

Smithfield Carman United Church
Amalgamation Sunday
email Service April 26

Welcome

Greetings to all this week. Today is the day we celebrate our Smithfield Carman Amalgamation. Though we are not together for coffee, and goodies, we are together in the Spirit of love and friendship. May the words of this opening song remind us that we – the people - are the church – not the building – as we continue to hold everyone in our heart and prayers during these times of isolation. Let us rejoice for Christ is Risen.

Song of Celebration

(tune 421 “Lead On, O Cloud of Presence”)

The church where we all gather, the church that is our home.
We celebrate beginnings, a church we call our own.
Through years of Christian service, as changes made us strong,
God helped us through our struggles, God guided us in song.

Our church is not a building, our church is not a house.
But people who are willing, to give, to live with us.
Compassion, strength, and friendship, we strive to do our best,
For God, ourselves, our families, we work and then we rest.

Rejoice, O Smithfield Carman, a new church realized
Tradition, understanding, a love gives us new ties
Compassion, strength, and friendship, we strive to be a friend,
For God, ourselves, our families, we work until the end

Call to Worship

(based on Luke 24:13-35)

We need your presence on this long road, Lord.
The road between fear and hope,
the road between the place where all is lost
and the place of resurrection.
Like the disciples walking the road to Emmaus,
we are in need of your company!
Jesus, stand among us, in your risen power,
let this time of worship, be a hallowed hour.

Hymn: 396 Jesus Stand Among us

Jesus, stand among us
in your risen power;
let this time of worship
be a hallowed hour.

Breathe the Holy Spirit
into every heart;
bid the fears and sorrows
from each soul depart.

Lead our hearts to wisdom
till our doubting cease,
and to all assembled
speak your word of peace.

Scripture:

Luke 24: 13-35

Jesus appearance on the road to Emmaus

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."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

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. 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?”

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

The Road Back To Hope Luke 24:13-35

Reflection: *“But We Had Hoped”*

On this third Sunday of Easter, we find ourselves traveling a road that’s uncomfortably familiar. Every one of us, regardless of identity or circumstance, knows this road. We’ve walked it. We’ve lost our way on it. We’ve left it behind and then returned to it. The road is the road to Emmaus, and we recognize it by the words we speak when our feet hit its rough and winding way one more time:



“But we had hoped.”

The words we speak on the road to Emmaus are words of pain, disappointment, bewilderment, and yearning. They are the words we say when we’ve come to the end of our hopes — when our expectations have been dashed, our cherished dreams are gone, and there’s nothing left to do but leave, defeated and done. *“But we had hoped.”*

In our Gospel story this week, Cleopas and his unnamed companion say these same words to the stranger who appears alongside them, as they walk to Emmaus on Easter evening: *“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”*

Jesus — as far as they know — is dead. The Lord they staked their lives on, the Messiah they thought would change the world, has died the most humiliating and death imaginable, and his promises of a new kingdom have come to nothing. Worse, Jesus’s tomb is empty, his body is missing, and the women who loved and followed him appear to have gone mad, what with their bizarre reports of angels, gardeners, and talking ghosts. How completely things have fallen apart. *“But we had hoped”* for so much.

The story of the road to Emmaus doesn’t seem like an Easter story, yet according to Luke’s Gospel, it happens *on* Resurrection Sunday. This is the day our churches are full, we decorate with flowers on crosses, and sing our “Alleluias.” However, the road to

Emmaus stretches out ahead of us, bringing defeat, disillusionment, and sorrow. Perhaps for some of us resurrection takes longer than three days. Sometimes new life comes in fits and starts. Sometimes, seeing and recognizing the risen Christ is *hard*. Sometimes what we see is not what we expect - in this Emmaus story.

If we look carefully we might see a quiet resurrection. Perhaps we would expect Jesus, after suffering an unjust death would come back with a vengeance, shouting his risen triumph from the rooftops, and prove his accusers and killers wrong. Yet, as far as we know, he doesn't enter the Temple and make a scene. He doesn't appear to the Sanhedrin, or show up at Pilate's house, or set the sky ablaze with fireworks. He makes absolutely no effort to defend himself, or to act out in revenge.

Instead, on the evening of his greatest victory, the risen Christ takes a walk. He takes a leisurely walk on a quiet, out-of-the-way road. When he notices two of his followers walking ahead of him, he approaches them so calmly and understated, they don't recognize him.

"But we had hoped" he'd be more dramatic, more convincing, for we had hoped he'd make post-Easter faith easier. is part of us disappointment as read this story and we are disappointed in this quiet resurrection. The disappointment of a Jesus who prefers the quiet, hidden encounter to the theatrics we expect and crave.

If we look carefully we might see healing through story. As soon as Jesus falls into step with the companions on the road, he invites them to tell their story: "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" Astonished by the question, they tell Jesus everything, sharing the story of their faith — its rise and its fall. They tell Jesus how high their expectations had been for their now-crucified leader, "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." They describe their devastation at his death; their confusion, their loss, their uncertainty. They tell Jesus the whole story.

And Jesus listens. He hears them out, and then — when they're done — he tells the story back to them, and as he does so, the story changes. In his retelling, it becomes what it really always was — something far bigger, deeper and wiser, than the travelers on the Emmaus road understood. "Here's what you're leaving out," Jesus seems to say. "Here's what you're missing."

