

Faith Presbyterian Church

*Christians growing in Faith by caring, connecting &
serving community*

*Abide
With
Me*



**CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE ON THE THIRD
SUNDAY OF EASTER**

April 26, 2020

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Rise and greet the morning.

Cast off your sleep and doubt.

Arise, meet the risen Christ --

who comforts our grieving hearts,

who encourages our faltering steps,

who wrinkles us with compassion,

who raises us to heaven.

Let's pray together...

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, once again we are apart this morning. Once again, we rely on our computers, our tablets or our phones to bring us together. But still and always, we are blessed by your goodness. And we are thankful for your constant care for us, for the possibilities that lie ahead, even in the midst of this pandemic; for the glimpses of peace and the signs of healing. God of surprises and joy, fill us today and always with your grace. Amen.

HYMN #122 "Thine Is the Glory"

CALL TO CONFESSION *Let us bring to God in prayer whatever weighs heavy on our minds and hearts today as we pray...*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful and risen Savior, we claim to be people of the resurrection, yet we confess that far too often we do not

experience resurrection power. We take too much for granted and fail to thank you for the blessings we receive every day. We fail to be good stewards of your creation, and we get discouraged by problems and limitations. Gracious God, forgive our shortsightedness and lack of trust. Help us to see you at work in our lives and in the world. Inspire us to hold fast to you in faith and to know deep down that even in these difficult times, we have nothing to fear. Amen.

A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PARDON

RESPONSE *Glory to God, whose goodness shines on me, And to the son, whose grace has pardoned me, And to the Spirit whose love has set me free. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen*

Now fold your hands in front of your heart and bow to your neighbors near and far, wishing them God's peace.

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD (Luke 24:13-21, 28-35)

MEDITATION

Happy Easter everyone! Yes it's still Easter because here we are on Easter evening on the road to Emmaus, a small town about seven miles from Jerusalem. Have you ever walked seven miles? That's a pretty long walk. You may not have ever walked that far, but I know you all are doing some walking because you've told me about it—about walking around the house, or around the block, or in the hallway outside your apartment, or at the park. After not being able to go to the Grand Canyon this month, I signed up for another hike on the AT this fall, where the plan is to walk the entire 40 miles of the

AT in Maryland in 5 days. So what makes a walk a hike anyway? I've been thinking about that, because I'm really not sure I can walk that far in 5 days, but I do know what helps pass the time when you're walking, and that's telling stories.

Do you remember that old folk story called Stone Soup? It's been told and re-told with slightly different details all over the world. In case you've never heard the story, it's about some weary travelers who arrive at a small village with nothing. No food, no money, nothing. All they have is a large cooking pot. The travelers are met with suspicion and grumpiness everywhere they go. No doors are opened to them. Nobody invites them over for dinner.

So they decide to build a fire in the village square. They fill their big pot with water and one large stone, and place it over the fire. They sit around the pot rubbing their hands and anticipating a great delicacy called "stone soup." One by one the villagers come out to ask the travelers what they are doing and what are they cooking that is so special? And so they tell the villagers that the soup they are cooking is absolutely the most exquisite soup anyone could ever taste. But the best could be even better with just one more ingredient. To one villager they mention carrots. To another they suggest potatoes, and to a third, a big beef bone. And so gradually the stone soup turns into a rich, delicious, thick stew. And then all of the villagers and the travelers sit down to an unexpected and hearty meal together.

This story is not about how to get a free dinner, but rather it's about what happens when we take the time to sit down and share a meal together. Of course now you're thinking, how I would love to do that! And hopefully soon that will happen. Meanwhile you could come to our Popcorn with the Pastor get-togethers on Tuesday nights on Zoom. I had fun throwing popcorn at everybody, virtually that is. And we shared a little bit about all the projects we're getting done around the house, and what we're cooking, or not cooking, and

how many puzzles we've completed. Basically, we told stories and we listened.

So how about those two disciples who were walking along the road to Emmaus? They were talking and walking at the same time, telling stories and listening, and then along comes that stranger. Strangers back in Bible times were generally treated a bit better than they are today. Today we are a little suspicious and cautious around strangers. We want to know what their story is. We want to know if they're safe. But in Bible times there were strict rules about how to treat strangers that had to do with survival. When you were out in the wilderness traveling by yourself, you were at the mercy of other people's hospitality. You couldn't survive without it. That's why the rule was to treat anyone who knocked on your door or approached you on the road as if they were the Messiah himself.

