

Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts and Outlaws – 6. Jesus and the Outlaws

Luke 23:32-43

April 2, 2023

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Throughout the season of Lent, we have made our way through the Gospel of Luke, learning more about the people Jesus loved, and the way he loved them. We've seen Jesus love, and draw near to him, those who are most marginalized and outcast. The old and young, women and the sick, and those are called sinners. We've seen him share meals, tell stories, and offer forgiveness.

This morning is the beginning of Holy Week, called Palm Sunday. It's a day where we mark how Jesus entered Jerusalem to the welcome of palm branches waving, praises singing, and people rejoicing at his presence. All of them, like us, ready to tell stories of how Jesus had made a difference in their lives.

But this was not the only thing going on that day. You see, it was the beginning of Passover and hundreds of thousands of Jews were returning to celebrate and worship God, the God who redeemed and protected them from slavery and death.

For the people that day, they would be filled with wonder and hope that God would free them, yet again, but this time from Roman rule -- from their heavy hand and laws, from their taxes, and ever-present troops occupying their land.

And there would be no avoiding the presence of Rome amid their Passover celebrations. As thousands of Jews lined the streets in celebration and praise of God's redemption -- so too, would Roman soldiers gather, surrounding them as a constant reminder to stay in line and to remember that Caesar was in physical control here. The soldiers stood in armor, ready for battle, a stark contrast to the people gathered in joy and hope.

Just as we've seen throughout the Gospel of Luke -- that while the government and leaders saw the world from one particular lens: that where Rome leads, Caesar is

King, and laws are meant to keep people in place. That Jesus arrives, and turns these expectations on their heads. Sending us a clear message, that Jesus brings another vision of our world.

A vision where all are welcome. Where the lowly are lifted up, where the powerful lose their thrones, and where even the most outcast and marginalized are given a special place in the kingdom of God.

Into this scene, Jesus enters. Not in royal garb on a majestic horse, but in ordinary clothing, on a borrowed donkey. An immediately sign that Jesus is one who is "one of us"... He enters the city, with streets lined with rags taken from the back of wearing travelers, to declare and promise that just as God heard the cries of their people in the past, so too, does God hear them today.

Jesus is calling to himself all those who have been cast aside, trampled, and harmed. Jesus is flipping upside down the expectations of what the world looks like. And the presence of the crowds is a sort of protest against the way of the world, declaring their hope in the way of God. Because unlike Rome, who reigns with fear as a motivator, and death as a consequence. Christ, reigns with love, and promises life which conquers death.

Last week, our Bishop called this an "optimism of grace" -- that sense within us, that even when things seem to be filled with yuck... with heart ache and pain, that we are a people who are optimistic, hungry for the grace and goodness of God. Trusting always, that God will make a way.

I imagine the mood on the streets was different this week, than other times Jesus gathered to preach and to heal. The people could feel the heavy anticipation that something was coming, and yet they clung with hope that God would make a way.

Have you ever felt this way? Have you been someplace, where you felt both a deep sense of grief or dread, and clear sense of hope in the ways God was working in and through you?

One of those times, for me, happened in the fall of 2014. My oldest, Calvin, was getting ready to turn one year old. And like all new parents, we were thrilled! Excited to celebrate the birthday of our beloved, and happy (maybe relieved!) that we had survived all the ups and downs of that first year of parenting. It was as much a celebration for us, as parents, as it was for Calvin. But hanging, heavily, on our hearts that fall was my Mother-in-law's health. At the end of the summer, she had been diagnosed with an aggressive cancer that already spread throughout her body. She fought, like she was battling the devil himself. She had surgeries, chemo and radiation, and it was taking its toll on her body and spirit.

And so, just a few weeks before Calvin's birthday, my MIL decided to stop treatment and to instead, try to control her pain and allow herself as much time with family and friends as possible. When Calvin's birthday came, she hadn't much strength, was eating little, and wasn't leaving the house, except for doctor appointments.

Luke and I decided to host the party at his parents church, wanting to be close to his parents home, and hoping that maybe she might have strength enough to come for a time. The day of the party was perfect – we had so many friends and family, my uncles and cousins, who came to celebrate our boy. But they also came, to support us. To give their presence as a gift of support for our optimism of grace, that maybe Grandma Jean could spend this one birthday with her first grandson.

