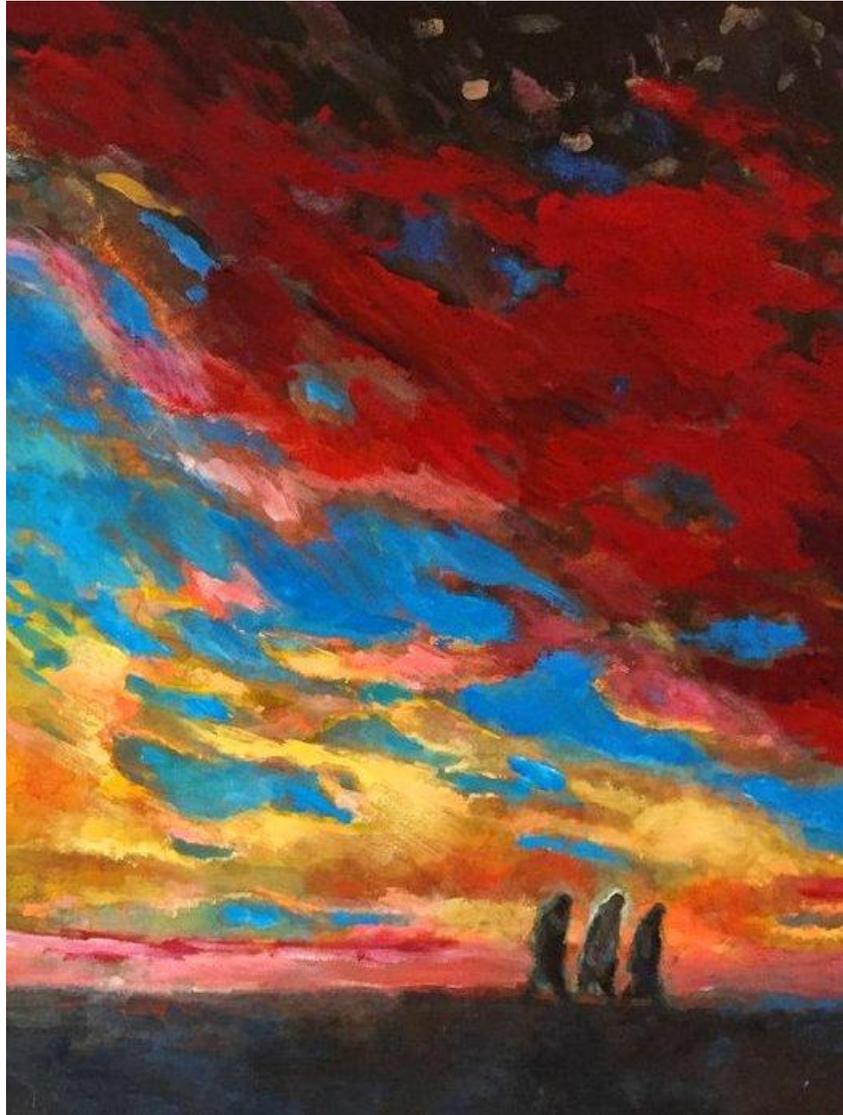


ST. PAUL'S UCC

1304 Heidelberg Ave. / Schaefferstown, PA 17088



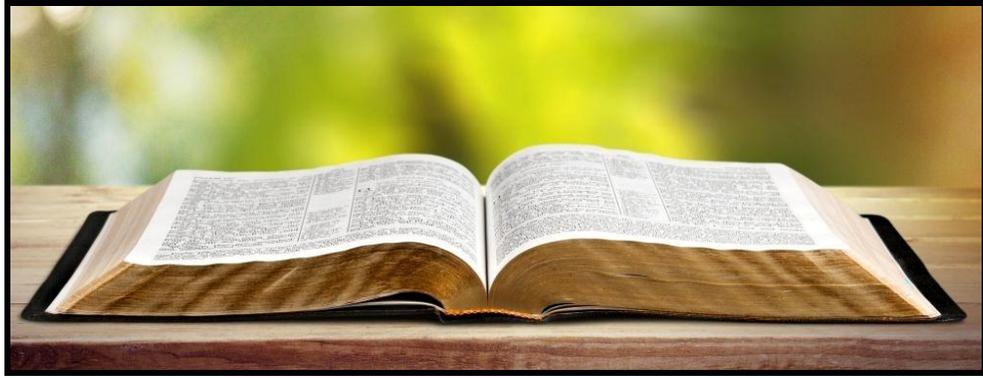
April 26th / 2020

Worship Service - United in Spirit

→ **Church Family** ←

At 10:30 AM on Sunday please set aside time to say:

The Lord's Prayer & The Apostle's Creed



1 Peter 1:17-23

(New International Version, NIV)

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Luke 24:13-24, 28-31

(New International Version, NIV)

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

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. 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?"

"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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 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.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.



