



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
235 South Kenilworth Avenue, Elmhurst, IL  
*Partners in Christ's Service since 1890*

**EARTH SUNDAY & THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

At Home or Small Group Worship for April 26, 2020

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**OPENING HYMN** – *audio available on the church website*

Meg McGarry, vocals

#56 For the Beauty of the Earth (vs. 1, 2, 5)

For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
sun and moon, and stars of light,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise

For thy church that evermore  
lifteth holy hands above,  
offering up on every shore  
one pure sacrifice of love,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

**We are called to be one in community.**

We have boldness before God.

**Because we know we are loved and known.**

Let us love each other not only in word or speech but in truth and action.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Heart of Creation, you know us and call us into bold service. On this Earth Day Sunday, we celebrate your creation, the beautiful lakes and streams, the lavish landscapes full of grasses, flowers, and trees. Nature surrounds us and provides us with not only food and water but also awe and inspiration. Open our hearts that we may be empowered to act in love for one another and the earth, for you are our shepherd, who leads us toward green pastures. We pray, in the name of your Son, Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **GLORIA PATRI**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son  
And to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning  
Is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH**

Prayer Hymn #263

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place,  
I can feel his mighty power and his grace;  
I can hear the brush of angels' wings,  
I see glory on each face;  
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Silent Prayer

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Everlasting God, today, we give thanks for the world around us. For the trees swaying in the breeze. We thank you for the sun warming the waters; for the rain nourishing the land; for butterflies, children can chase in open fields. All these gifts are from you, and in your love we are blessed. Hear our gratitude for the wonder of creation and the abundance of life.

We pray for the church in our world. We remember that we are all connected to you and the earth. Be with those seeking to share your message of hope and mercy. Yours is an unconditional love that is not influenced by race, creed, orientation, or economics. You share your love with all people equally and claim every person as your child.

Compassionate God, we confess that we do fail to live-up to being co-creators with you. We recognize the burdens on creation sometimes seem too heavy for us to change. Help us learn the needs of the Earth when we hear it groaning. Nudge us onto the path of deeper listening and caring.

Tender God, be with those in suffering, loss, and grief. Today we remember victims of Coronavirus. We pray for small business owners in peril of losing their life's work, we remember the millions who are unemployed, we remember the poor and marginalized unable to get vital social services. Lord, we have not forgotten that we are global citizens, and we do not forget our brothers and sisters in other lands. Be near and remind all of us of your lasting presence.

Within your boundless love, we are made new. Following your Son, we are lead to serve your creation. Believing in your Son, we have life eternal. Bless this day and bless the earth, as we pray in Christ's name, amen.

**OUR LORD'S PRAYER**— *audio available on the website*          Michelle Maiers, vocals

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**CHILDREN'S MESSAGE** — *audio available on the website*          Martha Mendoza

**SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE** — *audio available on the website*          Rev. Mike Daly

Luke 24:13-21, 28-31 (NRSV)          The Walk to Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped

that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

## **SERMON**

Like a Butterfly

Rev. Mike Daly

To honor Earth Day, I want to start today's message with this wonderful story that captures an essential understanding of faith in a post-Easter world.

*A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further. So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would expand and be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. What the man in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into the wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.*

Recognition stories, like the one on the Emmaus Road, are fun because we can all relate, can't we? How many times have you been in a restaurant or at Jewel or even on vacation somewhere far away and saw someone you "knew you knew" but couldn't remember who or why you knew them? Today's story from Luke is yet another post-resurrection story where the once close companions of Jesus don't seem to have a clue who he is whenever he appears in their midst.

Remember, when Jesus died on the cross, so did the hopes of his disciples. As Rev. John Buchanan says, "The finality of his crucifixion had brought a devastating end to their growing sense... that in *his* presence they were somehow in the presence and grace of God." Consumed by fear, grief, and doubt, they are confused and unsure of what to do next. So they began to wander.

What is so striking in today's story is how ordinary it is. But, that is part of its charm. The two disciples could be any of us. The road to Emmaus could be any road. And, Emmaus could be any town.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, "Everyone has walked the Emmaus road. It is the road you walk when your team has lost the big game, when your favorite political candidate drops out of the race or is defeated, when a loved one has lost a job, a close family member dies. It is the long road back to the empty house, the piles of unopened mail waiting for you on the table, and a voice inside your head saying, "It's time to live life as usual, if life can ever be usual again.""

