

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Links to Christ and Grace

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgveCGQgn0okeiNXLcmZI_w?view_as=subscriber

Website: <https://www.christandgrace.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ChristandGracePetersburg/>

OFFERINGS: Thank you to all who sent in your contribution this past week. We know that this is an extraordinarily challenging time, with many facing serious financial hardship. So many of you who need the church right now feel terrible about not being able to support it financially. Please remove this from your list of worries. We are here to support each other, and we will get through this together. We know that those who are able to do more to support the church at this time will do so, recognizing that if the shoe were on the other foot, our fellow parishioners would gladly do the same for us. It's who we are and what we do.

For those who are able, please know that you can [make a contribution electronically](#) by going to "Give" at www.christandgrace.org. Offerings can be set up for a one time or recurring gift. The church is charged a fee for this service. If you are able to include the fee with your offering, the total amount is tax deductible. Or you can set up a regular payment through your bank's bill pay, or mail checks to Christ and Grace 1545 S. Sycamore Street, Petersburg, VA 23805.

PRAYER LIST: We beg you to feed the hungry, protect the refugee, embrace the distressed, house the homeless, nurse the sick, and comfort the dying. Especially we pray for Robyn Arrington, Nancy Gates, Betty Goodman, Kayleigh Harris, Brian Hettinger, Horace Higgins, Nell Howard, Mark Jones, Pret Kaichen, Josh Lumley, Mike McKibbin, Joan Mitchell, Addison Owens, Sharon Plymire, Lilly Rudd, Mark Sheffield, Wendy Taft, the Trowbridge Family, Larry Tucker, and Paige Whitley. We pray for Kent Mallory who has entered the nearer presence of God.

WEDNESDAY SERVING OPPORTUNITY:

Each Wednesday we are collecting food for the Hope Center Food Pantry. You may bring food and leave it in the plastic bin at the back door. If you would like to send a monetary contribution to the Hope Center they would be most appreciative. Send to The Hope Center at 827 Commerce Street, Petersburg, VA 23803. You can also donate via their website at dcuhopecenter.org. Items needed at this time are: canned fruits, vegetables, meats, tuna, stew and pasta sauces – no glass. No pasta is needed at this time.

FORWARD DAY BY DAY (MAY-JUNE- JULY):

Available for pick up on Wednesdays at the back door of the church.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES – ZOOM BIBLE STUDY FOR EVERYONE, THURSDAYS AT 7 PM

We will begin this Thursday, April 23 with an overview of Acts, chapters 1 and 2, and figuring out Zoom. Then please read chapters 3-8 for April 30. This class is for everyone – whether you win or lose at Bible trivia! We will hear the stories of how the church became the church, and how the Holy Spirit empowered a group of scared and uncertain disciples in an unprecedented and unpredictable time. So yes, it's relevant.

Acts is filled with miracles, mistakes, obstacles, a shipwreck, and even humor. The people and the stories easily connect to the joys and challenges of our lives today both in the Church and in the world. The end of the story leaves us with an invitation to continue the story as we walk in the way of Jesus.

The added bonus of joining this class is time to be in community and share learning, laughter and love together. If you are interested, please email Robin+ and she will send you the link to join the Zoom meeting.

If you have previously participated in a Zoom meeting then you should have the app already downloaded on your computer or phone. If not, you will need to download the app. I suggest you do that at least 30 minutes before a meeting to allow time. You can use any device that has a camera and microphone - smartphone or laptop or iPad or desktop. You will need a Zoom app. Then when it's time for the meeting, just click the link in the email I sent you where it says Join Zoom Meeting. Once you have downloaded the app, meetings from then on will be easy to click and join. You can go to zoom.us and find all sorts of helpful info. Here is another tutorial video to watch that I found helpful - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9isp3qPeQOE&t=400s>

MESSAGE FROM ROBIN+

This week I read an article from a congregational consulting site that speaks great, if challenging, truth to us as a church. We are in a liminal season as a result of the chaos unleashed by COVID-19, stuck between an ending and a new beginning. The pathway forward is not knowable. The way we “did church” even two months ago is done. We have literally been thrown out of our buildings by a pandemic. We might reassure ourselves by pretending this disruption is temporary saying, “We will resume all normal activity soon.” This reassurance is not helpful or truthful.

