

I would like to welcome each one of you here this morning. Now there are many of you who are regulars at the Beachburg pastoral charge, but I also know that there are some of you here because family and friends have invited you to gather with us, and I am glad that you have decided to join with us this morning. So whether this is your first time with us or you have been here since we began these on-line services back on March 22nd, I hope that these services we will be a blessing to you.

So let us begin this sunny Sunday morning in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth day to honour the Creator. Let us pray.

Creator God, how deep are your designs! You made a living earth, land, sea and air, and charged us with their care. And we have seen this past month, when left to its own devices, the earth will indeed heal itself. So as we attempt to reengage with your world after our long isolation Help us build our lives into being a steward for all creation, as we listen to voice of wisdom telling us to be better agents of this world so that it will be a better place for our children and their children. In your name we pray. Amen.

Song- For The Beauty Of The Earth

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTcJ_SQruhE

Scripture *Luke 24: 13-35* In this familiar reading we continue to experience the Risen Christ On the Road to Emmaus. I read from the New International Version:

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

On The Road

When I begin my sermon the first thing I do is to read the scripture passage over several times and try to visualize the scene in my minds eye. But today not only did I envision the scene on the road to Emmaus it also conjured up a song in my head. And that song was On the Road again.

Now Since I'm not much of a country music buff as I'm more of a classic rock type of guy I Initially I thought that it was written by the late great Kenny Rodgers only to quickly realize, upon further investigation the song was written by Willie Nelson.

In fact in my online search I actually found that country music can contribute a lot to your religious education. Here's a list of a few country & western songs that in my investigation of country songs that I DON'T recommend:

I Keep Forgettin' I Forgot About You -

I Liked You Better Before I Knew You So Well

- How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?

- I'll Marry You Tomorrow But Let's Honeymoon Tonight

- I'm So Miserable Without You, It's Like Having You Here

- My Wife Ran Off With My Best Friend, and I Sure Do Miss Him

- If You Don't Leave Me Alone, I'll Go and Find Someone Else
Who Will

And then there's this confession:

“I didn’t see you leaving, but I can see that you’re gone”—a laughable way to put it, but an honest confession of our failure to be attentive to those we love.

And of course in light of the last month when many people have been quarantined with their partner for an extended period of time the issue of domestic abuse must never be overlooked and I have heard many radio ads reaching out to those who are particularly vulnerable at this time. So although I just make sure you reach out to protect yourself or those you care about.

But There are other lines from country and western songs that have their own power: Like “Forever is as far as I’ll go.”—That’s a pretty good definition of love. “Forever is as far as I’ll go.” For Love is the only house big enough for all the pain in this world right now.

I’m waiting for someone to put to music the words of the 13th century Sufi poet, Rumi: “Fear is the poorest room in your house. I would like to see you in better living conditions.”

My preconceived notion was that most of the ‘theology’ of country music is marked by stories of heartbreak, lost love, shattered dreams, with the underlying notion of “que sera, sera”— “whatever will be, will be.”

But what I found was that some of the ‘theology’ of country music is good.

For instance, one song I heard, kept repeating the line, “There ain’t no stoppin’ love when it’s meant to be.

Or these lines: We need to hold who needs holding; mend what needs mending; walk even if it means an extra mile. Pray what needs praying; say what needs saying; because we’re only here for a little while.

Now if we go back to beginning before I went off on a tangent. Willie romanticizes being on the road. On the road again just can’t wait to get on the road again. Goin’ places where I’ve never been... I can’t wait to get on the road again. And I think that sums up all of our longings at this minute as we would just like to burst out of these 4 grey walls that surround us and hit the road again.

But for those of us, if we have to be on the road all the time, ‘on the road’ comes to represent loneliness, frustration, being directionless, without hope.

But this sermon is not about country music. It’s about what good country music is about, life, life as we live it, life as we experience it

I think the reading this morning, from Luke, describing the two travelers on the road to Emmaus, provides a pattern that enables us to see more clearly and hear more deeply, the encouragement we all need as we pilgrims journey through life,

for it describes the experience of being on the road, and feeling lost, frustrated, disappointed.

Cleopas and his companion were followers of Jesus. They had counted on this Man. With others, they had believed that He was the Son of Man, the long-awaited Messiah, who would redeem Israel.

There had been convincing evidence: the power of His preaching, His healing ministry, the miracles He performed, His personal authority, His refusal to be controlled by either political or religious factions, the prophetic witness of His presence with the poor and oppressed. This had been the Man to follow.