We have all traveled the road of disappointment. We have all lost our bearing. We know what it feels like to wander aimlessly.

It takes about two hours to walk seven miles to the town of Emmaus. Plenty of time for these disciples to think about the past few days. The road was long enough to talk over the events of the past three days and feel even more worried. And, whether they were walking a straight path or a windy road to Emmaus, their emotions have been a roller coaster ride they would like to be over-and-done with.

How much could they take? They witnessed a trial, a crucifixion, a burial. There were visions of angels and the empty tomb—the rumors of resurrection out of the grave. Nothing made any sense. How could it?

Then, from out of nowhere, a stranger comes up behind them and asks them what they are talking about. They tell him about their friend Jesus and how things looked so promising at first. They spoke about how Jesus taught them about God's love and realm. Jesus impressed everyone with his bold words and mighty acts. Then, when things seemed most hopeful, things went most wrong. Now, there was nothing left to do but go back home.

This is when the stranger doesn't look to make them feel better. Instead, he explodes on them. Taylor reconstructs Jesus' words this way, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart! If you had read your Bibles, none of this would be a

surprise to you. It is right there in black and white: the Christ is not the one who wins the power struggle; he is the one who loses it."

Jesus is the suffering servant, the broken one, who comes into his glory with his wounds still visible. The scars are proof that he is who he says he is. The way to recognize Jesus is by his scars, not his muscles. His followers will bare those same scars as well.

Life after resurrection means that you no longer despise the painful parts of your lives anymore. Post-resurrection means that you don't interpret your defeats as failures anymore. New life means you no longer fear your enemies, not even death itself.

The one they called friend and leader is still with them, still at work, and so are they. To follow him now will go against common sense, because, like Jesus, they will go to the scariest, the most vulnerable, the most dangerous places in the world. They, like him, are not fighters but physicians - wounded healers - whose credentials are their hurts and pains.

It is good news to know that the blindness of the two disciples does not keep their friend from coming back to them. Jesus does not limit his post-resurrection appearances to those full of confidence in him. He comes to the disappointed and the doubtful. He appears to those who do not know the scriptures, and to those who do not recognize him even when he is walking beside them. He even comes to those who have given up and are heading back home.

Jesus worked with broken people and their broken dreams. He took a loaf of bread and broke it. He did the same with his own flesh and blood because that is the way he could reveal himself to us. The only way a loaf of bread can be shared is to break it. His broken body, like the broken loaf, brings all of us who are broken back together into one body. Through brokenness, we may indeed recognize the risen Lord in our midst. Like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, the struggle of replacing our old life with new life has meaning and a purpose.

Barbara Brown Taylor says, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ permanently rearranges our understanding of reality." Now, our understanding of the world has to fit into the reality of a love more powerful than even death. Isn't it a blessing to know that even if we don't recognize Jesus in our midst, he will be there. The risen

Christ will never give up our dreams or the causes we believe in. There is no broken dream, no cause so lost, that the living Christ cannot redeem.

Amen.

**OFFERTORY MUSIC**— *audio available on the website*

*God provides for us in ways that we do not always recognize.*

Creation Calls  
*Kevin Loeper and Meg McGarry, vocals*

Doerkson

**DOXOLOGY**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

**CLOSING HYMN** — *audio available on the website*

Al Thurkow, vocals

#59 This is My Father's World

This is my Father's world,  
and to my listening ears  
all nature sings, and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world:  
I rest me in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas  
his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world:  
the birds their carols raise;  
the morning light, the flowers bright,  
declare their Maker's praise.

Our God has made this world  
and shines in all that's fair;  
in the rustling grass I hear God pass,  
who speaks to me everywhere.

Our God has made this world:  
oh, let us ne'er forget  
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.  
God trusts us with this world,  
to keep it clean and fair.  
All earth and trees, the skies and seas,  
God's creatures everywhere.

### **BENEDICTION**

Go forth and be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, amen.