And she made it. Her walking was slow, but her face showed a determination that I think is reserved only for Grandma's. She was resolved to celebrate the gift of life around her, even as hers was soon ending.

And so as gathered around the and watched Calvin make a mess of his birthday cake, our voices joined in song – but our hearts sang, of more than birthdays, they sang songs of praise for life and for love.

As it was, that was the last time Grandma Jean left her home. A few weeks later, we gathered again in that same church, to let loose our tears and sing songs again in praise of life and love, as we said our earthly goodbyes.

There are times in our lives and world, where our deep pains are held together only by our "optimism in grace," our hope and trust in God's presence to see us through the hardest of days, and to somehow – bring life and healing from them.

As we stand at the beginning of Holy Week, looking ahead and knowing how it ends – we do so, with this same sense that God is with us through it all. One of the most well known and loved places in scripture where this is written, is in Psalm 23, right in the middle where it's declared: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. And again, at its end: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

No matter the circumstance of your heartache, no matter where your valley is found – God is with you in the middle of it all. And one of the great lessons from Luke's Gospel, is that Jesus not only is with you here – when you feel alone and outcast, abandoned or left behind... but that Jesus will turn the world upside to make it right. To make you know that you matter, you belong, you are safe, and you are loved.

The story of Holy Week is our story, that reminds that there are no depths or limits to the love of God in Christ. Jesus is so committed to welcoming all people into the kingdom of God, that even as he is put on trial, convicted, and named an outlaw himself – he continues to redeem and restore all things.

Our week will close with Good Friday, and Jesus hanging upon the cross. It's a jarring message, distinctly different in tone that the praises and shouts of Palm Sunday. And we're reminded how quickly the crowds move from Hosannas to Crucify.

But Jesus knew, at the outset, that his message would come with a cost. As he proclaimed love and welcome to the outsider and outcast, as he rallied against the powers of Rome, and demanded real change for the people. As he healed the sick,

welcomed the sinner, and called to his side all who have pushed away and forgotten... Jesus knew the cost. And in Rome, the cost was always death.

But Jesus also knew, that in God – death never has the final say.

And so, even in those final moments, Jesus did not stray from his message of inclusion and hope. Instead, he seemed to lean into them – continuing to show others glimpses into the kingdom of God. Offering forgiveness to the soldiers with his blood on their hands, and promising paradise to the outlaws on his left and on his right.

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” - Luke 23:34

With these words, he turns the world the upside down again. Because for Jesus, welcoming all people into the kingdom of God, included forgiving those who hurt him most. Even the soldiers holding the nails, and the criminals next to him, were not excluded from the promise of God’s love.

Can you feel how much Jesus loves you? Even if the world says that you aren’t enough. That you aren’t good enough, or smart enough, or successful enough. Even if the world says you should feel shamed because of things you have done or have failed to do... Jesus brings a vision of another way.

A world where all of us are loved and cherished. A world where the circumstances in our lives, the traumas in our past, the stories we wish to be forgotten – where Jesus sees all of those things, sees all of you, and still calls you a child of God. Loved and redeemed. Welcomed and forgiven.

Jesus has a vision for the world where this is no outsider or outcast. Where there is just one body, one family, of God here on earth. Where God’s peace, and justice, and mercy is the law on our hearts. And Jesus wants so badly for you to know and trust this vision, that he continues to preach and teach it, even when his life is threatened.

This is how important you are to Christ. This is how important your neighbor, the stranger around the corner, even that guy that you don’t really like that much. They matter so much to Jesus, you matter so much, that not even the death will stop him.

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” - Luke 23:34

This, to me, is one of the most challenging verses in scripture.

Can you imagine, praying, as Jesus did, for the people who killed him? For those who actively caused real harm, who will end a life, who seem to stand against everything that Jesus proclaimed?

Even here, at his death, Jesus is flipping expectations. Breathing his last breaths -- Jesus uses them to extend the welcome and mercy of God to those who are ending it. When Jesus says he came to bring life, for all people - he meant all. Not even those who ended his life were excluded from his message of forgiveness.

Jewish tradition says that when people were executed, they were to pray:
may my death atone for all my sins.

