to know of that love and to be more loving because of it. Invite him to stay awhile. Even if you have to keep talking with each other about all of the things that have happened, and even if you had been hoping for something different in life, and even if these have been brokenhearted days for you. Ask him to stay.