

Returning — Reassured & Renewed  
April 11, 2021; 9:00 am online; 10:am in Person  
Luke 24:36b-48  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

### Jesus Appears to the Disciples

<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it **because of joy and amazement**, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.

### I. EASTER TWO!

Happy Easter, Two! Happy Easter, Too! For Easter is *not* over—any way you slice that ham! Easter Sunday, last Sunday, was only the FIRST Sunday of Easter. The first day of celebrating the Resurrection, in its *first* appearance! We now launch into Eastertide—a season of FIFTY days to celebrate! And to look—with eager and earnest eyes—for the Risen Christ in our midst—wherever we *and* his original disciples might find him!

He might be having a bit of bread and fish on the beach for breakfast! He might appear through the wall, suddenly, without going through the locked doors. He might turn out to be *in* the person you're walking and talking along the road with; or on a hiking trail. You just never know!

Easter and Eastertide is all about surprises! About glitches even! Things not going according to plan! No matter how much planning, prepping, praying, preserving and pondering we might think we've done!

Easter is about blessings and challenges turning up in the most likely and least likely of places. Even about challenges turning INTO blessings. We are continually learning about contingency plans, back-ups—whether digital or actual. If you haven't had a chance yet to watch last Sunday's Easter Worship on YouTube with all the glitches gone, I encourage you to

go! Experience it today—it will move and uplift your spirit!

## **II. EASTER TOO—TOGETHER! RETURNING**

So, today, Easter Two—Welcome back! We are also in *another* kind of Season in this Eastertide—a season of Return. Whether you are worshiping with us on YouTube from somewhere in the world, down the road in our community from your home—right now or later this week—or right here **at** CUCC in Buena Vista, we are returning and re-gathering.

Eastertide for us as humanity, this year especially, is a time of returning to life in all *sorts* of ways. Of coming out of hibernation and isolation—into a season of renewal, re-gathering, and being reassured that we are still here! Body and soul! Still here, in community, gathering, belonging, celebrating life and loss, love and longing—all together as God’s Family.

We are so excited to come together again! To see each of your faces and smiles—even if smiling eyes over a mask—for yet a little while more. To re-commence worship and fellowship in more ways that we’ve been able to do. To re-connect, recommit to our community, and to find ourselves reassured and renewed.

## **III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?—EYES OPEN**

Pastor Tricia Gates Brown speaks of this moment—of return and Resurrection—and the call it brings to us—as Christians everywhere:

With Easter we move **on** from the season of Lent—where we have gone into the roots, the underground, where the nourishing work of dormancy prepares us for rebirth—into a season where we celebrate and acknowledge restoration.

In the season of Easter, we recognize that God’s presence is not *held* somewhere, in a tomb or otherwise, but scattered like proverbial *stardust* through every molecule of our existence.

To say ‘Christ is risen’ is to say: *Look around, for heaven’s sake, every moment.* Because every moment and everywhere God is making things new.

From this day forward, we are *all* to become witnesses to the ways God is vitally present in us and in our lives...

Jesus recognized and accepted fully that God was incarnated in him. But Jesus ...also invited us to join him in recognizing and accepting that God is present in *us* too—and that the **kernel** of God in us is our truest identity, our truest essence.

Granted, when things are going well it is much easier to say that God’s work of renewal and restoration are breaking out all around us and we should pay attention.

When things are dreary and desperate, it is can be much harder. Though it is Easter, many are still in grief, still struggling to put enough food on the table, still collectively

afraid of a virus that threatens countless lives not only here in the US but in countries around the world with little access to vaccines.

What does Easter mean when we are in uncertain times? That it's precisely in the midst of death and loss that we need reminding that death and loss don't have the final say.

I don't care how pessimistic you are. Resilience, rebirth are forces stronger than death. If we have our eyes and hearts open, we can look at our darkest times and see for ourselves the empty tombs, the times when out of the blue we were so filled with a sense of restorative presence and—yes—even of joy.

#### **IV. APPEARANCES! WHAT THEY SEEM?**

What did Eastertide mean for those first disciples? Was it that different from what it means for us? They were certainly coming out of the darkest, despairing times they'd ever known. In our scripture today, Jesus finds them frightened, unsure, doubting, needing a great deal of reassurance.

This particular story in Luke 24 is not as familiar to us as other "Resurrection Appearance" stories, as they are called. You might be more familiar with the story of Thomas discovering the Risen Christ suddenly appearing, with holes in his hands and feet. Or, some

disciples walking along the road to Emmaus, when a stranger suddenly reveals himself as Christ to them.

There are, in fact, *countless* stories of the Risen Christ appearing—to those first disciples, but also down through the ages. Some of them just happened to make it into the scriptures that we have written down.

I wonder if we listened to this story again and put ourselves there, what we might discover? What would be *your* reaction? Your question for Christ? Would you reach out? Look for proof? Scream that you'd heard a ghost? Offer him a bite of breakfast?

<sup>36-41</sup> While they were saying all this, Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you." They thought they were seeing a ghost and were scared half to death. He continued with them, "Don't be upset, and don't let all these doubting questions take over.

Look at my hands; look at my feet—it's really me. Touch me. Look me over from head to toe. A ghost doesn't have muscle and bone like this." As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. They still couldn't believe what they were seeing. It was too much; it seemed too good to be true.

<sup>41-43</sup> He asked, “Do you have any food here?” They gave him a piece of leftover fish they had cooked. He took it and ate it right before their eyes.

### **You’re the Witnesses**

<sup>44</sup> Then he said, “Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled.”