And here, Jesus, with his final breaths promises:

may my death atone for all of yours.

Beloved ones, you are deeply loved by a God who not only created you and called you good. But by a God who will give their own life for yours. Even when we don’t understand, or don’t get it right, or even when we act in ways that directly oppose the message of Jesus... Jesus prays, "father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

This is how I know I am in need of a Savior. Because while Jesus is forgiving the people holding the hammer and nails, I still struggle to love every day.

And like you, I watch and listen to stories of real pain and sin in our world. People hurting each other with words and actions. War and more gun violence. Addictions and broken relationships. I see real harm continuing to be done to our children, our siblings of color, and LGBTQ family. I see so much pain and exclusion in our world.

And it's hard for me to understand. It makes me sad, it makes me angry... but Jesus tells me: that he has come, to love, to forgive, and to make atonement for our sins. To draw all people into his arms of welcome. And I'll tell you: because I don't think I'm alone... that sometimes ours is a really hard world to live in. And sometimes it is really hard to love and forgive as Jesus does.

But Jesus is relentless. From the parades of Palm Sunday, to the arms of the cross, to the tomb of Easter – Jesus continues to teach and make known God's kingdom among us.

That's what we do here, as the body of Christ at Messiah church. We try to love and forgive as Jesus. To expand our welcome to include those who have been cast aside and hurt, who are told they aren't enough. And we remind them, and ourselves, that we are welcomed and loved.

But even when we forget, especially when we forget. Jesus remembers and invites us to try again. To remember, to taste and believe, the goodness of God in our lives.

You'll remember, that between the processional that began the week, and the cross which ended it, Jesus gathered with his friends and disciples at a table...

They gathered in the upper room, which in Greek is called a "kataluma"... and it's the very same word used to describe the room that Mary and Joseph gathered in on the night Jesus was born. And so, on that night, in a kataluma in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her beloved son, Jesus – who is Emmanuel: God with us.

And now, in the middle of Holy Week, Jesus, our Emmanuel, gathers with his disciples in another kataluma – this time in Jerusalem – to share a meal, and leave us a lasting commandment to break bread, to eat together, and to do so, celebrating that God is with us.

From beginning to end, this kataluma is a gathering space that proclaims the presence of God in our midst. Declaring to us, that no matter what happens in world around us, whether we sing out to Christ in praises, or cry out with the crowds to crucify... that Jesus is with us. For us.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 2, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, open my eyes and my ears to what you would have me read and hear today. Through your Holy Word, convict me, challenge me, and comfort me. Open my mind to new insights and fresh perspectives. Open my heart to the moving of your Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Note: We are reading the entire gospel of Luke in the GPS. Some days' readings are longer than usual. We hope you'll have an extra cup of coffee, or use your lunch break, and read Luke's entire story of Jesus.

Monday, April 3

Scripture: Luke 22:54-71

After they arrested Jesus, they led him away and brought him to the high priest's house. Peter followed from a distance. When they lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant woman saw him sitting in the firelight. She stared at him and said, "This man was with him too." But Peter denied it, saying, "Woman, I don't know him!" A little while later, someone else saw him and said, "You are one of them too." But Peter said, "Man, I'm not!" An hour or so later, someone else insisted, "This man must have been with him, because he is a Galilean too." Peter responded, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about!" At that very moment, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered the Lord's words: "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And Peter went out and cried uncontrollably.

The men who were holding Jesus in custody taunted him while they beat him. They blindfolded him and asked him repeatedly, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" Insulting him, they said many other horrible things against him.

As morning came, the elders of the people, both chief priests and legal experts, came together, and Jesus was brought before their council. They said, "If you are the Christ, tell us!" He answered, "If I tell you, you won't believe. And if I ask you a question, you won't answer. But from now on, *the Human One will be seated on the right side of the power of God.*" They all said, "Are you God's Son, then?" He replied, "You say that I am." Then they said, "Why do we need further testimony? We've heard it from his own lips."

Observation

We begin holy week with denial, mocking, and questioning. The chants of the crowds have changed, and the words of Jesus – while still a lasting hope for many, have become threatening for others. Can you feel and hear the fear in the voices of the men who took Jesus into custody? In the questioning of elders who demanded answers?

