

At home worship for April 26, 2020, Arusha Community Church

The Third Sunday of Easter

Welcome: On this third Sunday of the Easter season, the Lord joins us on our journey. Even though we may not recognize him at first, Jesus walks with us. He hears our fears and sorrows. He listens to our hopes. He offers us the truth of his word. And he opens our eyes to see how he is true to his promises.

This time of at-home worship offers you an opportunity to step into the Gospel story. Hear Jesus' invitation to walk together for a while and listen for how he responds to what is burning in your heart. During this worship service, you might actually choose to get up and take a walk (if your circumstances allow) to pray about the Gospel lesson. If you cannot walk, have a journal beside you to write what you would say to Jesus.

Opening prayer: using parts of the Psalm for the day, Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

I love the LORD, because he hears me;
he listens to my prayers.

² He listens to me
every time I call to him.

³ The danger of death was all around me;
the horrors of the grave closed in on me;
I was filled with fear and anxiety.

⁴ Then I called to the LORD,
"I beg you, LORD, save me!"

¹² What can I offer the LORD
for all his goodness to me?

¹³ I will bring a wine offering to the LORD,
to thank him for saving me.

¹⁴ In the assembly of all his people
I will give him what I have promised.

¹⁵ How painful it is to the LORD
when one of his people dies!

¹⁶ I am your servant, LORD;
I serve you just as my mother did.
You have saved me from death.

¹⁷ I will give you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and offer my prayer to you.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ In the assembly of all your people,
in the sanctuary of your Temple in
Jerusalem,
I will give you what I have promised.
Praise the LORD!

Song of Thanksgiving: Christ is alive, let Christians sing! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlZ0G0WvD8g>

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.

The cross stands empty to the sky.

Let streets and homes with praises ring.

Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
But saving, healing, here and now,
And touching ev'ry place and time.

Christ is alive, and comes to bring
Good news to this and ev'ry age,
Till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Prayer of Confession: Recognizing Jesus

One: Risen Lord Jesus, what is it that keeps us from recognizing you?

Two: When we are so full of ourselves, it is all too easy to block you right out of our lives.

One: Maybe it's the way we interpret Scripture that obscures the signs pointing to you.

Two: Perhaps we are guilty of being slow of heart when we don't recognize you in our neighbour, or in the guise of the poor or the dispossessed.

One: Our eyes and ears have become so crammed with the sights and sounds of living that we simply fail to see you or to recognize your voice.

All: Risen Lord Jesus, help us to empty ourselves of all that hinders our awareness of your presence with us. Fill us with the joy of knowing your continuing presence, so that, like those travelers on the road to Emmaus, we too, hasten to share this great good news with others.

Amen.

~ written by Moira Laidlaw, at the **Liturgies Online** website. <http://www.liturgiesonline.com.au/>

Song of Preparation: Abide with me (MP4) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3_2Q

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grown dim, its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,
shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
heaven's morning breaks,
and earth's vain shadows flee:
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

Gospel lesson: Luke 24:13-35

Today, we will practice stepping into the Bible. We will ask the Holy Spirit to help this story come alive. We will pray that our Creator God, who created us with an imagination, would help us to imagine what happened on that Sunday of the resurrection, as two men walked together the 11 km from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and met Jesus on the way.

Read through the Gospel text once to familiarize yourself with the story. Use your own Bible or this link: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+24%3A13-35&version=NIV>

After reading a traditional text once, read the scripture passage again slowly, using the dramatized version (the VOICE translation) on the next page. See if you can picture the scene in your mind.

- What do you notice in the scene: The landscape, the weather, details of the two disciples
- How do you think the disciples feel as they are walking and talking and then as they are joined by Jesus?
- How do you picture Jesus? Think about the expressions on his face, his tone of voice...
- Think about how the feelings of the disciples shift as they share what is in their hearts and hear Jesus' response and teaching.

Luke 24:13-35 The Voice (VOICE)

¹³ *Picture this:*

That same day, two other disciples (*not of the eleven*) are traveling the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. ¹⁴ As they walk along, they talk back and forth about all that has transpired during recent days. ¹⁵ While they're talking, discussing, and conversing, Jesus catches up to them and begins walking with them, ¹⁶ but for some reason they don't recognize Him.

Jesus: ¹⁷ *You two seem deeply engrossed in conversation.* What are you talking about as you walk along this road?

They stop walking and just stand there, looking sad. ¹⁸ One of them—Cleopas is his name—speaks up.

Cleopas: You must be the only visitor in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about what's been going on over the last few days.

Jesus: ¹⁹ What are you talking about?

Two Disciples: It's all about the man named Jesus of Nazareth. He was a mighty prophet who did amazing miracles and preached powerful messages in the sight of God and everyone around. ²⁰ Our chief priests and authorities handed Him over to be executed—crucified, in fact.

²¹ We had been hoping that He was the One—you know, the One who would liberate all Israel *and bring God's promises*. Anyway, on top of all this, just this morning—the third day after the execution—²² some women in our group really shocked us. They went to the tomb early this morning, ²³ but they didn't see His body anywhere. Then they came back and told us they did see something—a vision of heavenly messengers—and these messengers said that Jesus was alive. ²⁴ Some people in our group went to the tomb to check it out, and just as the women had said, it was empty. But they didn't see Jesus.

