



Church of the Isles & Chapel on the Hill

United Churches of Christ

"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

Third Sunday of Easter  9:00 AM, April 18, 2021

GATHERING MUSIC

Lana Cartner

PRELUDE/CHIMING THE HOUR

Phil Pratt

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Shelly Wilson

CALL TO WORSHIP *(responsively)*

Linda Smith

One: All of life is call and response. God calls us into creation. God calls us into life.

ALL: How we live is our response to God. As we share in this call to awareness, let our response be: "God calls us to this day! God calls us to move gently and graciously among the creations of this world."

One: God calls us to Love, to plunge ourselves into the hurts and the horrors, and into the opportunities for celebration--to give ourselves to the embodiment of God in the world, present to those who are without love!

ALL: God calls us to be the body of Christ! May we respond with joy!

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Eternal and Beloved, be with us this day as we seek to open ourselves to your love and your wholeness in the world. Fill us with your compassionate spirit, so that body and



soul, we can serve the world with love and with justice, as ambassadors of your grace. Amen.

OPENING MUSIC

Curtis Watson

CHILDREN'S STORY

Mindy Picardo

SPECIAL MUSIC

Curtis Watson

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Shelly Wilson

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Curtis Watson

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 24:36b-48

Judy Pratt

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were fearful and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.



SERMON “God Embodied”

Shelly Wilson <https://youtu.be/ruHghE6SOIU>

It’s funny to me that in this story the followers of Jesus are so startled every time they encounter the Christ-spirit enfleshed within the post-resurrection community. It is sensible that the Spirit would be there in a significant bodily way. How else would God show up, but in the material? The earliest stories of Jesus are all about physical presence. Some of the earliest followers encounter God in the sharing of food and in helping the poor. Some of them, as in the story from last week, explore how God is to be found in the examination of community trauma and the wounds and the scars they leave.

This week the community learns again about a God incarnated. *Fleshy* is what God is in these stories, the Christ-spirit has flesh and bones on. The Christ is graphic and certain: I’m not a ghost. It’s not about ghosts, Holy or otherwise. It is about spirit AND flesh, it is about **belief**—what you give your heart to, and about questioning the merit and resiliency and the content of what you believe, and of what you give your hands and feet and best efforts and money and time to. It is about community and the parts of community that we do together, bodily, that help us create the realm of God on Earth, in us. And now, it seems because of the separations of the past year, more than ever, we know in our own flesh the presence of Spirit when we are together. We know viscerally how important it is, this simple story, this testimony of how significant it is to eat together, as they do in this story, when you thought you’d never appreciated the privilege of what it means to eat together--not fancy food, just simple fish and bread like in this story, or pizza or rice or tacos, recognizing how God is always present when there are those we love near and when everyone has enough to eat. It is a call to the journey, to grab hold of peace and to go with it, to let go of the fear, to become embodied spirit ourselves.

Luke has his community members gathered together, and as in the story from last week, they are afraid, and not sure what to do with the new realities—so like us in our time and circumstances. I am captivated by the words the Gospel writer Luke uses, for here he describes their condition of being afraid, translated as “terrified” and “fearful” “Terrified” in this context is the same word used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the terror caused by war—how the people in the land felt when Joshua fought the battle of Jericho—how they felt when he invaded their homes and killed everyone. The other word, translated “fearful” is the word used to describe how the first disciples felt when they encountered the empty tomb of Jesus. What it makes me think of, this phrase “terrified and fearful” is the unfortunate and haughty words used by some US officials in 2003 to describe our invasion of Iraq and the response of the people there: shock and awe.

In this Scripture, what I hear Jesus saying is, “What I bring to you now is the antithesis to “shock and awe,” to “terrifying and fearful,” to the racial terror, the violence of the dominant culture and its enforcers, the antithesis to the dis-ease and the awfulness



caused by horrific hate, injustice, war, pandemic and death—and that contrast is “peace, peace to you...” not a theoretical, ghostly kind of peace, but peace in the flesh. Flesh and bones kind of peace that requires a relentless press toward justice and a struggle to be in right relationship that pushes through the locked down places of our hatred and fear and separation.

It is such a peace that the stories of the living and enfleshed Christ-spirit are meant to engender within the growing community of faith, our forbears. A peace of the heart and of the body. Luke, as the closest thing to a poet we have among the Gospel writers, places in the mouth of Jesus this sentence, “a spirit doesn’t have flesh and bones the way you see I have them!” The phrase, “flesh and bones” is an ancient idiom that means not only a physical reality, but a common humanity, a relationship of family, as in, “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” In this story, Christ asserts, I am with you, part of you. The God who is spirit is also body, flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone, and as such, you are family one to the other, God sharing in your human experience, and binding you together. God enfleshed in the Earth in all the ways, expansive and beyond the limitations.

This teaching is not about a God who shows up in theory and faith but in the bark and leaves and flesh and fin and fir, and in every manifestation and all encounters, God. A God who enables us to see one another and our circumstances and our interactions and our realities with new eyes--as if God and we are friends, and we are, for fun, wearing each other’s clothes. What if God puts on our clothes, puts on our flesh, becoming bone of our own. Living our experience. What if God IS our experience and IS the experience of everyone else around us, too? What if that is the truth of this story...deceptively simple, deeply spiritual, deeply fleshy, a mystery?

