

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
April 18, 2021 - 3rd Sunday of Easter**



Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from One License with license # A-723596 and CCLI License #3272690

*Please rise as you are able
Please join in speaking/singing **bolded** text

PRELUDE

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

PREPARING OUR HEARTS

***Opening Words**

The bread of life opens our eyes.

The word of life opens our ears.

The risen one shows us God's own brokenness,
and by those wounds we are healed.

Peace be with you.

And also with you.

***Opening Hymn #37 (SH)**

"Blessed Be Your Name"

Text and Music by Matt Redman and Beth Redman

© 2002 Thankyou Music

CCLI License # 3272690

Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful,
where your streams of abundance flow, blessed be your name.
Blessed be your name when I'm found in the desert place,

though I walk through the wilderness, blessed be your name.
Every blessing you pour out I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say,
"Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your glorious name."

Blessed be your name when the sun's shining down on me,
when the world's "all as it should be" blessed be your name.
Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering,
though there's pain in the offering, blessed be your name.
Every blessing you pour out I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say,
"Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your glorious name."

You give and take away, you give and take away.
My heart will choose to say, "Lord, blessed be your name."
You give and take away, you give and take away.
My heart will choose to say, "Lord, blessed be your name."
"Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be your glorious name."

Prayer of Confession

The one who calls us to repent, hears us.
In trust that our Creator knows us through and through,
let us open our hearts to the healing of God's forgiveness.

God our Father,
in your love you welcome us as your children,
through your care you have shaped the universe,
with your mercy you hear our prayers.
Hear us, your children,
as we come before you in worship.

Jesus, our risen Master,
in our weakness, you call us,
in our confusion, you teach us,
in our troubles, you offer us peace.
Meet us, your friends,
as we come to hear your word.

Spirit, Living One,

in the beginning, you breathed life,
in chaos and darkness, you brought hope,
in many tongues, you spread good news.
Transform us, your people,
as we open our minds and hearts to you.

God, loving Father, Son and Spirit, we come.
We know we come with doubts and fears.
We know we come in ignorance.
We know we have failed you,
your creation and your people, in many ways.
Trusting in your love, we turn again to you.
As we open our hearts to your mercy and forgiveness,
grant us your peace.

Accept these prayers,
accept our worship,
accept us, through your love,
Amen

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
your plea for absolution has been heard.
God's promises are sure: your sins are forgiven. Peace be with you!

Hymn #129 (SH)
“Refiner’s Fire”

Text and Music by Brian Doerksen
©1990 Mercy Vineyard Publishing / Vineyard Songs Canada
CCLI License # 3272690

Purify my heart, let me be as gold and precious silver.
Purify my heart, let me be as gold, pure gold.
Refiner’s fire: my heart’s one desire is to be holy, set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy, set apart for you my master; ready to do your will.

Purify my heart, cleanse me from within and make me holy.
Purify my heart, cleanse me from my sin, deep within.
Refiner’s fire: my heart’s one desire is to be holy, set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy, set apart for you my master; ready to do your will.

Refiner’s fire: my heart’s one desire is to be holy, set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy, set apart for you my master; ready to do your will .

Children's Message

Prayer Response #2193 (SF)

“Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

Words & Music by Ken Medema

©1973 Hope Publishing Co

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
send us love, send us power, send us grace.
(repeat)

Scripture Lesson

Luke 24:13-48

Message

“Living the Story”

Rev. Leanne B. Thompson

What makes your heart sing? It is a question asked by counselors and coaches, mentors, spiritual directors, and pastors. What makes your heart sing? When we hear that question we recognize that we are being challenged to name and connect with that something that brings us joy, peace, or comfort. It might be that thing that connects us to faith and to hope. Or something that gives our lives a sense of purpose or meaning. What makes your heart sing?

