

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I include this page each week as an ‘instruction page’ for worship.

Attached is this weeks bulletin for your devotion and worship. It is consistent with the components of worship that John Calvin insisted must be present in Reformed worship.

It is my prayer, and the prayer of your session, that these worship and devotional aids will nourish you during this time that we cannot be together.

**You will find the five Components of Reformed Worship in bold:**

*\*Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

**1. The Invocation** (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

**2. The Word** (you will need to read the scripture cited on the top left of the first page)

*\*After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn (Hymn suggestions below)*

**3. The Confession** (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

**4. The Sermon**

The Affirmation of Faith (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

*\*Read a psalm aloud as your offering to God. (A suggestion is provided below.)*

**5. The Benediction**

All of these components are on the insert. If you read through each in the order above, you will have moved through the rhythm of a traditional Reformed worship service. You should feel free to intersperse songs of praise, Psalm readings and personal prayer. Suggested places to do this are indicated at the asterisk (\*) above.

Our prayer is that this will prove nourishing to your Spiritual health.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Alan

**For your convenience, songs are recommended below:**

*The Day of Resurrection!* — Hymn Number 298

*Open My Eyes That I May See* — Hymn Number 480

*The Easter Day with Joy was Bright* — Hymn Number 299

As a Psalm suggest, read the rest of Psalm 116. A portion of which was used as our Invocation.

P.S. Note that the Affirmation of Faith is not one of Calvin’s components of Reformed Worship. Nevertheless, I have included it because it has become a standard part of the worship in the Presbyterian Tradition.

Dear FPC Saints,

Have you ever heard of Eastertide? Here is what Wikipedia says about it:

*Eastertide is the period of 50 days, spanning from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. It is celebrated as a single joyful feast, called the "great Lord's Day". Each Sunday of the season is treated as a Sunday of Easter.*

So, the idea of treating the next Sunday we come together as 'our Easter celebration' is not without precedent!! To be honest, I can't wait! Pentecost is celebrated this year on May 31. Let's all add to our prayer list that we be able to come together again in worship before Pentecost comes and goes.

I hope I'm getting better at these temporary ways of delivering the weekly message to you. Even more, I hope you are taking advantage of at least one the three ways we are distributing the message. You can ask for a hard-copy to be sent to you from the office; you can listen to the message on the churches Web site; or you can watch the video version on our Facebook page. In addition, we either USPS or email a bulletin to every one each week along with a page with instructions on one side and a letter (this letter) on the other side. While you are touching base with members of the church this week it would be good to ask them how they are receiving our worship. Let the a session member know if you find anyone having trouble.

Again this week I put the entire message with the bulletin so we don't have to print separate copies. I pray you'll find it an encouraging message for 'Eastertide'.

Please continue to pray for the wisdom and discernment for all of our leaders. As I said last week, there is no templet for the many decisions that need to be made during this outbreak. Our leaders will need all the support they can get and your prayers are always an encouragement to them.

My prayers are with each of you throughout Eastertide. Although we cannot gather together socially, I hope you are staying in touch with brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition to watching my own sermon each week, Carla and I have been enjoying the sermon from Burnt Store Presbyterian Church on Youtube and watch one of our favorite preachers, Bob Russell. Both can be found by searching Youtube.

Remember to stay in touch with one another and don't become too isolated! And, keep praying. I'll say again: God is listening for the concerns of His people! Be confident in His promises and Grace!

Peace and God's Blessings,

Pastor Alan

# SUNDAY WORSHIP

In Service to our Lord | First Presbyterian Church | Arcadia, FL

## Invocation

*Psalm 116:1-4*

I love the Lord, because he has  
heard my voice and my  
supplications.  
Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long  
as I live.

The snares of death encompassed  
me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold  
on me;

I suffered distress and anguish.  
Then I called on the name of the  
Lord: "O Lord, I pray,  
save my life!"

## Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, in raising Jesus  
from the grave, you shattered the  
power of sin and death. We  
confess that we remain captive to  
doubt and fear, bound by the ways  
that lead to death. We overlook  
the poor and hungry and pass by  
those who mourn; we are deaf to the  
cries of the oppressed, and  
indifferent to calls for peace; we  
despise the weak, and abuse the  
earth you made. Forgive us, O  
God, Help us to trust your power  
to change our lives and make us  
new, that we may know the 'life  
abundant' given in Jesus Christ,  
the risen Lord. Amen.

*(take a moment for personal silent  
confession).*



HE INTERPRETED TO THEM THE THINGS  
ABOUT HIMSELF IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE

### *Seven Miles of Wonder*

I remember waking early one morning when I was camping in the White Mountains National Wilderness Area in New Hampshire. One always wakes early under such circumstances. The day before we hiked from about 6 AM until it was too dark to go any further. Then we pitched our tents against a night that would prove to be cold, wet, and very very long. The routine the next morning would be typical: heat water for coffee, break camp, grab a handful of Gorp, and hit the trail. We hiked for several hours that morning before we came to a landmark that was recognizable. We recognize it because we had seen it the day before. We had been hiking in the wrong direction.