Application

As we hear the accounts of the days leading to Jesus' death, I invite you to make space. Space to breathe, to listen, to rest. Notice the ways that your heart, body, and mind are responding to the story of Christ this week. Be gentle on yourself, as you let the words and message of Jesus take root. And today, remember this: love conquers fear. Let the love of Christ dwell in your heart, let us loosen any seedlings of worry or fear, allowing love to flourish instead.

Prayer

Holy Christ, be with me today. Settle the fear and worry in my heart, releasing me to love and follow you more fully. Give me courage when your messages challenge me, or on days when following is hard. Remind me of your goodness and love, Amen.

Tuesday, April 4

Scripture: Luke 23:1-25

The whole assembly got up and led Jesus to Pilate and began to accuse him. They said, "We have found this man misleading our people, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming that he is the Christ, a king." Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "That's what you say." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no legal basis for action against this man." But they objected strenuously, saying, "He agitates the people with his teaching throughout Judea—starting from Galilee all the way here."

Hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was from Herod's district, Pilate sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Herod was very glad to see Jesus, for he had heard about Jesus and had wanted to see him for quite some time. He was hoping to see Jesus perform some sign. Herod questioned Jesus at length, but Jesus didn't respond to him. The chief priests and the legal experts were there, fiercely accusing Jesus. Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt. Herod mocked him by dressing Jesus in elegant clothes and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate and Herod became friends with each other that day. Before this, they had been enemies.

Then Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people. He said to them, "You brought this man before me as one who was misleading the people. I have questioned him in your presence and found nothing in this man's conduct that provides a legal basis for the charges you have brought against him. Neither did Herod, because Herod returned him to us. He's done nothing that deserves death. Therefore, I'll have him whipped, then let him go." But with one voice they shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." (Barabbas had

been thrown into prison because of a riot that had occurred in the city, and for murder.) Pilate addressed them again because he wanted to release Jesus. They kept shouting out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time, Pilate said to them, "Why? What wrong has he done? I've found no legal basis for the death penalty in his case. Therefore, I will have him whipped, then let him go." But they were adamant, shouting their demand that Jesus be crucified. Their voices won out. Pilate issued his decision to grant their request. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison because of a riot and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

Observation

Jesus meets with Herod, who sends him to Pilate. We read that neither leader finds cause to sentence Jesus, and still – the crowds yell to crucify. Pilate asks, "*Why? What has he done? I've found no legal basis for the death penalty.*" But the crowds were adamant, and their voices won.

Application

Throughout Lent, we've listened as Jesus stood up for those whom the crowds shouted against. While Pilate gave in, Jesus never faltered, and instead continued to remind us that God's grace is far greater than our imaginations or boundaries. Still, sometimes our voices join those of the crowds calling for condemnation. How is Jesus inviting you to loosen your grip and forgive?

Prayer

Holy Christ, the crowds who praised you soon turned to crucify. Sometimes, I admit, my heart does the same. Forgive me for turning from you, for failing to love my neighbor, for forgetting your words of hope. Help me love as you love, Amen.

Wednesday, April 5

Scripture: Luke 23:26-56

As they led Jesus away, they grabbed Simon, a man from Cyrene, who was coming in from the countryside. They put the cross on his back and made him carry it behind Jesus. A huge crowd of people followed Jesus, including women, who were mourning and wailing for him. Jesus turned to the women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't cry for me. Rather, cry for yourselves and your children. The time will come when they will say, 'Happy are those who are unable to become pregnant, the wombs that never gave birth, and the breasts that never nursed a child.' Then *they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'* If they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." They drew lots as a way of dividing up his clothing. The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one." The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine and saying, "If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself." Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read "This is the king of the Jews." One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, "Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o'clock, while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, *into your hands I entrust my life.*"^[b] After he said this, he breathed for the last time. When the centurion saw what happened, he praised God, saying, "It's really true: this man was righteous." All the crowds who had come together to see this event returned to their homes beating their chests after seeing what had happened. And everyone who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance observing these things.