I can't answer that question for you individually. But collectively, we just named and celebrated that which makes our heart sing. We are Easter people. And just a couple weeks ago, we raised the first strains of *Alleluia!* After a long dark season of Lent. We celebrated the triumph of life over death, of light over darkness. We proclaimed Jesus risen from the grave: *Christ is Risen; He is Risen Indeed!*

And we are still celebrating! Easter is not over. According to the liturgical calendar, we will celebrate the season of Easter until May 23rd when we change the banners to red and celebrate Pentecost. Today and 4 more Sundays to follow, we will intentionally and joyfully celebrate the risen Lord.

But I'm finding it difficult to sing songs of joy right now. I am painfully aware, especially after another weekend of violence that we may be an Easter people, but this doesn't feel like an Easter world. This world is broken, and violent. There is a painful absence of hope, justice, and peace. Love for neighbors seems to be in

short supply. I am finding it all too easy to relate to the disciples, not yet believing that Jesus is risen, hiding out in grief and despair, uncertain how to move forward.

Recently, a wise person reminded me that sometimes the songs our hearts sing are songs of lament. There is a place for songs of joy, but there are also times when we need to acknowledge our sorrow, when we need to actively mourn what we have lost.

That is where our scripture begins today. Cleopas and another unnamed disciple - who scholars believe might be his wife - are walking home to Emmaus. Not with joy, but with sorrow. Their hearts are heavy with grief when they encounter a stranger on the road. And in this encounter, two significant things happen. The first is that they are talking about Jesus and he shows up. Remember this; it is important. It happens again later in the text with another group of disciples in another place: they are talking about Jesus and he shows up. The second significant thing that happens is that they invite a stranger into their experience - their grief, their story, their hospitality - and *then* they recognize Jesus there with them.

They are talking about Jesus and he shows up. Let's explore that first; it's the easiest. We get this. Anyone who has ever grieved the loss of a loved one knows that there is power in telling the stories of the one who has passed. To tell the stories makes our loved ones real to us, if not in body at least in spirit. I don't know where the idea originated, but I can quote author Terry Pratchett, so I will quote Terry Pratchett. He writes: "Do you not know that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken? No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away." There is this beautiful, almost transcendent thing that happens when we tell the stories of our loved ones together. I've seen it happen over and over in family living rooms and church basements. Telling the stories allows, if only for a moment, for tears to turn to laughter. More than that, telling the stories allows us to see our loved ones through another's eyes, to recognize the impact they have had that we might not be aware of.

This is what Cleopas and his unnamed companion were doing on the road as they walked. Naming and remembering Jesus. And Jesus showed up, unknown to them, to articulate to them the ripples emanating out into the world because of him. As they were mired in sorrow, this stranger told the stories that helped them remember the miracles, the wonders, the promise. And that made their hearts sing. The text actually says their hearts were burning within them, but I think that is pretty much the same thing as singing. Their hearts sang songs of lament, and their songs of lament turned to songs of enlightenment as they began to understand what this stranger (who happened to be Jesus) was teaching them, and their songs turned to songs of joy as they recognized the risen Lord with them and they returned to where the other disciples were to share the good news. Their hearts sang songs of

joy, but not before first singing songs of lament. Jesus met them in their lament. They remembered him. They spoke about him. And he was there.

Here's the second point, and this one is more difficult. Jesus was real to them, not just present with them but real and known to them, when hospitality was extended...to a stranger. Jesus could have revealed himself to them as they walked together on the road. Immediately lifting them out of their sorrow by his presence with them. But he didn't. Jesus could have revealed the authority with which he spoke about those things. He did not. He chose not to do that. He didn't reveal himself until after they had extended hospitality to him --- a stranger they encountered on the road. It was in the breaking of the bread, the sharing of a meal, that they finally recognized him.

We rehearse this theology - this way of talking about and understanding God - every time we gather around this table. We proclaim this the Lord's Table, open to all. We gather as friends, but we invite the stranger to join us as well. And we understand that God is made real to us in the breaking and sharing of the bread. But this isn't the only table where that happens. It happens around tables in the fellowship hall over coffee and cookies. It happens at potlucks and banquet feasts. It happens around dining room tables and in cafes.

