



Order of Worship 4/26/20 Online worship for Church of the Isles/Trinity UCC

To view the service online, go to:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLr2IwlWThmmSo_iaKhhTZceTX2pRgm-3

WELCOME TO ALL & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Shelly Wilson

<https://youtu.be/Bku7-MqBd28>

Welcome to this online worship experience from Trinity and Church of the Isles United Churches of Christ, St. Petersburg and Indian Rocks Beach, FL. I'm Shelly Wilson, and it is my joy to welcome you here. As we continue to responsibly stay safe and at home during this time, we want you to know that our welcome as families of faith extends as warmly as when we are together, and we hope you will visit us in person when the time for that has returned. Both of our churches believe that God welcomes and celebrates us all, regardless of our race, economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity, so no matter who you are or where you are on your life's journey, welcome.

If you need anything that our churches can offer, we are glad to help and to walk together with you. Our church office phone numbers, email addresses, and other information can be found on our websites and we hope you will be in touch. We thank you for the support of our ministries through offerings and donations and ask you to remember in prayers and love all who suffer and all who serve.

On this day, I invite you to settle in a comfortable and beautiful place in your home or outside in the fresh air and to take a deep breath, and envision the healing presence of Spirit shining in the light within your heart space and all around you now. Spirit of Love and Healing, with hearts of gratitude we greet this day, a gift for us to utilize for good, for beauty, and for peace. Welcome to Worship!

Please remember in prayers: Mindy's daughter, whose father-in-law is ill with the virus; Charlotte who has been hospitalized; Eleanor who grieves; all who are ill, all essential workers; Earth and all creatures.

PRELUDE "Jesus Calls Us; O'er the Tumult" (Alexander/Jude)

Don Hand

<https://youtu.be/WH2uXa9keCg>

CALL TO WORSHIP "The Miracle of Morning" by Amanda Gorman, (Youth Poet Laureate of the USA)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuA0mF27raI&list=PLr2IwlWThmmSo_iaKhhTZceTX2pRgm-3&index=3&t=0s

I thought I'd awaken to a world in mourning
heavy clouds crowding a society storming
but there's something different on this golden morning
something magical in the sunlight wide and warming...

We'll observe how the burdens braved by human kind
are also the moments that make us humans kind.
Let every dawn find us courageous but closer
heeding the light before the fight is over.

When this ends we'll smile sweetly
finally seeing in testing times we became the best of beings.

OPENING SONG **"O Spirit, Let Us Walk with Thee" (Gladden/Smith)**

<https://youtu.be/4i6eMCO6SGY>

1. O Spirit, let us walk with Thee, In lowly paths of service free;
Tell us Thy secret; help us bear The strain of toil, the fret of care.
2. Teach us Thy patience; still with Thee In closer, dearer, company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong, In trust that triumphs over wrong.

OUR BELOVED CHURCH **"We are all One"** (special thanks to Marty Synott & Nancy Ertz for the photos and to Susan Gilbert for creating the photo collage of Church of the Isles members.)

<https://youtu.be/OgClvrZcERw>

CHILDREN'S STORY <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBVSN4s1IIk&feature=youtu.be> **Mindy Picardo**

READING

Rebecca Bacon

When she was asked, "What is for you an image, moment or instance of resurrection that has occurred?" Catherine Browning wrote these words: "When the tide rolls out and the full wetness of marine baptism suddenly withdraws, unsightly mudflats are exposed near the place where I live. Blatant barrenness squelches romantic notions held at sunset. Slimy gook repulses joy for living. Stench forces you to think of fleeing from these lands. But just as you are ready to walk away, just as you are ready to call it quits, the universe surprises you with a blessing. Suddenly, out of nowhere, hundreds of pink flamingos arrive on the scene. Sinking their delicate selves into brown gook, these otherworldly beings transmute ugliness into beauty. Perched upon single limbs, they balance gracefully like ballerinas atop dirty junk piles. Leaning strangely toward the thick darkness, flamingos feast on ambrosial treats, trusting the treasures contained within sludge. Flamboyant wings reach high into the air revealing spectacular orange, pink and black undersides. Wow! Only the universe could fashion a phenomenal moment such as this. Only the universe could turn a muddy day into an unexpected colorful ballet. Flamingos in the mudflats, they are a powerful metaphor for life: Be patient. Don't judge too harshly for things are not always as they seem. Stay with the resistance. Trust that a new form will emerge from the debris. Remember, the Creator creates best out of what seems like nothing."

OFFERING/SPECIAL MUSIC

"Because He Lives" (Gaither)

Shirley Hand

https://youtu.be/UQCjPOP5_Rs

Financial support for our churches is essential, now more than ever. Please mail in your offerings to your church:

Church of the Isles

Att. Barb Templin

200 24th Ave.

Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785

(or give online via Pay Pal—on

Church of the Isles website)

Trinity UCC

Att. Marty Seyler

3155 Featherwood Court

Clearwater, FL 33759

SCRIPTURE READING**Luke 24:13-35 The Message (MSG)****Alex Fuller**

¹³⁻¹⁶ That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem.

