

April 14, 2024  
Third Sunday of Easter

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship Psalm 116

The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
and hears us when we call.

The Lord has been good to you.

**The Lord has delivered my life from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
and my feet from stumbling.**

**We come with thanksgiving,  
and call on the name of the Lord.**

\*Hymn 664 Morning Has Broken

Prayer of Confession

**O God, whose presence is veiled from our eyes,  
when we do not recognize you,  
may our hearts burn within us,  
and when feeling is lost,  
may we cling in faith to your Word  
and the power of bread broken.**

**We confess that we do not always live in the spirit of new life.**

**We worry and grow discontent about our circumstances and deny the transforming power  
of the resurrection.**

**Forgive us and call us back to the sacred walk you take with us,  
be it on the highway, or the quiet path.**

**in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever. Amen.**

\*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, in Jesus Christ we are called to a new way of life, one that overflows with hope, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Let us walk forward together on this journey of faith, assured that our Lord never leaves us or forsakes us. Be at peace. Amen.

First Reading 1 Peter 1:17-23

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 24:13-35

The Morning Message

This is a favorite Scripture passage for many of us. My affection for it has been influenced by the beautiful Robert Zund painting of the scene which we have included in worship today.

The setting is so lush and green. Fertile. The soil soft and worn as they tread it. The trees providing a cool canopy above them. Three friends moseying along, enjoying each other's company. They could be any group of guys walking around Lake William at Barbourville Park. Maybe they're walking off that biscuit they just had a Tudor's.

But they're not just any trio of buddies. This is Jesus with two of his friends. Post-resurrection. They didn't recognize him yet.

We know what has happened in recent days in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before the people, had been arrested and crucified. How they had hoped he was the one to rescue Israel, but the authorities had ordered his death.

They had witnessed his crucifixion and had carried him to the tomb. The tomb that the women had found empty on the third day, but did encounter angels and Jesus himself, though they didn't recognize him at first. They didn't know what to make of these mysterious occurrences.

When the stranger joined them, the disciples recounted the events. Their hearts were heavy with grief and confusion. But, into their sad reverie, Jesus brought some good news. He recalled stories from Scripture, stories they would know by heart. Jesus reminded them that the Savior would suffer trials before his entrance into glory. Was not this the testimony of the law and the prophets?

They walked and talked 'til the sun was low in the sky. Close to their lodging place, they invited Jesus to join them for a meal and a night's rest.

And so he did, and though he was not the owner of the house, or the host of the meal, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it. And they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

A friend of mine says that when she was growing up, she and her sisters shared the task of setting the table for meals. They were taught by their parents to set an extra place, for Jesus, the unseen guest at every meal.

There is an expectation in that, an intimacy that says Jesus is familiar in a tangible way. He is family. He is friend.

Sometimes, when a person is near death, they report that they see Jesus waiting for them, at the foot of the bed, or by the door, to take their hand and lead them into the next life. Their good and trusted friend has come for them. There is no fear. No hesitation. There is recognition. And that is a great comfort for them and for us.

Can we know Jesus in that way? In a time when we send and receive “Friend” requests and “Like” requests with a tap on our iPhones, can Jesus be our friend? What kind of friend? Can we “Unlike” him when we disagree or when he “Likes” someone or some cause we don’t?

Ruth is one of the saints in light now, but she lived 96 years on earth, before her friend, Jesus, led her into the Church Triumphant.

One day when I was visiting her, she spoke of how Jesus became her closest and most reliable friend.

Ruth was born in Massillon, Ohio. She came to Huntington and graduated from Huntington High School. She went on to Marshall College, where she would be a member of Kappa Theta Sorority. She served on the Pan Hellenic Council. She was a long-time supporter of one of our county political parties. Ruth had many friends.

That was no surprise to me. Even in advanced years, she was beautiful, energetic, articulate, and social. She loved football...or at least she loved “that Tom Brady...um!”

It is also no surprise that Ruth caught the eye and the heart of a handsome young man, Julian. They married and were blessed with a son and a daughter. Life was good.

Julian worked for the US Post Office as a letter carrier, as they were called in those days. On October 24, 1950, while he was on the job, in Salt Rock, here in Cabell County, Julian was shot and killed. He was forty years old. Ruth was left to grieve his death and raise their children, who were not yet in school, the youngest still a babe in arms.

Ruth says she was strolling her baby one day, a million thoughts running through her troubled mind. How in the world could she carry on, how could she raise her children without her husband? Would they even remember their father?

She says she remembers praying that day as she walked, repeatedly asking, “What am I going to do?”

And then she felt the warmth and comfort of a hand on her back. A hand she couldn't see, but, knew, was the hand of Jesus. And in that moment, she heard him say, “I will be your friend.”

And her burden was lifted.

With that reassurance, Ruth did find strength and courage and everything needed to raise two faithful, healthy, accomplished children. She had a forty year career in one of our local businesses. She had a church family. She had friends. Jesus was her friend and I'm sure it was Jesus who took her hand and led her home on a January day a few years ago.

Jesus is always with us, though we may not see him, or hear him, or even acknowledge his presence. But we have evidence. How have you recognized him? In the breaking of bread on a Communion Sunday or in the breaking of an addiction? In seeing a solution to some problem? A break-through? When we are alone and scared, when the diagnosis is undesired, and we get a call or a handful of flowers from a neighbors garden? Have you recognized him when you've reached a milestone, succeeded at a difficult assignment, aced a high-set goal? Do we acknowledge his help when we learn something important? Or when healing comes? Or when a relationship is mended?

Our old friend William Barclay included these words in his discourse on Luke 24:  
“It is not only at the Communion Table that we can be with Christ. We can be with him at the dinner table, too. He is not only the host in his church. He is the guest in every home.”

And he leaves us with these verses by Fay Inchfawn:

“Sometimes when everything goes wrong,  
when days are short and nights are long;  
when wash-day brings so dull a sky  
that not a single thing will dry.  
And when the kitchen chimney smokes,  
and when there's not so odd as folks.  
When friends deplore my faded youth,  
and when the baby cuts a tooth.  
When John, the baby last, but one,

clings round my skirts 'til day is done,  
and fat, good-tempered Jane is glum,  
and butcher's man forgets to come.  
Sometimes I say on days like these,  
I get a sudden gleam of bliss.  
Not on some sunny day of ease,  
He'll come...but on a day like this!"

\*Hymn 246 Christ Is Alive, Verses 1-3

\*Affirmation of Faith Apostles Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn 607 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Hymn 246, verses 4 and 5

\*Blessing

May the work of your hands bring Christ honor.

May your speech and actions reflect the Word of Life.

And may the service you offer be driven by the indwelling Spirit. Amen.

\*Postlude