

**St. Paul United Church of Christ  
April 18, 2021**

**The Order of Worship**

**Third Sunday of Easter**

Although we are now holding worship in our building, we are conscious of the ongoing challenge of in-person worship while the corona virus persists, and the need many feel to avoid the possibility of contagion. Therefore, we will be continuing the practice of sending a worship bulletin to all who are on our mailing lists for email or hard copy. Those who will be worshipping from home and who have computer access will also be receiving a recorded version of the service that will be sent out by email on Sunday afternoon and also can be seen on our Facebook page. We welcome your participation in any way that is convenient for you, and we encourage you to share our worship service with any person you know who may appreciate receiving it.

**MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER REQUESTS**

**PRELUDE** (recording begins)

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

- L: God has set apart those who are faithful.  
Our Creator will hear us when we call.
- C: God puts gladness in our hearts and minds.  
We will lie down in safety and sleep in peace.**
- L: Beloved, we are God's children now.  
What we will be has not yet been revealed.
- C: We are here to remember Jesus Christ.  
We want to be like the One who lived by love.**
- L: Our faith strengthens us for each day's living.  
God empowers our ministries of caring.
- C: We trust God whose children we are.  
We look forward to what God will reveal to us.**

**†HYMN**

*"Thine is the Glory"*

#310 Blue Hymnal

*Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
Kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.*

**Refrain: Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.**

*Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.  
Let his church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
For her Lord now liveth: death hath lost its sting.*

**Refrain**

*No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life!  
Life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife.  
Make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love;  
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.*

**Refrain**

**GOSPEL LESSON**

Luke 24:36-48

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

**SERMON**

**The Never-Ending Easter Dinner**

Jo Ann Bertram

Rev. Roy Almquist  
retired from Washington Memorial Chapel,  
Valley Forge, PA

Jesus said: "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?...Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet...(then) he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence (Luke 24:38-43).

At the bloody second Battle of Bull Run in the Civil War, a certain Captain Robert Clark and his men were surrounded by the Confederate forces but refused to surrender. In the terrible battle that ensued, Clark's entire detachment was overrun. Listed as missing in action, Clark was presumed dead. When his family was notified, they sent a telegram asking for the return of his body. But Captain Clark was not dead. Separated from his detachment, Clark had hidden behind enemy lines for three days, and although wounded and hungry, he was able to make his way back to his headquarters in time to deal with his family's request. With laconic humor he sent a telegram, which read: "Still have use for the body; will bring it back in person. Your loving son, Robert."

This ironic footnote from a terrible war captures something of the astonishment, which must have accompanied the unexpected appearance of Jesus in the midst of his disciples who clearly thought he was dead.

All Easter stories begin with tears and confusion and end with hope and purpose. That is why it is so important that we tell the stories of Easter so we can encourage people and instill hope. Our Gospel lesson for today is a beautiful illustration of how the Easter story overcomes tears and confusion and provides a message of hope and purpose.

Our Gospel lesson is the second of two significant Resurrection appearances of Jesus in Luke 24, joined by a powerful moment of witness. The first appearance is the wonderful story of Jesus, joining with two distraught disciples on the road to Emmaus. In this account our Lord changes the direction of these men who had been looking backward in sadness until Jesus reorients them to look to the future, underscoring his words with a dramatic act – the breaking of the bread. And in that profound moment, those two disciples came to an understanding of the heart of our Resurrection faith...the presence of the Living Christ (Luke 24:13-32).

Luke's wonderful account includes a report on the impact of the Resurrected Christ on these two men:

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us, while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour, they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:32-35).

Jesus' second appearance was to Peter in an event referred to in Luke but captured in John's Gospel. John relates how Jesus took Peter aside to ask him three times ~ "Peter do you love me?" And in that off-stage encounter Jesus not only took away Peter's apprehension, but also gave him a sense of full forgiveness and restoration after his unfortunate denial of Jesus on that final terrible day, concluding with those powerful words of commission: "Feed my lambs...tend my sheep" (John 21:15-19).

In our Gospel lesson, the risen Jesus finally appears in the midst of all eleven disciples, bidding them peace and demonstrating that he was not some sort of ghost but rather he had been restored to life by the power of God (Luke 24:36-42). Much like that Civil War soldier, Jesus made it clear that he needed his body a little longer, asking them, in fact, for something to eat.