They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

¹⁹⁻²⁴ He said, "What has happened?"

They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus."

²⁵⁻²⁷ Then he said to them, "Oh, are you still so slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

²⁸⁻³¹ They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

SERMON**"On Making the Road"****Shelly Wilson**

<https://youtu.be/3wlp1pfBJzM>

I really love this story of the walk to Emmaus. Like all Scripture these days, this one has new nuances for me—for you, too, I suspect. Usually we just read the first lines like, that same day, that is Easter Day, two people were walking to a village a few miles away...and then you get to the important part of the story. Now, I notice that detail--These people were going someplace, a village, leaving the house... and they meet up with a stranger and start walking together—having a conversations with somebody up close and personal, on the road... we used to do that easily, maybe, and now, we shout good-natured greetings even to our neighbors from a safe distance, perhaps an awareness of danger underneath the pleasantries. But ironically, there was not necessarily ease of greeting then either, for the two are in a fog of fear after their friend Jesus is murdered, and when the stranger kindly asks what occupies them so heavily as they walk, the explanation of all that has happened to them, comes pouring out in a torrent of grief, as they rehearse in the growing dusk all the details of the crucifixion and the empty tomb. As we do when there is grief and pain. To connect, we say it or want to say it, so we are not alone with it. And the narrative goes on--they walk together with the Beloved, "but their eyes are kept from recognizing him." I imagine it was a foggy day, mist swirling, the future unclear. They really could not see anything clearly. Like now. The other night I lay outside in my backyard hoping to see the Lyrid meteor shower, but a thunderstorm was coming that would hit us by morning. I did not know that then, just that there was mist rising on the water, clouds swirling in front of the guiding morning star. Such is this life.

That's how I imagine this passage this year--the walk to Emmaus enshrouded and wet and stormy. I imagine the friends pushing through a thick fog, not able to see what is around or ahead of them. Emmaus, scholars believe, was not a physical place...its name means "warm springs." So imagine it as a Florida swamp... shrouded in fog, this symbolic journey, a spiritual pilgrimage. Maybe

they were still locked inside that upper room, in a quarantine of fear, not yet able to be out on the road at all.

I come from the Blue Ridge Mountains where it is easy to run off the roads or get lost in the fog late at night. The mist descends, rolls between the hills, and into the roads cut out of the cliffs, disorienting, and erasing the lines that separate the lanes from the rocks below. It settles over the trees in sheets, freezing and breaking off the branches in winter, where they fall and lie on the ground, framed in gnarly ashen displays, looking for all the world like ghastly fingers. Mountain fog can be very beautiful in summer or in autumn with emerald and gold peaks jutting out of swirling, puffy clouds just so at the edges of the sky, but when that mist descends like trouble into your own backyard, it can penetrate your shirt and your soul, and make you shiver.

Here in Florida, though, the fog is different. Here, it carries its heat and is sticky-green, almost alive as it swirls over the swamps and the springs and the intercoastal mudflats, screening the gators and gulls. If you have gone with me in your mind into the Emmaus journey fog that is our reality this year, what does it look like, feel like, smell and sound like, for you, this journey we are taking that is keeping us safe at home?

Most of us, truth be told, prefer the bright sunlight of certainty, and do not care for the mystery and the muck, but the great philosopher, Henry David Thoreau loved the wetlands of Massachusetts like it was his job. He's sometimes called the Patron Saint of Swamps and wrote about them prolifically, seeking to counter the anti-swamp sentiment of his day.

Because here is an interesting factoid for your consideration. Before germ theory was proposed or proven, swamps also were believed to be a source of human epidemics. The miasma theory of disease posited that, among others--cholera, typhoid, malaria, and Black Death, were all transmitted via a poisonous vapor--the miasma--swamp fog--in which, it was believed, were suspended floating, decaying bits of plant matter, characterized by a foul odor. It was an old, well-accepted theory, dating back to the first century.

Thoreau, of course, would have none of that, and in fact, believed and wrote that not only were swamps NOT a place full of evil fogs, but that their misty and muddy foundations, were the fertile, teeming source of a soul cure for the ennui and exhaustion so characteristic of human city life. He believed that the shallow soft of swamp was the first birthplace of nature, rather like a very smushy garden of Eden. Like the writing by Catherine Browning, a place of flamingo flocking.

Okay, well, what does all this have to do with the Emmaus story and Covid 19 and us, in our struggles. Well, consider this... it seems to be part of our spiritual journey, both when we can go out and when we have to stay inside, to navigate them--the swampy parts and spiritual-y parts. Our human life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. My experience of this time we are enduring is to underscore the reality that the only predictability in this life is the curl of some new wrinkle appearing in the dark. Joyful things, surprises, Christ appearing on the road as we walk or in the breaking of the bread around our own table as we stay home, may come. And, as well, the painful things that we did not see coming at us through the fog like headlights on a narrow mountain road have presented themselves--taking us away from where we have been and hurling us toward where we are going. And the questions are for us, as they were for the disciples on the road, what have we learned and how will we respond?