Theologian Nancy Eiesland wrote this story about her experience with this truth. She says, “Much of my life I waited for a mighty revelation of God. I did experience it, but it bore little resemblance to the God I was expecting or the God of my dreams. I was asked to lead a Bible study with several residents of a rehabilitation hospital for persons with spinal cord injuries. One afternoon after a long and frustrating day, I shared with the group my own doubts about God’s care for me as a person living with disabilities and chronic pain. I asked them how they would know if God was actually in their midst and understood their experience. After a long silence, a young man answered, “if God was in a sip-puff, maybe I would know God understands.” I was overwhelmed by this image: God in a sip-puff wheelchair, the kind used by many quadriplegics that enables them to maneuver the chair by blowing and sucking on a straw-like device. Not an omnipotent, self-sufficient God, but neither a pitiable, suffering servant in need of healing. This was an image of God as a survivor, as one of those whom society would label “not feasible,” “unemployable,” with a “questionable quality of life.” Later, I was reading Luke’s story where Jesus says, “Why are you terrified and fearful? Touch and see—I am flesh and bones.” This isn’t exactly God in a sip-puff, but here is God embodied, as we are—disabled and divine.”



Within us and between us, God who binds us together as we experience vulnerability, flaws, every limitation, disfigurement, disillusionment. A God who looks like we do and looks like another one does, and not like we do, a God who invites us to peace with ourselves in our circumstances....to let go of the need to control and to win and to let go of the fear--and the war it causes, to embrace our humanity and our unity with others because of it. There is so much more to bring us *to* community than to keep us apart. A God who is within us and through us and part of us—all of us.

This, of course, is not a new concept to any of us, we've heard this before, but what became new for me, this year, was to think: so now, we have access to all the courage, the power, the vision, of all those who share their divinity from within their disability, because God is within and through us all—in the spirit and in the flesh. So, it becomes, not what **would** Jesus do? But rather, it is, what **does** Jesus do? What do we do as the community, the collective consciousness of justice, of real-life experience of disability and divinity—the in-carnation--when we choose to let go of hatred and terror, shock and awe and instead, choose peace? As we seek for God in theory, what if we seek for God in reality? What if God were one of us? Amen.

POSTLUDE

Phil Pratt

BENEDICTION

Shelly Wilson

TRAVELING MUSIC

Lana Cartner

Prayer concerns

- Jan Kreuger, medical tests
- Sympathy to the family and friends of Hanna Strong who died on Wednesday, April 7.
- Marty Synnott, in the death of her sister, Debbie, on Tuesday, April 6.
- Dana, Larry, Lindsey, & Kurt—family members of Shirley & Don Finkenstadt
- Agnes, family member of Alicia Isaac
- Larry Gerwig
- Nancy Ertz
- Shirley Hand, ongoing health concerns
- Guy Hawkins, ongoing health concerns
- Charlotte Hanna, ongoing health concerns
- All those grieving losses caused by gun violence
- Grieving loss of loved ones from COVID, other illnesses, accidents, and racial hatred



- Healthcare and other essential workers
- Those living with mental illness, domestic violence, and addiction challenges
- Those who have lost loved ones, possessions, homes, and hope
- Those exhausted and endangered by systemic violence and racism
- The nations of the world affected by food insecurity, war, and oppression
- Spill of toxins into Tampa Bay, environmental impacts
- The Earth, effects of global climate change.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

COFFEE TIME AFTER CHURCH! After the service you are all invited to Coffee Time outside the double doors! Join us for coffee and conversation! Thanks to the Deacons for providing the coffee and treats!

Thursday, April 23 – COTI BOOK CLUB! Everyone is welcome! Join us at 4:00 PM for a study of *The Rope* by Alex Tresniowsky

“...a page-turning, remarkable true-crime thriller recounting the 1910 murder of ten-year-old Marie Smith, the dawn of modern criminal detection and the launch of the NAACP.”

For more information: call martysynnott@yahoo.com; 727-249-3011

Elizabeth and Rod Snedeker, beloved members of Church of the Isles for more than 27 years, are moving to Ft. Myers on April 21. We are collecting cards and letters from their friends here to place in a going-away basket of goodies to wish them well in their new home. If you would like to write a card to them, please drop the card by the church office by **April 20** or mail it to the office at 200 24th Ave., Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785 and note that it is for the Snedekers and we will be sure they receive all correspondence. Thanks for sharing your love in this way!

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT JOINING THE CHURCH? Here’s some quick info:

- You can join by baptism, transfer of membership from another church, or because you want to be part of a community of folks engaged in worship and service to the world, even if you have never been part of a church before!
- You can join as a full member or as an associate member. Associate members also hold their membership in another church (up north, for example)
- Church members don’t attend every Sunday, necessarily, but their spirits are committed to the ministry and mission of the church and support its work by their



prayers, and if they are able, with offerings. But no guilt or coercion. We don't do that.

- **NEW MEMBER SUNDAY will be next Sunday, April 25 at the 9:00 AM Service!**

- Want to know more or want to join up?

Email or call Pastor Shelly: wilsonshellya@yahoo.com

352-359-1869