Wherever Jesus is spoken of, he is present. Wherever hospitality is extended to the stranger, his presence is made real. That is what we learn from this encounter on the road to Emmaus and in the encounter that follows. Wherever Jesus is spoken of, he is present. Wherever hospitality is extended to the stranger, his presence is made real - we recognize him in our midst.

So, back to the world. I said earlier that we are Easter people, but this doesn't feel like an Easter world. Maybe this is exactly an Easter world: a broken world in need of healing; a world that is waiting for a savior; a world that is worth redeeming. Perhaps what is missing is that the Easter people are still hiding out in upper rooms, isolating themselves from a world that feels threatening and chaotic.

I get it. The hurt of the world is overwhelming and discouraging. There is just too much bad news. I have found myself hiding out more than once in these past months. My hiding out looks like turning off the news and avoiding social media, or by avoiding difficult topics of conversations. It looks like distracting myself with a good novel or a Netflix binge. It is all too easy for us to climb into protective bubbles - familiar places and like-minded people - and insulate ourselves from the chaos that is happening somewhere else in the world. It feels safer to live in denial that we are part of what is happening out there in the messy broken world.

But if we are Easter people it is not enough to tell that story in the safety of our sanctuary on a Sunday morning. We need to tell that story in the broken places of the world. Because where we tell the story of Jesus, he is there. So we gather here and proclaim: *Christ is Risen; He is Risen Indeed!*

But we also make space to lament the world that needs a Savior. We lament lives cut short by violence; we lament people of power abusing their power; we lament that so many lack the power and resources to change their circumstances; we lament lives forever changed by tragic mistakes; we lament a world in which people live in fear; we lament a world that tries to force us to take sides in ridiculous debates; we lament institutions that dehumanize people and profit from their pain. We lament these things and so much more. But we don't just lament. We lament alongside the story of Jesus and invite him into these circumstances. We remember how he responded to the suffering of people, how he exercised abundant compassion, how he pushed back against power and invited the marginalized inside the circle of his love. And telling these stories gives us hope that Jesus can still be at work healing the world.

But it is not enough to just talk about it. Jesus is made present when we tell the story. But Jesus is made real and recognizable when we extend hospitality to the stranger. It is easy to extend hospitality to a friend. It is much more difficult to extend hospitality to a stranger. It is nearly impossible to extend hospitality to a stranger when we perceive that stranger as a potential threat. We hide from threats, we don't invite them to dinner. And that friends, is a missed opportunity. Friends, the most radical and transformative display of our faith might be in our refusal to see the other as the enemy. The most rebellious thing we can do every day in the name of faith, might be to see the stranger as a beloved child of God and treat them that way. The most powerful statement we make about God's abundant grace, might be to offer hospitality believing that when we do Jesus will be present and recognizable in that place where we extend compassion.

So, what does this mean for us? It means we will continue to gather in this place. In the midst of a chaotic and broken world, we need a place where we can gather and encourage one another. We need a place where we can tell the familiar stories of Jesus and his healing love and amazing grace. We will talk about him and he will show up here with us as we remember him. But we will not stay here. We can't sit in hiding waiting for the world to change, because the world is not going to change without us. We are the ones left to speak his name. We are the ones left to keep the ripple effect of his radical hospitality going. We don't get to be passive observers, but active participants in the transformation of the world.

So, we will go back out into the world. And, I am certain, we will go out to places where we will have opportunities to tell the stories that we know - stories of healing, stories of hope, stories of acceptance and love, stories of encouragement.

And wherever we go, we will encounter a stranger or two. The strangers we encounter will be different depending where we find ourselves, but always it will be an opportunity to practice extending hospitality in large ways or in small ones.

So, sing your heart songs. Sing your songs of lament and sing your songs of joy. Live your song in the world and invite friends and strangers alike to join the song. Break bread together with those who encourage you and those who make you uncomfortable. When you do, Jesus will be there, and his transforming presence will be real in the world.

Alleluia. Amen.