This is quite remarkable! The Resurrected Christ breaks bread with those grieving men at Emmaus, turning their tears and confusion into hope and purpose. Then Jesus shares in a fish-fry with the disciples in Jerusalem with a similar impact. So for Luke, Easter is less about an empty tomb than it is about food shared around a table! If a high point of your Easter celebration was a big family meal, how appropriate ~ it would appear that Jesus spent Easter Day eating, calling the ones he loved not to an empty tomb but to the place where bread is broken and food is shared.

Luke challenges us to think of Easter in terms of dinner. We should not have difficulty in doing that. Central to our Holy Week remembrance is that wonderful meal Jesus provided for his followers in the Upper Room on the night before he was handed over to his enemies. Sitting with the disciples, Jesus took the Passover bread, blessed it in a special way, then he broke the bread and shared it with his friends. In words that have become etched upon the fabric of our believing hearts, Jesus identified himself with the bread as his body and the shared cup as the new covenant in his blood. This great act is not only a defining memory for us, but it is the way we personally experience the Risen Christ...in, with and under the bread and wine.

So we do not need advanced degrees in sacred theology to connect the dots between the meal in the Upper Room, the meal shared on the road to Emmaus, and Jesus sharing fish with the disciples. These are the moments that overcome fear and doubt, giving us hope and confidence...moments that allow us to say with confidence...He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!

I rather expect that most of us had something more than bread and fish for our Easter dinners. At our Easter dinner we had roast beef which, I suppose, has nothing to do with Easter, but for me, it is the essence of a celebratory meal. But when we think of bread and fish, our minds race to that wonderful moment when Jesus expressed his compassion for the thousands of people who had flocked to the wilderness to be near him.

As we remember how Jesus, in that deserted place, took some donated loaves and fish to provide what has become for us a foretaste of the feast to come that Jesus has promised will await us when the reign of God comes in all its fullness. And the promise we hear, again and again is that at this great Resurrection banquet, no one will be hungry; all will be satisfied. The last will be first and the first will be last, and the feasting will continue forever.

I think we find not only the meaning of Easter but also the very essence of what it means to be a Christian in these stories of the Never-Ending Easter Dinner. For I believe that Jesus' continual eating and drinking with the poor, the outcast and the despised says a lot about what it means to be Easter people. Jesus certainly raised people to new life at those dinner parties! We have been called to a ministry of enfolding people at the table of grace and renewal, of blessing and commission. I am convinced that when we experience the shared life of the Christian community, we discover the true meaning of the Resurrection.

In the final analysis I suppose most people are more comfortable with having Easter carry us to the Empty Tomb for one day a year, than having the reality of the Resurrection central to everything we say and do 365 days a year. A trip to an empty tomb confines Easter to very early in the morning on that first day of the week when the women went to anoint Jesus' body. Confined to that specific time and place, we know when Easter is over, and many people like that! But when the celebration of Easter is associated with the gathered community and the

breaking of the bread, then we have let Jesus out of the box, and we invite him to join us in all that we say and do and believe. Hopefully, if we are welcoming and express joy and purpose, we will be setting up more tables and chairs as the Easter feast continues to draw the hungry, the hopeful and those who seek a place where they can belong.

So let us seek to be a people so rooted in the Easter vision of God's unconditional love and forgiveness that our hearts will burn with a desire to tell about God's love in Jesus Christ to those who are close to us and to those whose names we do not know. May the power of Resurrected Christ enable us to do this holy work. AMEN

#### MUSICAL INTERLUDE

Jake Rizer

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

God of our ancestors, author of life, source of Easter good news, we are drawn together again by the mystery of life and death. We call on you, so far beyond our knowing, with a mixture of faith and doubt. Let your face shine on us as we put our trust in you. Draw together the fragments of our busy lives around the central core of love which you provide, that we might relate to one another as whole people. Grant us a fuller sense of what is right and good, and help us to live at our best. Amen.

We pray as Jesus taught us to:

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

#### †CLOSING HYMN

"He Lives"

#302

Blue Hymnal

*I serve a risen Savior, he's in the world today;  
I know that he is living, whatever some may say;  
I see his hand of mercy; I hear his voice of cheer,  
And just the time I need him he's always near.*

**Refrain: He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!  
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way  
He lives, he lives, salvation to impart!  
You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.**

*In all the world around me I see his loving care,  
And though my heart grows weary, I never will despair;  
I know that he is leading through all the stormy blast,  
The day of his appearing will come at last.*

**Refrain**

*Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing  
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King!  
The hope of all who seek him, the help of all who find,  
None other is so loving, so good and kind.*

**Refrain**

**BENEDICTION**

**All: Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will go strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace.**

**POSTLUDE**