So the dilemma we find ourselves in today is a little ironic. We've been told to treat everyone as if they are carrying the Coronavirus. Be suspicious of everybody and don't let down your guard. And yes, this is good advice because we don't want to get sick; but still let's not forget how important it is to treat strangers with dignity and compassion. Over and over again, the Bible tells us to do this. And that's probably why the two disciples invite the stranger they had just met on the road to come inside with them and join them for a meal. In the King James Version, their invitation in verse 29 reads: "Abide with me; for it is toward evening and the day is far spent." These words were the inspiration for the hymn, "Abide with Me." It was written by Henry Francis Lyte, an English pastor who retired from the ministry in poor health and saddened by some conflict in his congregation. In September 1847 he preached his farewell sermon and went home to rest. The story goes that a few hours later, he came out of his study holding in his hand the manuscript of the hymn Abide with Me, which John will play in a few minutes.

So that's what those two followers of Jesus say to the stranger who has been walking with them for quite some time. They say, come inside and spend some time with us and share a meal. And once they are around the table, the rules of hospitality are turned upside down because it's the stranger, not the two friends, who takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. Kind of sounds a little bit like the stone soup story, where it's also the strangers, the travelers, the people who aren't from around here, the people who aren't "our people," who are the givers, and the inside folks who are the receivers. So yes we need to be careful these days, yes we need to keep our hand sanitizer close by and maybe even wear a mask. But our world depends on us caring for one another, including the strangers among us.

What do you think it was about sitting around the table that made those two friends recognize their guest? They knew him well, but up until this point, he had been a stranger to them. I have a hunch it had something to do with sitting around the table. When you sit around a table, you can see each other a little better than when you're walking side by side. You look up, and there's your neighbor looking right back at you. This is why we're not going to celebrate communion until Faith Church is back together in person. Some churches are celebrating virtual communion, with everybody scattered in their own homes. But the Lord's Supper is meant to be celebrated together, around one table, so that we can look each other in the eye, 6' away and above our masks that is! And we hope to do that soon, so that together Faith Church can be the body of Christ and together Faith Church can recognize the risen Jesus living among you, not as a stranger, but a dear friend. Amen.

SOLO "Break Every Chain" Sung by Promise Busby, one of John's students

Let us pray... Dear God, we are once again in our separate places this morning, but we yearn to be together. We know you are with us, but we yearn to reach out in person to our neighbors and friends, our church family, and all those who join together in worship. And yet we know you are with us in our homes, for you are with us always. There is nowhere we can go that you are not already there.

And so we lift up our prayers to you, that you would break every chain that holds us back: break the chains of loneliness, of worry, of depression and of fear. Break the chains of economic hardship. Break the chains of those who feel trapped, and of those who have lost hope. For all who lined up at the Foodbank last week, for all those who line up to get carry-out from the House of Bread. For frontline and essential workers, for medical personnel we lift up our prayers.

And we share our prayers of joy;

For birthdays this week: Diane and Clayton, for the wedding of Don and Linda's niece.

For other joys and concerns— (please add your own)

You hear our prayers, named and unnamed as we lift them up to you and pray together...

THE LORD'S PRAYER

OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Let us sing or say together...

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Christ, all people here below; Praise Holy Spirit evermore; Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Accept these gifts we humbly offer, gracious God. Use them, and use us, to reach into places where your mystery remains hidden, where your goodness is not yet known. Make us good stewards of your word. Make us responsible heirs of your promises, in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN #543 “Abide with Me”

BENEDICTION And now we ask God to abide with us every day this week, until we are together again, in body or in spirit. Let us be the church- welcoming and caring for the strangers in our midst, offering the kind of hospitality only Jesus can give. And now let us go in love and peace to serve the Lord. Amen.

Response “Glory to God”
(Words by John Derrickson)

As we go forth, we'll live each day for him, Almighty Lord, who washed away all sin, All glory and honor, be unto his name. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.

Rev. Julia Williamson, Interim Pastor
Faith Presbyterian Church
Huber Heights, OH
937 233-0873