There are two things that all wilderness hikers learn quickly: One, is that the wilderness can be disorienting. You should always check your compass before you head out. The other, is that when you are hiking the right trail, but in the wrong direction, everything looks totally different. You won't know that you are going the wrong way until you reach a recognizable landmark.

Seven miles is a long way. A strong walker, on level ground,

## Affirmation of Faith

We believe that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”. (John 3:16-17)

We believe that “. . . all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God”. (John 3:20-21)

## Benediction

Romans 12:9-10

HATE what is *evil*;  
cling to what is *good*

BE devoted to one  
another in *love*

HONOR one another  
above *yourselves*

ROMANS 12:9-10

**Go now in peace,  
and peace be with you all.**

will walk about 4 mph. When you figure in the rough roads, the loose sandals, and the preoccupation talking about events that have occurred over the last few days, you can assume that these disciples were on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus for about three hours.

If you examine the scripture closely, however, you will discover that these are three very interesting hours.

We can only identify one of those walking to Emmaus, Cleopas.

We're **not** told why they are walking to, Emmaus, and we know very little about the town, anyway.

In fact, all of this town's notoriety, comes from this one famous 'Walk to Emmaus'.

The truth is, Emmaus is not mentioned anywhere else in the canonical Scriptures. But the fact is, we find these disciples of Christ, having lost their bearings, walking to Emmaus, leaving Jerusalem, and heading — in the wrong direction.

On the same day that the women had discovered the empty tomb, on the same day that the angels had told them that Jesus was alive, on the same day that some of the disciples run to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, they were leaving Jerusalem and going in the wrong direction.

The fact is when you walk away from the cross, instead of toward it, everything looks totally different and you won't realize you are on the wrong path until you reach a recognizable landmark.

Still, if the women have reported an empty tomb, if Peter and John have confirmed their story, and if an angel had told them that Jesus is alive - then why are these disciples getting out of town? I suspect that it is because they have had a long, cold, wet, disorienting last couple of nights. They thought it was over. They were convinced that nothing more would come of it. And, they thought the best thing to do was to get away for a while: Away to a town where people would not recognize them; away where they would be in relative safety; away to where they could hang out - until the heat blew over.

I mean really, why stay in Jerusalem just to wallow in defeat? Why listen to the jeers and the pointed accusations of the people? The Bible says, "**everyone was talking about it.**"

Why not accept the truth: We were wrong. — We had **hoped**. — But we were wrong.

That's when the Scripture says, "**Jesus himself came near and went with them**". Notice the clear redundancy of "Jesus himself". I don't think this is an accident on the part of the writer. Luke wants us to know that this is not some 'other' Jesus. It's not a new Jesus. It's not someone taking Jesus's place. It's not a reconstructed Jesus. It's not even an unrecognizable Jesus. This is "Jesus himself". The same Jesus they all knew, the same Spirit, the same smile, the same body, the same wounds, and the same voice.

(Now, I think this is the most intimate interesting part of this lesson from scripture.) The text says, "**but their eyes were kept from recognizing him**". It does not say that he didn't look like Jesus looked before. It does not say that he wore a cloak over his face. I have seen this portrayed in movies where they seem to make Jesus out to be a dark character who keeps his head bent toward the ground and hides his face under a hooded cloak. Sometimes, commentators who struggle with the disciples lack of recognition, suggest that Jesus was in a spiritual body and that is why the disciples were unable to recognize him. The Bible doesn't say that either.

In fact, that is quite inconsistent with the idea of an empty tomb. If Jesus was going to raise in a different body he could have simply left the old one right there where it was - and appeared to his disciples in his new body. But, that's not what we find here. The scripture testifies to the real bodily resurrection of Jesus. And it promises us a similar resurrection.

Someone asked me not long ago, if we'd be able to recognize our loved ones in heaven. The person said, "If we're all going to be 'spiritual blobs' how will we know who is who?" In other words, how will we recognize each other in heaven. You see, the bodily resurrection of Christ should be a great comfort to everyone who has ever lost a loved one. To everyone who has listened to a friend, or spouse, or family member say, 'I'll be waiting for you'. I find this to be an encouraging scripture! Encouraging because it teaches us that we will see them again, just as the disciples saw Jesus again. We will know them, just as we knew them before, and we will touch them, just as doubting Thomas touched Jesus' wounds. That is the glorious nature of an empty tomb.

But hold on! Verses 15 and 16 say, "**While they were talking and discussing Jesus himself came near and went with them but their eyes were kept from recognizing him**". Let me review those verses from the King James version of the Bible to help us understand what is going on here: "**And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.**"

Look at that phrase "**they communed together and reasoned.**" "**Commune together**" is simple enough. In the original language it can mean to be 'in company with', 'to associate with', 'to stay with', or 'to converse with'. In other words, they were walking together and talking together.

