

**“Along the Road to Emmaus”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

April 26, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – April 26, 2020**

“I Love the Lord” V. 1 #76 in the Book of Praise

I love the Lord because my God  
Has heard my voice, my prayer;  
So while I live, I'll praise the one  
Who turned a gracious ear

*Words: © Andrew Donaldson, 1996 Music: public domain*

“Be Still and Know” Vv. 1&3 #64 in the Book of Praise

Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God

In Thee O Lord I put my trust  
In Thee O Lord I put my trust  
In Thee O Lord I put my trust

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“Come to us, Beloved Stranger” V. 3 #262 in the Book of Praise

We would never fail to see you  
As you walk with us each day.  
As a friend and not a stranger  
You would join us on our way.  
Help us trust that through your mercy  
We can doubt and fear transcend,  
And to others be a blessing.  
Keep us faithful till life's end!

*Words: © Edith Sinclair Downing, 1993 Music: attributed to B.F. White 1844*

**Scripture Text: Luke 24:13-35**

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

<sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

## **Meditation**

I don't know what responses you are encountering when you ask how people are doing in this time of isolation, but I'm getting a pretty steady set of answers when I call and say, 'Just checking in to see how you're doing.' Normally I hear things like:

Oh, I'm hanging in there;

I'm doing ok, finding things to do;

I'm getting a lot of cleaning done;

I'm making a lot of phone calls!

For the most part, I think people are doing their best to keep their spirits up and find different ways to connect with others.

In our house there is a lot of piano and guitar playing, video game play, BBC watching and houseplant care. I will likely pick up a new knitting project soon, and work my way through some books that have been sitting on my shelf for a while. I'm also snacking more, which is why I'm glad I have incentive to go for a walk every day – the dogs.

I'm glad we have these little furry family members around. I've often said they help keep my blood pressure down, and I certainly enjoy their constant company. Many of you have met them, or heard them over the phone because if my attention isn't readily available they will correct that situation. They also get me out of the house almost every day for some exercise because they need to be taken for a walk. And, my fitness tracker gives me a buzz of encouragement as I get my steps in every day!

While we walk, we are mindful of others, and keep an appropriate distance from anyone we may encounter on our route.

How different from the experience of two of Jesus' followers as they walked on the road to Emmaus.

There was no physical distancing for them as they made their way from Jerusalem. In fact, as they walked along, a stranger joined them on their journey. He simply stepped in beside them and entered the conversation.

These men didn't know who their new companion was, although in hindsight they realized they had felt something within their hearts as he talked with them. They were surprised by his question about the topic of their conversation. They were further surprised when he reminded them of everything they needed to remember about the words of the prophets about the Messiah.

Then, they offered the stranger hospitality as they entered the village and he accepted. And something amazing happened for these men who had been so overwhelmed by all that had happened. Jesus broke bread and we read the familiar words:

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

In that moment they knew it was all true. They understood the feeling they had had while on the road with him. They took in the reality of his resurrection and believed. They immediately headed back to Jerusalem to share the good news with the eleven disciples. They had seen the Risen Christ. They had gathered around a table with him and broken bread with him.

And they had recognized him.

Can you imagine how they must have felt? Their hearts were burning. At the end of the journey they knew why. He was alive and had been right there with them. That road would likely never have the same feeling to it.

Last weekend we heard about another path that will be changed forever as we took in the news of the mass shooting in Nova Scotia. The road on which the shooter travelled was not one of life and fulfilled promises, but one of death and sorrow. It is a situation about which we have heard heartbreaking stories and developments all week.

We can only imagine how the families of the victims are feeling, the impact on the community, what it is like to wait for confirmation that loved ones were among the fatalities. Our prayers have been with the people of Nova Scotia, so deeply broken by this tragedy. We are praying for those in other provinces whose loved ones were taken. We are lifting the RCMP and all First Responders, and community leaders who are reaching out to offer compassion and concern. We are praying for churches, clergy, and community organizations that must find ways to offer hope and healing with no opportunity to gather. It makes this situation feel even heavier. A time of loss and crisis is when we most need the presence of loved ones – family, friends and neighbours – and yet in these days people cannot be physically present for one another as they would be under normal circumstances.

And so we pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit to be the presence of comfort that is so desperately needed. This is our hope. We are not alone, even without the physical presence of others.

This isn't a cliché, a platitude one offers at a time of grief. We really are not alone. By the presence of God's Holy Spirit, the One who loves us beyond any human understanding is surrounding us, walking with us on our journey.

God's presence does not fail.

God's love does not end.

God's comfort is deep and lasting.

God's presence is being felt in different ways in this time of isolation.

It is being heard in the voice of a friend that calls to say hello and offer a word of comfort.

It is being felt as we smile and wave at neighbours through our windows, discover chalk messages of joy and encouragement on our driveways, and send cards.

We are seeing it in the happy drawings children are taping to the windows of their homes... in the red ribbons tied around trees to support front line workers... in the messages of hope for better days on homemade front yard signs.

For those in Nova Scotia, love and solidarity is being felt from across the nation. It is a selfless love that is being shown. The support being spread online and through the media is heart-warming. The initiatives being taken to bring people together in heart and spirit through virtual vigils and pages dedicated to messages of sympathy and support are sincere efforts to try and soothe the pain.

These things will not take it away, far from it. They will not stop the extreme grief. They will not bring back the victims, or erase the trauma for those who responded to the crisis. We do not have the power to do any of that. But we can engage in these acts of compassion in the name of Jesus, in the love of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot take this horrific situation away or make it better, but we can offer the presence of God's compassion through our words, our thoughts, our prayers.

We can support efforts to care for the communities so deeply affected by these terrible acts of violence.

We can be instruments of God's peace and grace, vessels through which God may speak. Our hearts can be companions on the road of grief, until the journey reaches our destination of healing and wholeness. As the Rev. Amanda Currie, current Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada wrote in her address to the church on the PCC website:

“Especially in this current context of staying home and physical distancing, may the church find faithful and creative ways to share God's love with those who are grieving.”

Perhaps you know of someone who has lost a loved one during this pandemic and is grieving without the presence of family and friends, without a funeral service to acknowledge and give thanks for the life of that special person.

Reach out to them and share God's love.

Perhaps you know someone who is ill, or caring for someone else, or is living alone and is feeling the loneliness of isolation.

Reach out to them and share God's love.

Perhaps you know someone working in health care, Police, Fire, or Paramedic Services that is feeling the anxiety of the society in rather acute ways.

Reach out to them and share God's love.

Perhaps you know of parents trying to help their children cope with school work and the absence of peers, grandparents who are missing their grandkids, adult children who are

concerned about their aging parents, someone who has lost work because of workplace closure, someone who is unsure of what the future holds because everything has changed. Reach out to them and share God's love.

Be creative about it. Ask God to help you help others.

And when someone reaches out to you, receive their offering as the gift of love and compassion that it is.

The road to Emmaus was a difficult one, but its travellers arrived at their destination to receive a new sense of hope and promise. May our efforts to care for others in these challenging days open the eyes of our community, nation and world so that Jesus will be recognized. Because our efforts, in his name, are fuelled by the Spirit of God, whose peace does surpass all understanding. Amen.