Doubt and disillusionment, discouragement and despair—these are emotions that are common to all of us at some point in our lives. Loss of a job, loss of a loved one, divorce, illness, even the loss of a pet, any of these things and more can throw us into a tailspin and fill our hearts with discomfort and fear. We feel things will never be right again. Especially in the confines of a pandemic. We forget that there ever was a thing called hope, and all that we have learned about God's saving grace is nowhere to be found. If ever we knew how to call upon God, it is now, in times like these. And yet, when we need God the most, we often are tempted to turn our backs on God and walk away.

That is exactly the situation in which we find Cleopas and his friend in today's gospel reading. Followers of Jesus, they had believed in the new life he had promised them. Nourished in mind, body, and spirit by their fellowship with Jesus and with other believers, their lives had become filled with a new joy: everything they had to give up to follow Jesus was nothing compared to the happiness they now experienced in his presence. They thought it would go on forever.

But that was then. Now all their hopes and dreams were as dead as Jesus. The events of the past few days, ending with the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, had beaten every last shred of hope from them. They thought there was nothing left to do but get out of Jerusalem and go to another place, perhaps to pick up the pieces of their former lives and begin anew; to turn their backs on all that had seemed so promising and hopeful, and walk the seven miles on the road to Emmaus.

So they started out, Cleopas and his friend, walking and talking as they travel together, going over the same story again and again, as if saying it one more time would change the outcome. Don't we do the same thing? If we've lost something, don't we keep revisiting the same spot, thinking that if we go there often enough the lost item will miraculously appear?

But as they do this, a stranger meets them on the road. It is Jesus, but their hearts are so full of defeat and so devoid of faith that they do not recognize him. What's more, when this stranger asks what they are talking about, they cannot believe he doesn't know all that has happened. Where has he been? And so they tell the story again.

As Jesus (whom they still did not recognize) talks to them, they are so enthralled by his words that when they reach Emmaus, they don't want him to go; they want to hear more, and so they invite him to stay with them.

Jesus agrees, and as they sit down for supper something amazing happens. Jesus picks up the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. And in that simple but meaningful act, their eyes are opened and they know with certainty, not only who he is, not only that this is indeed Jesus,

but they also know that all he had said to them was true. For Cleopas and his friend, their doubt and despair were swiftly forgotten. They were so renewed in faith, so excited that their feet grew wings and they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell others the good news.

If Jesus was disappointed in the disciples and all the others who deserted him at the end, who, in the midst of their despair and disillusionment, chose to take the road to Emmaus rather than stick it out by his side, we never hear about it.

One of the most glorious things to come out of the resurrection is another truth we learn about Jesus—that no matter how bad things become for us, no matter where we go to hide ourselves when the world gets to be too much for us, even if we lose our faith for a time, God will come to be with us. He won't ask us for explanations. We won't have to justify our position. There is no shaming or recrimination. He will simply meet us as we walk along our own road to Emmaus.

Whatever Emmaus route we take when we just can't take it anymore,
Jesus will meet us there! Even though we are the ones walking away,
God is always faithful. God will never leave us nor forsake us.
God will never let us walk alone.

In the words of author Barbara Taylor Brown, "Christ comes to the disappointed and the doubtful. He comes to those who do not know their Bibles, who do not recognize Him even when they are walking beside Him. He comes to those who have given up and are headed back home, which makes this whole story about the blessing of brokenness, a story about us."€•

The wonderful truth of this story is that God, even in our moments of waywardness and faithlessness, does not abandon us but instead draws closer to us. Just as he made himself known to the two men walking along the road, and then used them to make his story and the news of his resurrection known, so he comes and stands beside us in our moments of despair, calling our name, waiting for us to recognize him, to realize again the truth of his words, to be renewed in faith so that he can use us to grow the kingdom.

The message of Jesus is a gratuitous offering of life to us. Because God loves us so much, He gives us the opportunity, over and over again, to discover new life in Christ; a kind of partnership that helps us on our path so that we can begin to make sense of all the parts that don't easily fit together.

Over and over again, that is what Jesus is trying to do for us—move us out of fear into love—out of doubt into faith—out of gnawing anxiety into a place where we feel that the things happening to us, as well as the people around us, are feeding and instructing us, building and teaching us, encouraging and reassuring us.

We are on a path together. It's the road to Emmaus. It's the path we all travel. And whether we like it or not, it is paved with challenges to our faith. But the good news is, the greater the challenge, the closer our Lord walks beside us. Like the two friends walking to Emmaus, the Lord joins us to help make the journey of life just a little easier for us to endure.

Like the two friends in our story, all of us must travel the road to Emmaus. It is a dusty, difficult road at times, but a road, nonetheless, that has the power to bring hope back to life.

Let us go forth today with more reliance upon our faith and greater assurance in our hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown the ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us,
scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us,
free our hearts to love and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.

Cure thy children's warring madness,
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Set our feet on lofty places;
gird our lives that they may be
armored with all Christ-like graces,
pledged to set all captives free.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
that we fail not them nor thee,
that we fail not them nor thee!

Prayer:

Merciful God, we thank you for the invitation to walk with you, to commune with you, to feel your reassurance within us that enables us to accomplish the goodness you require of us. Bless us with great peace and great understanding as we continue to celebrate the strength of your outstretched arm and the light of your loving presence. In Christ our Lord's name. Amen.

Apostle's Creed:

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.