

**St. Thomas Lutheran Church    1/26/2020    Pastor Joan Sorenson**

**Alleluia Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia**

This past week my husband and I were part of an online, Zoom visitation for one of our long-time CT friends. John died from Covid19. He was in his early 80's, and had been in a nursing home for over 15 years after a debilitating stroke.

Knowing that a funeral or memorial service right now was not possible, the congregation decided that they would add a time, after their Wednesday night Evening Prayer via zoom, to share stories of John and how he impacted the lives of members of this congregation. They invited folks who knew him during the 40 years that he was a member there. We were there. It was so good to see faces we haven't seen in a very long time.

And the stories were wonderful, especially those from what used to be the youth – most now grown with kids of their own!! I had forgotten so many of those stories that it was good to hear them again. And we could not have been there except for Zoom!

I tell you about John to remind us that stories are important. Stories help us to transmit our traditions and our history. Stories play an important role in how we learn words. Stories help kids learn to talk, to learn language as well as being great entertainment. As children and even as adults, there is nothing better than hearing the words, “once upon a time” That is why I can almost recite Dr Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham and One Fish Two Fish, Red Fish Blue Fish for memory and that is why Garrison Keillor is by far the best

storyteller I have ever heard. They both have such a way with words that you hear what they are saying.

The gospel story we just heard, commonly known as *The Road to Emmaus*, is an important story too, especially now. It could start out the same way many stories begin. Once upon a time, two disciples were walking down the road together, sad and gloomy, talking to each other about all the things that had happened that day.

I wonder how those two disciples missed the celebration – how they missed the angels and the women and the empty tomb part of the story. Didn't they hear, "he is not here he is risen?" Where were they? Even Peter, who sometimes didn't want anyone to know that he was Jesus disciples, ran to the empty tomb.

But no, here these two are, walking home, sad and gloomy, probably feeling pretty hopeless because the one who they thought would save them is dead.

Might we be able to connect with these 2 disciples? Here we are, in the midst of this Easter season, sitting at home, worshipping in a very new and maybe lonely way – via Zoom? Here we are listening to this story in the midst of our upside-down world.

Even though the angels said "he is not here; he is risen, they don't get it just as sometimes we don't get it either. I guess this Jesus was not who we thought he was. Oh well, maybe the next rabbi or preacher will be the Messiah, the one we are waiting for.

And maybe we say, Where is God in the midst of all this mess? Did God leave us too?

Why is God doing this to us? What did we do to deserve this pandemic?

And suddenly Jesus is in the midst of them, talking to them, in the midst of us, talking to us, asking, What's going on? What's the matter?

And even when Jesus listens and then starts talking to them, calling them foolish, sort of scolding them for not believing all the things that they had heard and seen about this Jesus, all the promises that God had made, all the promises that the prophets had told them and told them again; even then, they didn't know who Jesus was. Sound familiar? Some days it seems like we are so alone and isolated. We forget all the times we have heard the words –Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia

But whatever else, these 2 disciples are kind. When they get near their village, Emmaus, and it's pretty getting late and it appears that Jesus was going to keep walking down the road in the dark, they invited him to stay with them. And Jesus says, sure, thanks for the invite.

And then comes the best part of the story, IMHO especially now. They are eating together and Jesus picks up the loaf of bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them to eat.

And as Jesus does that, Luke says, they recognized who was eating with them, just as we recognize the body and blood of Jesus during the celebration of Holy Communion.

And here is another loss that we are experiencing during this pandemic. Our presiding bishop has asked that we not receive Holy Communion until we can do it together as Jesus did with his disciples. Holy Communion is meant to be celebrated within a community, gathered together.

At the same time, there are some scholars, theologians and pastors who say we should celebrate Holy Communion even though virtually because Jesus said do this. I'm not sure that either is right or wrong but there are different understandings of the practice of Holy Communion.

The bishop's reasoning is that during this quarantine, it might be a good time to fast from receiving the bread and wine so that we might see God's presence around us and in creation in ways that we have never noticed before. She says this might be a good discipline so that when we gather again, we might more deeply feel Jesus presence with us in the bread and wine; yet knowing that while we are fasting, God is still with us and our eyes are opened and we see God in our midst as those two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Jesus.

Maybe this is a good time to think about Jesus revealing himself to those disciples at a meal. Are there more ways than just water and bread and wine that Jesus shows himself to us?

Because if truth be told, most days, we are just like Jesus first disciples. We get all sad and gloomy about all sorts of things, don't we? Our friends are ill or have died. The cost

of living is causing us all sorts of financial concerns because now we don't have a regular paycheck because we are furloughed or out of work.

We have all these extra people in our house all the time. Sometimes being together as a family is unnerving. Life is just so very different during this covid19 outbreak. Seems like all we do is make meals and clean-up after them. And this church virtually, well, I guess it is better than nothing.

But deep in our hearts, just like those two disciples walking down the road, going home, missing Jesus, Jesus is here with us. He walks with us too, as he did with those two gloomy disciples.

That's pretty awesome to think about, isn't it? Jesus is right here with us, always, though not bodily like he was before he ascended to the Father. He's here. If we remember nothing else today, that is what we need to remember. Jesus is here with us now as he always has been and always will be.

I'd invite all of you to take a virtual walk with me and see where we find Jesus in our lives today.

We find Jesus in the water, sometime soon, at the font.. Here is where, through water and word, we were given a new name. Remembering our baptism is one way that we find Jesus among us.

We see Jesus at the table. Whether it is at the table, in the sanctuary or in our kitchen, with our family eating dinner or having an early breakfast so we can get to work – in our home

office - that Jesus comes to us and reminds us that HE is with us always to the end of the age.

I suggest that Jesus is with us now, as we gather in our homes in front of a screen or on the phone. Jesus is with us even though we are only together virtually. He invites us to look forward to the day when we can all be together again, at the font, around the table with our fellow members of the body of Christ.

We are in a holy place because Jesus is here. Jesus comes to us in the words we read from the Bible; in the words that we sing and in the words that we say – every time we gather to worship, Jesus is with us. In these words, Jesus tells us that even though we can't see him or touch him like the first disciples could, he is here with us. Some of my favorite words of Jesus sound like this – Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.

And not only is Jesus with us in the words that we hear and say and sing each time we gather, Jesus is with us in the people who are here in this place. Jesus comes to us as we share the peace with each other even though right now, we share with just words.

We are on a journey together as baptized children of God, even though we may be walking alone right now. But we know that Jesus walks with us just as he did with those two men on the road back to Emmaus.

There are so many things that we hear in this wonderful, familiar Easter story but today, it is my prayer that just as Jesus was walking with those 2 sad disciples, even though they did not know who he was, Jesus was with them as he is with us.

May the joy of this Easter season, the alleluias, the stories of Jesus with us, compel us to share the story that we know so well – Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

**Amen**