No one knows what normal will look like after we live through this pandemic. As I shopped for groceries today with my mask making it hard to take a deep breath, I thought about how things used to be when we could shop without masks, greeting friends and even blocking the aisles in conversation, to the annoyance of other shoppers. Then I wondered if we will ever be able to shop without masks or find the elusive toilet paper and disinfectant spray. Likely, we will resume many familiar things, but congregational life will not be the same.

We are disoriented and confused. We stay in our pajamas too long and are exhausted after a day of doing nothing. We are baking and eating and drinking to console ourselves. The loss and grief are real, and there will be great value in taking the time to name our emotions and work through them toward healing.

And what about the church? What we do next will determine the future of the church, a future that was already in question before the virus hit. But now we have this liminal, in between time to discover the next, new normal for our congregation. Though it can be unsettling, liminal time (that threshold between what was and what will be) can be a blessing if we will enter it. There are five specific things we can focus on in this holy gift of space and time that will help us begin to move forward. This week and for the next four weeks to come I will share with you these areas of focus.

Strange as it may seem, the first thing for us to do is to surrender. Who likes to surrender? Doesn't that mean to give up or to quit? Who wants to be called a quitter? But there is a more positive and fruitful definition of surrender. To surrender is to yield. We accept this moment as “just the place we need to be” to learn what is most important now. I do not believe that God sent a pandemic to make us surrender, but I do believe that God is here with us in this mess and will bring us into new life if we are attentive and responsive. To surrender does not mean giving up or giving in. It does not mean we languish or grow lazy—quite the opposite. It means we lean into the disorientation and trust the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This next season we are already entering is going to require adaptive learning—for me, for our parish leaders and indeed for each of us. Adaptive learning is as much about naming what won't change, as it is about naming what must change. It requires knowing what is central to our mission, and what is not. It requires surfacing and dealing with tensions in competing core values. It is not about throwing out everything and starting from scratch. It is not about unfocused and random experimentation or returning to things we used to do. Adaptive learning begins with surrender. We acknowledge that we don't have all or even any of the answers. We yield our spirit to God's leading and we attend to all that arises in response to our surrender.

Next week we will explore the next area of focus which is innovation. But for now, think about all the things we have had to rethink due to the pandemic, both personally and at church. What have we had to surrender? What might we need to surrender as we move forward? Have we taken the time to name what we have surrendered and to grieve the loss? How comfortable are we at yielding our spirit to God's leading? As you think of these things, notice what bubbles up in your heart. Jesus waits to be invited into our conversation. Easter is the perfect season to invite Jesus to cross that threshold into our hearts. Alleluia! Robin+

I am indebted to an article “Finding Our New Normal” by Susan Beaumont, April 20, 2020 from The Congregational Consulting Group.

LECTIONARY TEXT LINK: https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster3_RCL.html

**A SERMON FOR THE 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 26, 2020
WE HAD HOPED**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.
Luke 24:13-35

One of the gifts for me in this time of isolation has been time for walks. Most days I walk two or three miles. It gives me some focused time of prayer, reflection, and observation. Another gift in this walking on a regular basis is that I have become less concerned with fitting the walk into a busy schedule and plowing through it. Instead, I am able to notice things along the way, I am being more attentive to details, seeing things that were always in plain sight but that I had missed in my hurry or my preoccupation with my long list of scheduled activities.

I imagine that is what those two disciples were doing as they walked along the road to Emmaus. They suddenly had time on their hands, their schedule had disappeared now that Jesus had been crucified. They recounted the events of the past week and talked about all that had happened. In their loss and grief they could only focus on what was not to be. We had hoped.

This is what we do after a tragic event, we keep telling the story of how it happened as we walk away from the event. It's difficult to walk away, to leave the hospital, to leave the scene of death, to leave the cemetery, to leave the argument of a dead relationship, to leave the addiction, or to leave behind ways of doing things that no longer work. For us in this pandemic it has been hard to let go of so many things, both good and not so good, and perhaps most of all, our assumptions. Just like those disciples we had hoped.