When Jesus tells the story, he restores both its context and its glory. He supports the story in memory, in tradition, in history, in Scripture. He helps the travelers understand their place in a story that is big enough to hold their disappointment without being defeated by it. When Jesus tells the story, the death of the Messiah finds its place in redemption, hope, and divine love. When Jesus tells the story, the hearts of his listeners burn.

“*But we had hoped* the story was bigger. We had hoped it would have a better ending.” Well, it is. And it does.

If we look closely we might notice the freedom to leave. When the travelers reach Emmaus, Jesus gives them the option to continue on without him, making it so they have to offer an invitation to stay. Do they want him to stay? Are they willing to risk entertaining a stranger in their home? Do they wish to hear more of the story with this man who makes their hearts burn, or are they content to leave things where they stand, and return to their ordinary lives without learning more?

This is a moment of decision - for would have happened if Cleopas and his companion said goodbye to Jesus on the road? How would their story have ended if Jesus walked away? The companions would have missed so much. The Messiah they thought they knew and loved would have remained a stranger. They would not have experienced the recognition with the breaking of the bread and the shared cup. The joy of resurrection would not have become theirs.

Then – what about ourselves? Do we want to know more of the story? Are we ready to get off the Emmaus road of our own failures and defeats? Do we *really* want to know who the stranger is? Yet we too are offered the freedom to walk on, for Jesus offers us space, time, and the freedom to decide what we really want.

“*Stay with us.*” That’s what Cleopas and his companion say to Jesus. Stay with us. An invitation. A welcome. The words a patient Jesus waits to hear.

If we look closely we may notice the smallness of things.

Once Jesus and his companions are seated around the table, Jesus takes bread blesses, breaks, and gives. So small a thing that changes everything.

During these hard days of sheltering in place, hearing horrific stories of suffering, and fearing for our futures as individuals, families, communities, and nations, it’s difficult to trust in the power of small things. A bit of bread. A sip of wine. A common table. A shared meal.

But the Emmaus story speaks to this power — the power of the small and the commonplace to reveal the divine. God shows up during a quiet evening walk on a back road. God is made known around our dinner tables. God reveals God’s self when we take, bless, break, and give. God is present in the rhythms and rituals of our seemingly ordinary days.

For us in this time this means that God is in the text we send to the lonely neighbor we can't visit during quarantine. God appears in the Zoom gathering, the livestream worship service, the phone call, the greeting card. Jesus is the stranger you see across the street when you walk your dog — both of you smiling beneath your protective masks. The sacred is in the conversation you have with your stir-crazy child, the technology you attempt to master so that you can talk to your friends across the distances. If the Emmaus story tells us anything, it tells us that the risen Christ is not confined in any way by the seeming smallness of our lives. Wherever and whenever we make room, Jesus will join us.

“But we had hoped.” Yes, we had. Of course we had. So very many things are different right now than we had hoped they'd be. And yet, the stranger who is the Savior still meets us on the lonely road to Emmaus. The guest who becomes our host still nourishes us with Presence, Word, and Bread.

So keep walking. Keep telling the story. Keep honoring the stranger. Keep attending to your burning heart. Christ is risen. He is no less risen on the road to Emmaus than anywhere else. So look for him. Listen for him. And when he lingers at your door, honoring your freedom, but yearning to be present with you, say what he longs to hear: *“Stay with me.” Amen*

Hymn: Stay with us
(If this is not familiar, please treat as a poem)

Stay with us through the night.
Stay with us through the pain.
Stay with us, blessed stranger
till the morning breaks again.

Stay with us through the night.
Stay with us through the grief.
Stay with us, blessed stranger
till the morning brings relief.

Stay with us through the night.
Stay with us through the dread.
Stay with us, blessed stranger
till the morning breaks new bread.

Prayer of Intercession
(inspired by Luke 24)

You come to us
In unexpected places,
In a crowded room,
In a journey on a dusty road,

In conversation,
In the stillness.
You come in the midst of our doubt, our fear, our sorrow
You come in the power of the resurrection
No pain and suffering is unknown to you.

We ask for your presence today as we pray for our family and friends,
for ourselves, for our communities, and for all first responders,
as we all walk this journey of isolation. We also pray at this time
for all those affected by the shootings in Nova Scotia.
May you bring peace and love.

And we pray for the places where there is no peace
Countries torn by war
Refugees seeking homes
Prisoners facing torture

You bring peace
Peace to the tensions and conflicts within us
To the regrets, the failure,
The broken relationships
The lost friendships

You bring peace
For you are a friend to us
When we are alone
When we are lonely
Unseen you are there

You bring us peace
And we pray that we too
may become peacemakers... as we pray the prayer Jesus taught
Our Father

Hymn: 185 As we Walked Home at Close of Day
(tune When I Survey the Wondrous Cross)

(again treat as poem if not familiar)

Words of Commission and Benediction
(inspired by Luke 24:13-35)

Go now as those who have met with Christ
in the morning of this day.

Go now as those whose hearts have burned within them,
as the Scriptures were explained.

Go now as those
who have been touched by resurrection.

And may the blessing of God
be upon you, body, mind and spirit,
as you leave this place, Amen