I have learned that much of what preoccupied my consciousness before is no longer on the forefront. I have learned that in any given day, my greatest insight or instruction may come from the most unlikely sources. I have learned that grace really does show up in spades, more than you or I could ask for, or expect. That's why it is called grace. I believe there are fog revelations that will come to us, to be comprehended as such only AFTER the fog has lifted, epiphanies rising out of the mud of anxiety. Jesus talked to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and even ate with them, and he was also gone just as they had a flash of insight. Seems like just when we learn a spiritual truth, it slips into the fog and another mystery emerges.

Looking back on history, we know it now, the miasma theory people of Thoreau's day were wrong--we know now that viruses are droplet borne *and* contact borne, and not caused by an evil fog, but by unseen microbes. We know that Thoreau himself was right **and** wrong--that the swampy land shrouded in fog is not evil, but it is also not Eden. It is Earth, we're Earth, and as that, tangible, and holy, holy, holy. Staying safe at home or on the road to Emmaus, how are we finding our way through the clouds of unknowing that accompany us along the way? Where are you, where am I dwelling in this life's teeming, fertile, beautiful, fearful, mysterious swamp these days? Are we peaceful, busy, resting in the verdant growing parts? Or, do we find ourselves struggling mightily, sinking some days in the soft and silent, the squishy? Are you slowly emerging from the fog, believing there must be some sunshine ahead? Or, in some great in-between, slogging or striding through some mix of it all? And it is true that like the borders of actual wetlands, the landscapes and waterscapes of our lives are constantly in flux, with fuzzy, changeable edges, and the wisdom and advisability of our decisions to move forward are often shrouded in darkness.

The great Irish poet Seamus Heaney describes the road to Emmaus we are on these days as "melting and opening underfoot, " Swamp life is unstable by nature--in Ireland, the bogs nothing more than ancient layer upon layers of turf floating over water underneath. A really serious one is called a quaking bog or a quagmire. You may have found yourself in that swamp during these days, a quagmire, feeling like the Emmaus disciples, a bit bewildered in a cloud of unknowing, feeling, well, bogged down. But do know, if that is the case, you are not alone.

There is a group of helpful resources called *The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbooks*. They are both practical and funny, based upon the truth that in the swamps of life, "you just never know." The authors researched important survival advice on a variety of topics, like how to retrieve an object dropped near an alligator, how to deal with an overflowing toilet, how to avoid going to the wrong college, and how to survive all the worst case scenarios of travel, parenting, golf, dating, middle school, work, and holidays. And quicksand. Stop struggling, say the authors. Carry a walking stick and if you step into quicksand, let the stick help you to float, one body part at a time. Be still and calm yourself, so that you can remember your resources for help. The very first step on the sometimes long way back to self and spirit and centeredness is to stop running in the fog and to stop fighting the mud.

The mud slows us down and the miasma clouds our vision some days, but in us and in the world, body and soul, is the potentiality. For me, that hope, that potentiality is God. God's light and life within us, within all creation invites us onward, and recreates us. The transformation is always happening, the potential is always there, even hidden in the fog. But sometimes it begins with sitting still, like a flamingo, at home in the mud, and waiting in the fog, and checking in with our own spirits and with the Spirit that enlivened Jesus and all the saints, praying to be refilled with the healing energies within and that are growing up out of the swamps of sorrow. Deep within this silent spring of humanity, the wetlands still grow, full of flowers and trees and butterflies. I can forget that when I get so busy fighting the quicksand.

No mud, no lotus, as the Buddhists say. No mud, no flamingos. In the mud of each day and in each relationship and responsibility and heartache and opportunity, together with the Spirit of all life, God in us, the hope of glory, we create and recreate, finding our way from death to life, anew. Once Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, "The rose that wilts after six days, will become part of the garbage. And after six months, the garbage will be transformed into a rose. "

It really is true that we make the road as we go or as we stay, in our case. May you find your road, misty and muddy. May we find our way together.

Will you pray with me:

(from the words of Zachiah Murray: *Mindfulness in the Garden: Zen Tools for Digging in the Dirt*) "With awareness and curiosity I grow from not knowing, and the lotus of true understanding blooms beautifully within me." Teach us, God. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

"Heavenly Sunlight" (Zelley/Cook)

Don & Shirley Hand

https://youtu.be/euJtYBjQp_s

1. Walking in sunlight all of my journey, Over the mountains, through the deep vale;
Jesus has said, I'll never forsake thee—Promise divine that never can fail.
 - *Refrain:*
Heavenly sunlight! Heavenly sunlight! Flooding my soul with glory divine;
Hallelujah! I am rejoicing, Singing His praises, Jesus is mine!
2. Shadows around me, shadows above me Never conceal my Savior and Guide;
He is the light, in Him is no darkness, Ever I'm walking close to His side.

POSTLUDE

"He Lives" (Ackley)

Don Hand

<https://youtu.be/jCw5nyVGdfQ>