Then it happened. The terrifying, unbelievable nightmare that engulfed Him and them so suddenly, devastating their lives and shattering their spirits —they crucified Him. They took Him out to a place of degradation and shame, and nailed Him up like a common criminal. Little wonder, Cleopas and the others huddled together the next day, scared for their lives, too shocked even for grief, uncertain, unstrung, all their dreams in ruins.

This Man, their Man, was dead. There were rumours whispered about that His tomb was empty, that the women had come back after sunrise with a wild story about an angel speaking to them, about the stone being rolled back, about the grave clothes lying unattended in the tomb. But rumours were merely rumours. In their depressed state of mind, such stories seemed like idle tales.

So Cleopas and his companion headed out of Jerusalem, downcast, defeated, doubtful, wanting to put some distance between themselves and the events that had overtaken them. This is the scene as we enter the Gospel story. They're leaving Jerusalem, "on the road again," headed for Emmaus, dejected and despairing

Now let's bring the story home to us. Two things are of special note: First, Emmaus is every person's town. I've been to Emmaus, and so have you. Cleopas and his companion wanted to get out of Jerusalem, to get away from it all, in order to try to forget, to sort out their feelings, and somehow find a way to start over. With chins dragging and hope in the ditch, they headed west, talking together, rehearsing the events of the crucifixion to one another, trying to ease the pain and share the grief.

We've all been to Emmaus in one way or another, at sometime in our lives. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go, to salvage and sort out our feelings, to summon the desire and courage to keep on going, and to set aside tragedy. Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go, to reclaim our sanity when our world is falling to pieces, when our ideals have been violated and our dreams, destroyed.

Emmaus may be our recourse when someone whom we respected very much, betrays us, or the one with whom we've shared the intimacy of marriage, leaves us, or a parent or spouse, dies.

Emmaus may be our recourse when illness confines us in relentless pain, or strikes our child, leaving them hovering between life and death, leaving us helpless to heal them. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Emmaus is every person's town.

There is a second truth to be garnered from this story. Let it be etched clearly in our minds. In the course of our walk to Emmaus, in the midst of, or in the aftermath of, defeat and despair, suffering and pain, confusion and doubt, there is always the friend who joins us.

This is what happened to Cleopas and his companion. They were walking along, utterly dejected, when all of a sudden, they became aware of a third person. We notice that they didn't recognize who He was. Now what's important about that you ask? It is all-important. Jesus often comes to us incognito.

Has it ever occurred to you that when another person intercedes to help you through a spiritual crisis, you've actually experienced the presence of spiritual help, coming through God in disguise, incognito per say.

That's the way Jesus often comes—as a stranger.

He joins us on the way, and many times we don't even recognize Him. Jesus may come in the person of a friend who sits and listens, or through a spouse who keeps on loving us in spite of our

selfish, uncaring callousness. Jesus may come through a person who loves us enough to be honest with us, to help us face up to ourselves, to see ourselves as we really are. He may come through a friend who won't let us off the hook, but calls us to live out our Christian commitment. Jesus often comes to us in disguise.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians writes "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe. Today as we long to hit the road once again may your heart perceive the living Christ in those around you and may you be living Christ to all that you meet. Thanks be to God

Pastoral Prayer

Loving and creating God, we give you thanks for this day, and each day, each breath, each moment of life. We praise you for the beauty of the earth, for each creature, each plant, each star. You have gifted us with the beauty of this valley that we call home surrounded by a natural world that is beautiful beyond belief.

Help us God to care for your creation. Help each one of us tread lightly upon this earth. You created this earth for our needs and not our greeds so help us to stand up against the humans and corporations that destroy this planet for the sake of profit.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters especially those who grieve the loss of a loved ones in the horrific tragedy in and around Portapique Nova Scotia.

We pray for the sick and the lonely, for those who struggle with illness and death surrounding this on-going pandemic. Hear our prayers and longing for comfort and healing as We pray for wisdom from the leaders throughout the world, as they make decisions around our health and well-being.

We pray in hope for those we hold dear to our heart this day, our children, and their children and our children's children hoping that your teachings will continue on. We are all connected. We pray as one family, the family of Christ. Thank you Jesus for appearing to us in so many ways. We turn to you for hope, for truth, and for life itself as we say the prayer in the words that you taught us: Our Father who art in Heaven.....

Please enjoy our closing song, This Road by Jars of Clay

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z67TTVXi_BM

May God Bless you and keep you until we meet again.