

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter. You may have come to church dressed up more than usual. You may have come the week before and participated in the Easter Egg Hunt. You may have attended Easter Sunrise service with people here on the lake or maybe elsewhere. You may have travelled to visit family or friends. Holy Week and Easter is a day and time that we look forward to and celebrate. We celebrate the Resurrection and we celebrate the beginning of springtime.

But I will be honest and say that what happens after Easter becomes a difficult time for many church workers. There is all of this build up in planning Easter worship but very little planning goes into the planning of worship after Easter. I took last week off and we are thankful that David led worship.

Megan is away this week on a school chorus cruise to the Bahamas and David is jumping in again but this time to lead our music. Easter brings the big spike in attendance in worship in churches and enthusiasm but then the weeks after are a time when it is hard to know what to do next.

But I think this morning's lesson gives us some clear vision of what we are to do next here at Allison Creek. And this guidance from the gospel of Luke are words which I think speak to our Session and to all of us. I think we are being prepared and about ready to really go beyond ourselves and connect the good news to the lives of people outside of these walls.

As we read these verses from Luke this morning, I want us to ask ourselves what these verses are teaching us about how to connect the good news of Jesus Christ to people outside of these walls. When we talk about evangelism, which is a dirty word for many Presbyterians, we usually associate evangelism with getting people to come to our worship service that we offer here in this sanctuary on Sunday mornings at 10 am. And that is part of our calling.

But as we read this passage this morning, I want to challenge us to see this model which is presented in the gospel of Luke as the model to guide our church's Session and all us in what our role is now at Allison Creek.

The last year at Allison Creek has been a time of tremendous change and pain and adjustment. But I think we are experiencing some real healing from our past conflicts and I think we have in place the leadership and the staff which is needed to move us down the road toward the places that God is calling us to go.

You have a great staff and you have a great Session or governing board. I see your staff and I see your Session working very hard at their tasks. The staff and Session is eager and they are enthusiastic. So where are we being called to go? As we read this Scripture I want to invite these words to be our guide here at Allison Creek.

We are going to read from the last chapter of Luke. The first part of the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter is what we read about at Easter. The first 12 verses in Luke is the story of the women coming to the tomb after the death of Jesus but finding the tomb open and the body of Jesus gone. They are met by men who inform the women that Jesus is risen.

So on Easter we celebrate this event. We dress up and we sing and we celebrate. But the story does not end at verse 12. Let's read about what happens next.

As we read this story, I invite you to ask yourself three questions.

- 1) Where does Jesus encounter these men? Is it in the Temple or outside of the Temple?
- 2) What is the first comment out of Jesus' mouth when he meets these men?
- 3) At what type of event do these men recognize Jesus?

**Read Luke 24:13-16**

So where does Jesus encounter these men? He encounters them on a road going away from Jerusalem. These men are not encountered by Jesus inside the Temple. These men are not encountered by Jesus in the main city of Jerusalem. These men are encountered by Jesus on a road going away from Jerusalem.

So what does that mean for us here at Allison Creek? What this part of the story may be teaching us is that our place as disciples is not just hanging out in the church and expecting people to come and show up on our doorstep. Some will. But our calling, if we pay attention to this story from Luke, is to connect with people outside of the church. Faithfulness as disciples is not waiting for people to show up but to go where others find themselves.

Where is that and how do we do that? I had a wonderful conversation with someone a couple of weeks ago under a tent out here. The leadership of this church granted permission for those of you who live down the peninsula and your neighbors to begin a petition about a large scale housing development and concerns about its impact. So that led me into a conversation with someone who lives nearby.

This person has had very negative experiences with church people. This person has been burned by people who claim to be Christian. But your engagement with the community around you led that person to a connection here. And that connection grew stronger when this person was able to witness your outside Maundy Thursday service.

This person got to see this church attempt to bring about reconciliation between people of different races and denominations. And I can tell you that it made an impact upon this person. They told me so. And that Maundy Thursday service created quite a scene as people drove by. I could see it in their faces.

Why are all of these white folks and black folks sitting together and dancing together and singing together? So when Jesus encounters the two men heading away from Jerusalem the Maundy Thursday service and being involved in community issues like the petition is an example of what that looks like.

As I continue to read the story I ask you to remember the second question which is this. What is the first comment out of Jesus' mouth?

### **Read Luke 24: 17-19**

What is the first comment out of Jesus' mouth to these two men walking away from Jerusalem? The first comment out of Jesus' mouth is a question. Jesus does not go up to these men and tell them something. He does not yell at them. He does not give them four spiritual laws and tell them that they are going to hell if they don't believe in him. He asks them a question.

So what does this say to us? If we follow this story as our mode of outreach then it means we get to know our neighbors. Our neighbors have things to teach us. We need to get to know others in an authentic way and hear their stories before we should say anything about our faith and beliefs. We need to listen to non-church Christians and people of other faiths before we speak of our own.

So in the next part of this story the two men tell Jesus about all that has happened in Jerusalem and then and only then does Jesus interpret it for them. And then this happens. As we read this section we come to our third and final question which is this. At what event do they recognize Jesus?

### **Read Luke 24:28-31**

Jesus accepts their invitation to go to their home and then as he sits down to eat with them they then recognize who he is. In their home eating their food they recognize Jesus.

### **Read Luke 24:32-39**

Do we know why we pass the peace in worship? This passage is one of the reasons. We pass the peace because when Jesus encountered frightened disciples he passed the peace to calm them and reassure them that he was present and alive.

This church is in a wonderful place right now. Like I shared earlier, you went through a very difficult year last year and you survived. You have elected a great Session that spent their last meeting bowling and sharing beverages. A Session that bowls together is a great witness for you. You have a great staff that seems to me to love what they do and they do a great job doing it.

But I think that we are at a critical point as a congregation. If we focus inwardly and try to protect what you think we have we will turn into a clique. And I will be blunt and say that this church has a history of forming cliques. And many of you know it. When churches focus on themselves then that is how cliques are formed. And cliques are designed to keep a small number in and a large number out.

But we are not called to form new cliques. Cliques are not faithful to our calling. We are called to be disciples. And that means sharing God's good news. But our culture is changing and our methods must change as well. The message does not change but the methods must adapt.

(My experience at a recent race and how groups of friends have been forming around running using social media. How do we connect the gospel to groups like this? It is probably not by inviting them to a Sunday morning worship service.)

Be in prayer for your Session today. We will meet for lunch. Your Session likes to eat a lot together. And we will be discussing some ways for us to move beyond these walls and connect with the needs and yearnings of people outside of these walls.

But faithful discipleship cannot just be the Session. We all are invited to be disciples who give witness outside of these walls. That will mean some changes around here in the way we do things but we move forward into the place that God calls us.

We have a story that the gospel of Luke shares with us about what Jesus did after he came back after the resurrection.

Do we board ourselves up in Jerusalem or do we venture out to the roads that lead to Emmaus and beyond? AMEN.

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