Now there was a man named Joseph who was a member of the council. He was a good and righteous man. He hadn't agreed with the plan and actions of the council. He was from the Jewish city of Arimathea and eagerly anticipated God's kingdom. This man went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Taking it down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a tomb carved out of the rock, in which no one had ever been buried. It was the Preparation Day for the Sabbath, and the Sabbath was quickly approaching. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph. They saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it, then they went away and prepared fragrant spices and perfumed oils. They rested on the Sabbath, in keeping with the commandment.

Observation

As Jesus is carrying his cross, a man named Simon the Cyrene was pulled from the crowds to help. Cyrene was a city in North Africa – today's Libya. While we're not told whether he was living in or visiting Jerusalem, the Gospel of Luke makes a point that he isn't originally from Jerusalem. Here, in a Gospel filled with Jesus standing with the outsiders, we now witness Jesus receiving support and help from an outsider.

Application

Jesus invites us into a community of faith, where we are all valued, seen, and equal. Jesus imagines a world where there are not outsiders and insiders, but only beloveds of God. How are you experiencing the fullness of the body of Christ in your life? How might you learn from others, with differing experiences, about the goodness of God?

Prayer

Holy Christ, as I walk with you towards the cross, let its weight settle on my shoulders and heart. May your cross be a reminder of the ways you created a beautiful and diverse family in your name. Help me to celebrate, to learn from, and to support the full body of Christ. Amen.

Thursday, April 6 (Maundy Thursday)

Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only

the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

Observation

We're reading the book of Luke during Lent, and so to finish before Easter means a slight misalignment these final days. Today is Maundy Thursday, where we traditionally celebrate how Jesus instituted the meal of communion. You can read about that in Luke 22:14-23.

Application

As Christians, we are an Easter people. This means we understand all of life and faith through the lens of the Resurrection. When we celebrate communion, we celebrate the empty tomb and promises of God made known. The men at the tomb asked the women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (v5). On this Maundy Thursday, what things in your life is God calling you to release? Where do you seek the living among the dead? And how might Jesus be inviting you to witness something new?

Prayer

Holy Christ, make your promises of new life real and tangible for me today. As I eat bread, drink from a cup, or take in the beauty of your creation – may I experience your love for me anew. Amen.

Friday, April 7 (Good Friday)

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, their faces downcast. The one named Cleopas replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?" He said to them, "What things?" They said to him, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. But there's more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn't find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who told them he is alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him." Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets. When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?" They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying to each other, "The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!" Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

Observation

Today we read the story of the Walk to Emmaus, and it is one of my favorite stories in scripture. It's a story of Jesus being revealed to two people. They had been talking and eating with this person and had no idea it was Jesus in their midst. Here's what I love: I believe Jesus still shows up like this. If we pay attention, we can see Jesus all around us.

Application

Today is also Good Friday, the day where we mark and mourn the death of Christ. You can read that story, again, in Luke 23:26-49. I invite you to notice, as you do, how the Centurion saw *Christ* in his death, revealed as God among them, too. In his dying and his raising, may Jesus be revealed to you today.

Prayer

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Saturday, April 8

Scripture: Luke 24:36-53

While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish. Taking it, he ate it in front of them. Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I'm sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power." He led them out as far as Bethany, where he lifted his hands and blessed them. As he blessed them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy. And they were continuously in the temple praising God.

Observation

Holy Saturday, or Easter Vigil, is one of the oldest liturgies of the Christian Church. Using stories from scripture, light and fire, and song – it proclaims the hope found in the "in between" of Good Friday and Easter. We're called to remember that even in the darkness, before we can begin to see what's to come, God is at work. Just as a seed planted begins to grow before we see it above the surface – so too, is the mystery and holiness of this day. Christ is conquering death, *for you*, right now.

Application

In the reading for today, we are joining the disciples who are terrified and afraid. They are experiencing a sort of Holy Saturday, too – they just don't know it yet. They are grieving and gathering, afraid of what had happened to Jesus, and confused by stories they've heard now from their Emmaus friends. And right in the middle of all of this, Jesus arrives and offers peace. What are the places of scarcity, worry, or fear in your life, that are in need of peace? How might

you spend today receiving the peace of Christ, and praising the ways God is already at work in your life, even if you can't yet see?

Prayer

Holy Christ, be with me today. Help me trust that you are at work, even when I cannot see or understand. Bring peace to my heart, and peace to our world, as we wait in hope for your coming. Amen.