But that second part of the phrase "**and reasoned**" is another matter. That word (sood-zay-teh'-o) means: 'to seek or examine together', 'to discuss, dispute, or to question'. Now, what do you suppose they were questioning?

You'll find the answer to that question in verses 17 through 25: Jesus asked them, ***“What are you discussing with each other while you walk along? They stood still, looking sad. Then, Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ (Jesus said,) What things? They replied, “the things about Jesus of Nazareth, (Now, listen to “the things” as they describe them:***

***Jesus, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God.***

***Jesus, who our chief priests and leaders handed over.***

***Jesus, who was condemned to death and crucified.***

***Jesus, whom we had HOPED - was the one - to redeem Israel.”***

Did you hear what they said?: (Let's break it down):

1. They were sad about his death.
2. They acknowledged him as one (but just another) prophet.
3. They **had hoped** - that he was the one to redeem Israel.

In other words, they didn't get it! They thought he had failed!

They believed — that his birth, his life, his ministry, and his death — were a failed attempt. And they didn't believe - any of that stuff — about the empty tomb!

You see, when Jesus walked up to those disciples along the road to Emmaus, He encountered defeat instead of victory. (I'd say he also encountered doubt instead of faith.) Yet, in truth, this is not doubt. With doubt the outcome can go either way. But they were quite sure that the prophet was gone, the man was dead, and the hope was crushed. As a Christian today we find that almost unbelievable. Until we remember that ***their eyes were holden - that they should not know him***. That word ***'holden'*** that our NRSV Bible translates "***kept from***", is from the original word that means *'to have power, to rule, to 'hold in check' or restrain'*. And we find that word in the imperfect tense. Which means that it happens *'continually and as a repeated action'*.

In other words, they could not recognize Jesus because Jesus chose not to be recognized! Jesus held the power over them and prevented them from recognizing Him, and continues to hold them in check, for the entire journey. That is why they could not recognize Jesus: because it was the will of God that He not be recognized. I suspect that if He had been recognized, their answers to Jesus' questions would have been very different. Very different indeed!

But Jesus wanted to know why they were walking **away** from Jerusalem? He wanted to hear where their hearts were **now! Now** that he had been whipped! **Now** that he had been spat on! **Now** that He had been tortured, **Now** that he had been nailed, **Now** that he has been cursed, **Now** that He had been punctured and bled and died!

You might think that would be enough to change their hearts. You might believe that in light of the fulfilled prophecies, the healed people, the cast out demons, the control over nature (even death), the compassion and the love, that they might have some idea, of who this man is.

In light of everything else, it is hard for us to imagine why they didn't believe the women. Why they didn't believe the angel. — But they didn't. They were walking away! They thought it was back to life as usual once this whole thing blew over.

The scripture tells us how Jesus responded to all this:

***Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have declared!*** Then he said to them, ***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.*** But, he continued to bind them. He continued to 'holden' them. And they **could not** see.

It is worth noting, I think, that Jesus finally released his hold on them as they came together around the table. The scripture says: ***“When he was at the table with them he took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”***

Finally, a recognizable landmark. A landmark to remind them that they — have been traveling in the wrong direction.

At their Last Supper together, Jesus had said, ***“Do this in remembrance of me.”*** And when he did it — they remembered!

That's when Jesus broke his hold.

That's when he jogged their memory.

That's when he left them, — to make their own decisions.

Everyone who is a reader of the Word of God knows that Jesus does this to every one of us:

1. He intervenes in our lives in ways we do not recognize.
  - the disciples said ***“We're not our hearts burning within us”***.
2. He calls to our minds a landmark from the Bible - and suddenly we can see - what we could not see before:
  - the scripture says, ***“Then their eyes were open, and they recognized him.”***
3. And finally, He allows us to decide for ourselves.
  - The Bible says, ***“When He broke the bread, they recognize Him, and He vanished from their sight.”***

This may seem like an odd way to us. Nevertheless it is God's way. And when we read ahead in the scripture, we see that God knows what he's doing. Look at what the Bible says next:

***“That same hour they got up and return to Jerusalem; and they found the others gathered together. Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them — in the breaking of the bread.”***

*Seven Miles of Wonder!*

Seven miles of walking away from the cross — and nothing looked the same —  
until they came to that familiar landmark, — the Lords Supper.  
Then they regained their bearings; — then they returned to Jerusalem.  
They went back, they got a new perspective, they began to see things differently.

Again today, we celebrate the reality of the Easter resurrection.

In what direction are you walking?

Are you walking off in the wrong direction because you haven't gotten your bearings?

Are you walking away from the cross as though that's all behind you?

Or are you still in Jerusalem with the others — gathered together and saying:

The Lord has Risen – He has Risen Indeed!

Let those with eyes to see, and ears to hear, Listen! Amen.