WE RESPOND TO THE WORD

Hymn of Affirmation #105 (SH)

“In the Secret”

Text and Music by Andy Park
©1995 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing
CCLI License # 3272690

In the secret, in the quiet place, in the stillness you are there.
In the secret, in the quiet hour I wait only for you,
‘cause I want to know you more.
I want to know you, I want to hear your voice, I want to know you more.
I want to touch you, I want to see your face, I want to know you more.

I am reaching for the highest goal, that I might receive the prize.
Pressing onward, pushing ev’ry hindrance aside, out of my way,
‘cause I want to know you more.
I want to know you, I want to hear your voice, I want to know you more.
I want to touch you, I want to see your face, I want to know you more.

Prayers of Intercession

Risen One,
like those disciples on the road to Emmaus,
we struggle to recognize you in the everyday journey of our lives.
We seek your wisdom in the midst of the questions we have
about the circumstances we find ourselves in—
circumstances sometimes beyond our control,
but often of our own making.
Open our eyes, Light of the World,
to your work of transformation in and around us.
As we walk with you day by day,
may your new life be made manifest in what we say to others.
Help us to understand the power of our words to hurt or to heal;

give us the graciousness to make all our conversations holy.

Just as we desire that our speaking be holy,
may our seeing be holy as well.

We are bombarded with images everyday, O Christ,
that shape our attitudes and behaviors.

As you opened the scriptures to the disciples
and taught them everything,

open our eyes to behold you in your Word,
in the beauty of nature,

the beauty of another human being
and the beauty of sacred art.

And in our seeing,

help us to recognize and welcome the stranger in our midst.

May our welcome be a celebration of the gifts and graces
of persons who are different from us

and not merely some token tolerance of an outsider.

You were known to the disciples in the breaking of the bread.

May your resurrection presence guide us in the decisions we make
about what we take into our bodies—

especially what we eat and what we drink.

Help us to understand our eating and drinking as sacred events,
not to be abused or approached mindlessly.

So often we forget, Holy One,
that you invite us to abide with you;
to have our lives hidden in you.

We thank you that you travel with us in our joys and our concerns. Amen.

By the blessing of your Spirit, help us to live as we pray so that the world may
come to know the gift of life in Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, singing:

Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today, our daily bread;

forgive our sins and turn us from temptation.

The kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever.

Amen, amen, amen.

Invitation to the Offering

As Jesus gave himself fully for us
and then appeared to the disciples bringing peace,
so let us now bring wholeness and healing to others through our tithes and gifts.

Offering Prayer

Lord God, we offer to you only a portion of what you have given us.
All that we have is from your creative hand.

All that we can give away we do through Jesus' love.
All our renewal comes from the Holy Spirit's wisdom.
Deal graciously with these gifts so that others may have joy; in Jesus' name.
Amen.

WE LEAVE TO SERVE

Closing Hymn #138 (SH)

“Sing To The King”

Text and Music by Billy J. Foote
©2003 sixsteps Music / worshiptogether.com songs
CCLI License # 3272690

Sing to the King who is coming to reign.
Glory to Jesus, the lamb that was slain.
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
and joy to the nations, when Jesus is King.

Come, let us sing a song, a song declaring that we belong to Jesus;
He is all we need. Lift up a heart of praise.
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus; Sing to the King.

For his returning we watch and we pray;
We will be ready the dawn of that day.
We'll join in singing with all the redeemed,
'cause Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.

Come, let us sing a song, a song declaring that we belong to Jesus;
He is all we need. Lift up a heart of praise.
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus; Sing to the King.

Charge

May we go from here full of hope and joy.
May we go from here knowing that, through the resurrection,
we are forgiven, loved, and free.
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Benediction

“The Blessing”

words and music by Chris Brown, Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe, and Steven Furtick
©2020 Capitol CMG Paragon / Kari Jobe Carnes Music / Worship Together Music / Writer's Roof Publishing /
Music by Elevation Worship Publishing
CCLI License # 3272690

The Lord bless you and keep you,
Make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.
(repeat)

Amen, amen, amen. Amen, amen, amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you,
Make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

POSTLUDE