Jesus: ²⁵ Come on, men! Why are you being so foolish? Why are your hearts so sluggish when it comes to believing what the prophets have been saying all along? ²⁶ Didn't it have to be this way? Didn't the Anointed One have to experience these sufferings in order to come into His glory?

²⁷ Then He begins with Moses and continues, prophet by prophet, explaining the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, showing how they were talking about the very things that had happened to Jesus.

²⁸ About this time, they are nearing their destination. Jesus keeps walking ahead as if He has no plans to stop there, ²⁹ but they convince Him to join them.

Two Disciples: Please, be our guest. It's getting late, and soon it will be too dark to walk.

So He accompanies them to their home. ³⁰ When they sit down at the table for dinner, He takes the bread in His hands, He gives thanks for it, and then He breaks it and hands it to them. ³¹ At that instant, *two things happen simultaneously:* their eyes are suddenly opened so they recognize Him, and He instantly vanishes—just disappears before their eyes.

Two Disciples (to each other): ³² *Amazing!* Weren't our hearts on fire within us while He was talking to us on the road? *Didn't you feel it all coming clear* as He explained the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures?

³³ So they get up immediately and rush back to Jerusalem—*all seven miles*—where they find the eleven gathered together—the eleven plus a number of others. ³⁴ *Before Cleopas and his companion can tell their story,* the others have their own story to tell.

Other Disciples: The Lord has risen indeed! It's true! He appeared to Simon!

³⁵ Then the two men report their own experience—their conversation along the road, their moment of realization and recognition as He broke the bread.

Reflection on today's scripture from Sacred Space: <https://www.sacredspace.ie/scripture/luke-24-13-35>

- I reflect on this episode and on the mood of the two disciples, and realise how often I am in the same situation. How often I feel deeply disappointed and disoriented by the events around me, how often I am angry and frustrated like these two. The Resurrection seems something vague, that does not really fill me with hope. Yet I too feel this deep yearning to meet Jesus, whom I had hoped would be light of my life, giving it direction and meaning.
- I pray to recognise that Jesus is at my side, even when I am sure he is far away. I am not directly aware of his presence, because he is walking at my own pace, patiently waiting for me to open my heart to his words and to the words of the Bible. I pray to be given to feel my heart burning at his presence.
- Can I sense the nearness of the Lord? He is near me in his word, in his personal presence in the Eucharist, and in my own conscience.

Gospel Response

We cannot be together in church to hear a sermon on this passage. But maybe this is an opportunity to have a Sunday conversation with Jesus. If you are physically able to take a walk, get up and walk for a half hour. If you cannot walk outside, you might choose to think about inviting Jesus to sit with you and talk. Either way, share with Jesus what is on your heart.

... your fears and worries, for yourself, your family, your community

...your disappointments, and even where you might be angry with God or confused by God's action (or inaction)

...your hopes for who Jesus is and what that means

If you have written down these fears and hopes, take time and listen to Jesus.

What does Jesus say in answer to each one of the cares that that you have listed?

At the end of this time of contemplation, thank Jesus for whatever he has shared with you.

Hymn of Affirmation: Because he lives (MP52)

1 God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal, and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon,
an empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives.

*Because He lives I can face tomorrow;
because He lives all fear is gone;
because I know He holds the future,
and life is worth the living just because He lives.*

2 How sweet to hold a new-born baby,
and feel the pride and joy he gives;
but greater still the calm assurance,
this child can face uncertain days because He lives.
Because He lives . . .

3 And then one day I'll cross the river;
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
and then as death gives way to victory,
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives.
Because He lives . . .

Prayers of the Beloved Community

(at the end of each phrase, pause to allow the Spirit to bring to mind specific individuals).

Loving God, Your desire is for our wholeness and wellbeing.

We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.

We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.

We ache for ourselves and our neighbors, standing before an uncertain future.

We pray: may love, not fear, go viral.

Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.

Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

Protect and provide for those who cannot stay at home but must go out to work in order to eat.

Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,

You, the God who does not abandon.

Offertory: If you wish to give your offerings to ACC, you can use ACC **MPESA** number +255 755 992 394 in the name of Nasieku Mollel (ACC Administrator's last name).

Offertory hymn: *Give thanks with a grateful heart (MP 170)*

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because He's given
Jesus Christ, His Son.
Give thanks . . .

And now let the weak say, 'I am strong',
let the poor say, 'I am rich',
because of what the Lord has done for us;
and now let the weak say, 'I am strong',
let the poor say, 'I am rich',
because of what the Lord has done for us.

Prayer for Offering

Though alone, separated from others, we can still we offer our gifts on this Sabbath morning. We pray that the act of giving would shape our hearts and our lives so that we more greatly resemble you, generous God. We pray that whatever we give would be of service in your kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing hymn as benediction: **We Shall Overcome**

Although this African-American hymn has often been sung as a protest song, it can also be sung as a hymn of assurance and affirmation. Jesus' resurrection changes everything. Our fears and worries are transformed in the presence of Jesus. You may sing this hymn on your own. Or listen and follow along with this recent recording, made just before Easter, by the Aeolians, a choir from Oakwood University. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBtmPiCgTol>

We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome some day, some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day

We'll walk hand in hand...

We shall live in peace...

We are not afraid...today