We had hoped that after a few weeks of waiting out the virus our lives would return to normal. We had hoped we would be back in church for Easter. We had hoped we would not lose our job, lose our investments, lose our social events. We had hoped to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and weddings. We had hoped for our vacation plans. We may fear that this virus has put an end to our hopes.

Maybe you are not literally walking, but we have all had more time to be reflective. What stories are you sharing with those who are with you; what are you recalling with family and friends over the phone; what are you thinking to yourself about what is most important in your life?

Life is a journey; a pattern of mourning and rejoicing. Life happens along the twists and turns of the road and we make sense of it through our relationships and in our conversations. As people of faith we make sense of life with our worship, our liturgy, our life in community. We believe that Christ is with us always, part of our relationships and conversations even when we do not at first recognize him. Or perhaps, we practice a bit of denial that Jesus is with us, because to admit it would mean we would need to change, we would need to live our life differently.

This pandemic has forced us to live our lives differently, hasn't it? Our habits and preferences have been turned upside down. We are relearning that second grade social studies lesson about the difference between wants and needs. In all of our conversations with each other and with ourselves in our time of reflection, what are we finding to be essential? What are we learning about ourselves? What are we discovering about our relationship with God and our connection to the Church as the Body of Christ?

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus is honest with the two travelers. I have to believe Jesus was gentle, but he spoke truth – they were being foolish and slow of heart to believe. Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted the things about himself in all the scriptures. I think it's important to notice that Jesus did not do this until after he listened to them, until after they had processed their feelings and collected their thoughts. And he did not force himself upon them but waited to be invited to stay with them. How gentle and wise Jesus is with us. How brave of those two disciples to invite Jesus to stay with them.

This story is almost always used to help us understand that Jesus is known to us in the breaking of the bread, but as I contemplate it this week, it's clear that Jesus is also known in the scripture and in our conversations about the scripture. In this time when we cannot meet together for worship and holy communion, scripture is a way in which we can see Jesus and know him to be present among us. I encourage you to read some scripture each day and take a few minutes to be still and notice where Jesus might be in your own life right now.

We had hoped for so many things that have been upended because of the pandemic. But perhaps Jesus is more profoundly present to us in ways we would never have noticed before. Eucharist is a sacrament where Jesus is present; present and transforming us into a new way of life. There are sacramental images of transformation happening all around us even in these strange times. What are you seeing, what are you noticing? Maybe it's the sky that is a deeper blue, families spending more time together outside, more kindness, respect and attentiveness shared in those times we must venture out for needed supplies. This week I read an article that the Himalayas are now visible from the plains of India and Pakistan for the first time in thirty years because air pollution is decreasing as a result of our staying at home. I believe Jesus is present in these things, just as he is present with those who are suffering, and with those whose work ensures our safety and common life.

The travelers on the road to Emmaus had given up hope and were choosing to return to their old way of life. We are in a time of great change; it's a liminal time when we will make a choice about how we will move forward. Will we invite Jesus and all the newness of life that he brings to cross the threshold into our lives? We can now see that some of the old ways of life are not sustainable. Inadequate healthcare and a living wage affect all of us eventually. A virus has no respect for race or class. Another old way of life that will change is how we are the Church. Doing things in the same way we've always done them is not going to work anymore. For so many reasons, now is the time for us to invite Jesus into our conversations on this unknown road into the future.

Jesus is not always the most comfortable of guests to invite into our lives, but he is patient. Jesus didn't reveal himself to Cleopas and his companion right away. He joined them in their journey and was present with them as they honestly shared their loss and grief. Lament takes time. And sometimes lament is the journey that leads us to the awareness that we not only need new life but that it is possible.

In our collect for today we pray that the eyes of our faith will be opened, that we may behold God in all his redeeming work. God is very present, especially in our deepest need, and the risen Christ waits to be invited to stay with us. Amen.