<sup>45-49</sup> He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, “You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem!

You’re the first to hear and see it. You’re the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you’re equipped with power from on high.”

### **V. EASTER EYES for US**

When I started in seminary many years ago now (we’re having our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Zoom next week, in fact!), I heard this phrase: “We Are Easter People!” I’ve puzzled over that all these years, and preached about it, but I still wonder if we in the mainline church

have ever really known what that means? We chant it and sing it for a few weeks every year after Easter, but then it’s forgotten—tucked away with the plastic eggs, Christ Candle, bonnets and bunnies—to be brought out another year.

Maybe we need a new “take” on what it means to live as Christians—known by our Love, in this world, in the hours, days, weeks and months *after* Easter. All year long! As Easter People—or something else!

We’ve been exploring these many weeks since Christmas about “Seeing with New Eyes.” Seeing Jesus with new eyes, ourselves, God’s love for and guidance to us—in life and in scripture.

I wonder if being “Easter People” means having “Easter Eyes.” I wonder what that might look like? Seeing with Easter Eyes.... might mean....

Seeing *on* the heart. With the eyes *of* our hearts—in *love*. “Open the Eyes of my Heart, Lord!” we sing. Seeing broader, deeper, wider, with more fully-embracing vision of ourselves, our community, our world—all God’s children. And, seeing circumstances, situations, pressing issues and conundrums that we face, with eyes toward solutions that benefit *all*, instead of decisions and policies that divide.

Easter Eyes are eyes that see with understanding, openness, trust—in spite of the doubt we might feel. These are the Eyes of Christ that seek to know one another’s souls more deeply; to connect in life-giving

ways. Beyond just the surface. Getting off of the circumference of life, with its never-ending spinning in circles, staying in the shallow water, and diving, instead, into the Center. Where Life is most fully lived. Easter Eyes look through new eyes at the world. Through lenses of LOVE.

A number of religious types have been writing on social media and even to my inbox and that of other pastors lately using just the *opposite* of Easter Eyes.

Some want to point out the error of our inclusive ways and theology, and remind us more of “how we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the grace of God” more than how extravagant and expansive and all-bracing God’s grace is.

Some of these writings are pretty judgmental, and claim to speak for Jesus, but it’s a very “judgey Jesus!” If you encounter perspectives on faith and belief, that purport to be “biblically based” but don’t sound like *your* understanding of God, Jesus or the Bible, ask yourself: are these lenses through which the person is speaking or writing, through “Easter Eyes” or are they words or lenses that might make Jesus weep?

Jesus came to show us who God had been all along. Even laying down his life for ALL the world out of love. Even standing up to political systems that were hurting and killing people. Refusing to stay silent.

Jesus showed us a God refusing to stand quietly by while the least of these were and are being trounced on

–denied their full personhood—whether living in poverty, denied health care, denied any human rights like voting or status, in prison or anywhere on the margins.

Refusing to turn a blind eye anywhere people were being prevented from existing in their full, authentic, beloved souls, without discrimination.

And Jesus was raised out of that tomb by that same God, as a Big Sign to humanity—once and for all time—that God is a God who redeems. Redeems Creation. Redeems life out of death! Redeems Jesus’ life, and ours, and all of creation.

Yes, God redeems OUR lives too! That’s the message of Easter for us. God takes off our blinders of fear, anxiety, discrimination, misunderstanding, mistrust and suspicion—either of us or sentiments we hold toward others that are not healthy—and gives us new “Easter Eyes!” Can we live as if we believe that?

## **VI. THE RULES HAVE CHANGED**

When the disciples came to the Garden that first Easter morning, they did not find things as they expected. *Their* eyes might have been a little sleepy, yet, but the whole scene was not what they were anticipating.

As one of those disciples reflected:

“It was all and had been horrible. But as horrifying as it all was, it made a certain kind of sense. It **fit** into the way we understood the world to work. We knew the score. We understood the rules.

We had hoped for a different ending. But this is the one we had. Jesus was dead. He was laid in the tomb. That was the end to the story.

And we had experienced death before and knew what to do next. Prepare the body. Mourn. Remember.

And somehow move on into a world where he's no longer a part of our daily lives. That was what we *knew* and that is what we prepared ourselves to do

But what happened that morning *didn't follow any of the rules.*

Or perhaps to put it more accurately *it created a whole new set of rules*

The old rules that told us that we were on our *own* in life

That when something died it was gone forever

That there are endings and that they are final

But when Jesus rose from the dead those rules changed

And that can be a frightening thing

Even when what replaces them is something as wonderful as resurrection!

That is the promise and challenge of this day. The new rules are now new life.

On what you call Good Friday, Jesus died

But on Easter what died was despair

And a whole new way of living was born.

*The Rules Have Changed!*

## **VII. GO AND SEE!**

Can we believe that, or do we still need to find some kind of proof? Are we still wondering if Jesus is ghost standing among us?!

"Look at my hands; look at my feet—it's really me. Touch me. Look me over from head to toe."

Jesus says to us all. I'm for real! I'm about living in love—not judgment. About grace and acceptance and divine embrace. Put on your Easter Eyes and get seeing in new ways and get moving!

"Now go! Don't stand there gawking, wallowing in guilt and shame and remorse—how you have denied and betrayed and abandoned your Living Lord & Teacher.

Go and live! Go and love! Go and tell! He goes ahead of you—always. Goes ahead of you and waits for you—ready to show you the way! Jesus has Easter Eyes *and* Body on now! Let us follow him in faith, with our own New Eyes—Easter Eyes! Eyes of the heart that see with love! Amen.