

Sunday, April 26, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church

Greetings:

As we worship this week, we find ourselves in a difficult time in history as we live with the viral pandemic and the most horrific tragedy Canada has ever known. Like the Disciples on the road to Emmaus our hearts are saddened. May Christ's presence on our journey these days spark the hope that is within us and embolden us to live with trust and faith in Christ, who will lead us all from fear to hope and death to life, and show us how to care for the broken – hearted.

Our prayers today are offered for the families in Nova Scotia and we grieve with them...and also for the Kathen family as they grieve for Louie, whose graveside service was held this past week at Zion's cemetery.

Prayer:

Gracious God, you come to us when we are walking a path of despair and sadness and you speak words that bring faith and trust, opening our eyes to your gracious, healing presence. Bring peace to our hearts and lead us, for where you lead we shall go with confidence and hope for the future. **Amen.**

Readings:

Psalm 116

Luke 24: 13 – 35

Homily:

We do not know these two travelers on the road to Emmaus...we have not met them before in the Gospels. We have a name for one of them, Cleopas, but the other one remains unnamed. They were a part of the community of faithful people who had gathered around the Apostles, drawn to faith in Christ. Now, they are filled with doubt and sadness as they walk away from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. They are trying to leave it all behind them...the crucifixion and the rumours of a resurrection, leaving their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their destination was Emmaus which literally means “warm spring” – a Roman spa town. Only seven miles from Jerusalem, it was a world away from their worries.

We may not know these two travelers by name, but we know them by association. We have known and shared their weariness and sadness, their confusion and doubt. Being people of faith is not easy...and sometimes it is tempting to walk away from it all. Who has not had those Emmaus moments, when faith is hard to come by or despair seems to be the only road available.

It is so easy to become sad and weary Christians...there is so much in this life that can snuff out our faith and our hope. If we

were left to journey on our way alone, most of us would simply keep walking away.

The Good News is that we do not journey alone. The Risen One chooses to meet us on the way – to hear our anxious words and tales of lost hope. He even meets us on the paths that go away from him, so deep is his love for us.

Notice where the encounter with Jesus leads the two travelers in today's Gospel. Back to the community of the faithful; back to their brothers and sisters in Christ; back to the Church, where they share and celebrate and live together in faith.

Christianity has always been a religion that is lived in community. When we were baptized it was into the Body of Christ – the Church – into community in Christ. You cannot be a Christian and live in isolation from your brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no such thing as just me and Jesus. It is always Jesus with my brothers and sisters in Christ – a holy family in which I live and move and have my being.

We also need to remember that not everything in life is about ourselves. We belong to the Church just as much for others as for ourselves – to encourage and support our brothers and sisters in Christ.

People who say they do not need the Church because they have Jesus and their bible to read have chosen a very selfish

path. Beyond that, if they were actually reading the Bible, they would see that Christianity has always had the community in Christ, the Church, at its very heart. You cannot separate faith in Christ from life in the Church – the two go hand-in-hand.

So the two followers of Christ, their faith awakened, return to their brothers and sisters in the Church – and there they share their joy in the Risen Lord. Together they grow in faith and discover the courage the Holy Spirit gives us to do the work of Christ in our world, together. May it always be the same for us, as well. **Amen.**

Prayers of the Faithful:

Gracious and tender-hearted God, comfort all whose lives have been touched by violence and tragedy. Bring healing to the broken-hearted and sustain all who are overwhelmed by grief and sadness, especially the people of Nova Scotia. Help us care for them with ways and words that reflect your grace and compassion

Even when we walk away from you, Lord God, you meet us on the road and bring us home. Help us journey with each other with patient love, knowing that where you lead, we can confidently go together. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones who we cannot be with this Easter. We pray for all who are ill and in need of your healing touch. Hold them in your mercy, and surround them with your holy presence. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who mourn, especially the family of Louie Kathen. May our sharing in Christ's risen life bring them comfort as they say farewell to their dear ones who now dwell with Christ in our Heavenly Father's home. We shall see them again, and our hearts will be filled with joy. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who do work that endangers them as they provide for our basic needs. Watch over them, protect them, and bless their holy work. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We look forward to the future, for wherever you lead us we will go trusting in your grace and mercy and the compassion you have shown to us in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer you taught us. Our Father...

May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us always in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**