

John Sampson
"Surprises Along the Way"
Text: Luke 24:13 – 35
Preached at KVCC
May 3, 2020

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, I have something to admit to all of you.

I've said it before in different settings, but I don't think I've ever said it out loud on a Sunday morning. So here it goes. I was never a fan of online worship.

Never.

Before we started offering worship via Zoom in response to the COVID19 pandemic I had had just a few experiences attending worship virtually, and they always left me feeling kind of dull, and uninspired. And so I generalized those experiences and thought virtual worship could only ever be an unfortunate stand-in for coming together in person to be in communion with God, and with each other.

But now I have changed my mind. The COVID19 pandemic has forced us, as a community, and as individuals, to do things differently, and embrace ways of being that we would have rejected before. And that goes for online worship too.

I'll tell you the moment I was converted.

It happened within the first two minutes of friends and members beginning to join our very first Zoom worship service. Do you remember it? A small leadership team met in our sanctuary and we transmitted worship from there. No one else was allowed in the sanctuary because we were only allowed to have ten people or less in our sanctuary. As we opened the meeting I began to see people join, faces I hadn't seen since the summer, couples and families and individuals from literally around the country. And everyone was excited to greet everyone else, and say hello!

That joy, that excitement won me over completely. Now as we look to the future of who we will be as a faith community, I can't image moving ahead without some kind of online presence.

The contemporary story of our journey through the COVID19 pandemic echoes what we hear from the story our spiritual ancestors have gifted us, which we just

heard. The story of the road to Emmaus. Just like us, the disciples travel a road that is bound on all sides by sadness and loss, death and an uncertain future. We're told they are traveling to a town called Emmaus, but it seems just as likely this could be a story that is equally about escaping Jerusalem, and all of the heartbreak they've experienced there.

And then it happens. So unexpectedly, but really how could what these disciples encountered ever really have been expected. Right there, on the road of grief, they meet their teacher, and the truth of new life and resurrection stands before them.

In just a moment we will celebrate our very first ever communion together via Zoom. Today is another day of firsts for our congregation. And I have another confession. I've not been convinced about offering communion online. For those who are keeping track, we never celebrated communion in April, and part of the reason for that was because I hadn't been able to spiritually wrap my mind around what I wanted this moment to be for all of us. Maybe like me, you were a little skeptical when you heard we would be offering communion via Zoom this morning. Maybe like me you've been unwilling to let go of the physical experience of sharing the bread and juice among ourselves in the beauty of our sanctuary. And maybe you've been grieving the loss of this ritual, and how we've always done it.

But our story today tells us that if we focus only on the past, only on the grief of losing that past, then we will be unable to see the blessing that is right in front of us. Because the story of the road to Emmaus tells us that the presence of our great teacher is not bound by flesh, but is of a spirit that can be encountered in new and different ways. It is this spirit, which never dies, and comes again to us after the cross, and after the tomb.

I resisted online worship because I was tied to the beauty of what came before. But I was converted by a new and unexpected beauty flickering across the screen of my laptop.

Today is another opportunity to welcome something new into our lives – unexpected, different, but also deeply familiar. As we celebrate communion this morning we will use different words, the structure of the ritual will be a bit different, we won't be physically together, and we'll be using the elements which each of us brings to our own tables.

But I hope that as we break bread together in this new way we will be able to see that the Spirit of Christ is still with us, that that bond cannot be broken – not by distance, not by COVID19, not by anything else, because it is God's promise to us that we shall always be in communion with the Holy, and each other.

And so now open your eyes and see that your dining room table, that your tv stand, that your desk in your office, that the old card table you use for your laptop is none other than the very location for meeting the sacred. Open your eyes and see that

Wonder Bread and saltines, and juice pouches and day old wine drunk from a glass with a chip in it, are all we need to ingest the holy into our lives and our very bodies.

Open your eyes and see that our teacher is with us, right here and right now in the ordinariness of our lives.

Open your eyes, and let yourself be converted.

Amen.