

May I speak in the name of the Holy, Living, and Undivided Trinity, one God, now and forever,
Amen.

I want to start this morning with a reflection from my experience here on Good Friday.

I realize that may seem a little out of place, seeing as we're now in to the third Sunday in Easter; but in fact the gospel lesson, the well-known Road to Emmaus story, situates us back on Easter morning; thus the events of Friday are still fresh in the minds of the two disciples who are walking on the road as they talk with one another.

I was working that day, but I was able to be here in church for a bit on Good Friday; and as I knelt and placed myself at the foot of the cross, I did my own sort of personal, confessional reflection on my life, and tried, as best I could, to commune with Jesus. And as I entered into this prayerful, meditative state, I realized that Jesus is the one person, the one friend, if you will, in my life, and in our lives, who knows everything about us, and yet does not abandon us.

When I began visiting with people, back in Vermont in the mid-90s, the first person they assigned me to was a 94 year old woman named Katrina. I've probably talked to you about her at some point in the past, because there are so many things about the time I spent with her that were ultimately meaningful to my ministry.

And one of those moments is the day she finally mustered up the courage to tell me what was really on her mind: that she used to worship Jesus as her Lord and Savior, but now just thought of him more as a friend.

She now trusted me enough to tell me that; and with the very little time I had had in church as an adult, and with no formal theological training, I could do nothing more than listen non-judgmentally, nod my head, and think to myself "well, that sounds faintly heretical."

And of course it wasn't until I got to seminary, took a course on baptismal theology, and was assigned a book entitled *I Have Called You Friends*, that I realized Katrina's words were not heretical at all, but were actually from Jesus himself, on the last night, in the Upper Room, in John's gospel; and that they really reflected the fulfillment of a truer, deeper relationship with Jesus that she was experiencing as she neared death.

And so it was with that view and understanding – of Jesus as a friend who already knows everything about me – that I came to church on Good Friday. I am also reminded of that line from our opening prayer, “and from you no secrets are hid”

What a gift, to have someone, one person, in our lives, who can know everything about us, and yet, still not abandon us.

Because he didn't run away, you know; he didn't throw up his hands and say, “man, you people are messed up, I'm outta here”; he didn't do any of those things. Instead, he knows us, he loves us, and he was faithful to the point of death, even death on a cross, for us.

And as I was sitting there, thinking about how amazing that is, and thinking about having to preach today, I could discern the Spirit's voice, or my voice of inner wisdom, however you might name it, saying, “just tell them that!” So, that's what I'm doing.

Any time you need that comfort, that solace, that friend, that person who is there for you, no matter who you are or what you've done, you can find that person, in the form of Jesus, in and through your relationship with him.

And so with *that* understanding of Jesus as our friend, our companion, who comes alongside of us in our darkest hour, *now* let's transition to him coming alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter morning.

There is so much in this story. We read it every year, and every year something new jumps out at me. So I'm going to take a minute to do what we do when we read scripture together here, and share the word or phrase that jumped out at me when I read it.

This year, it was the line "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us..."

The word "astounded" jumped out at me because in the passage immediately preceding this one, Luke writes that when the women returned to report that they had gone to the tomb, but his body was not there, and they had "seen a vision of angels who said he was alive," the men had supposed it was an "idle tale".

And I'll never forget my very first year in campus ministry with Canterbury; we had a young woman, Rosie, who showed up, on her skateboard, twenty minutes early for her first Bible Study with us, ready to go! Everyone should get to have one student like that at some point. But she was the one, as we read that preceding passage, together with this one, who laughed and said "oh yes, because it was the women, they supposed it was an idle tale!"

But this time I also noticed, through the feminist lens I acquired in seminary, that Luke is acknowledging – when he writes "Moreover, some women of our group" – that there were also female followers, or disciples, of Jesus; and again later, at the end of the passage, when the two disciples return to Jerusalem, it says they found "the eleven, *and their companions* gathered together"

So, those are my points of personal privilege for this morning, and I thank you for allowing me those; now let's get on the road to Emmaus with Jesus and the disciples.

I will confess, there are times when I look at the gospel lesson and say, "hmmm, how am I going to connect this to our common life or experience?" This, however, is not one of those times.

Because it became very clear to me, as I entered into this story, that it also serves as a metaphor for our experience as a congregation, at this time of transition with Caro+ retiring, doesn't it?

We are walking on that road to Emmaus as a parish; as we journey together in search of our next priest, Jesus is walking with us, even if our eyes are kept from recognizing him; the journey is every bit as important as the destination; there is plenty to be learned along the way; we are putting together a parish profile, learning to tell our story of who we are, and Christ is guiding that process as well.

We will be inviting that person we meet along the way to come in and break the bread with us; and we will apprehend Christ's presence with us in those moments, and our eyes will be opened.

And how true it is, similar to my experience on Good Friday, the moment we apprehend, or recognize Christ's, or the Spirit's presence with us, that he/she/it/they will just as quickly vanish or flee from our perception, if not our presence.

Now, I realize as much as anyone here, I hope, that there is a lot going on in the world. In fact, I've seen doomsday prophecies for this very day. Our 24/7 news cycle is new, it's different than when we were growing up; it's designed to divide us and draw us in; outrage sells; we're fed just enough of a headline to get us to click on that article; that's how the algorithms work these days. In fact, I often don't click on them for that very reason. It can all get overwhelming; we might even decide to ignore it all for our own well-being.

There are plenty of concerning issues to choose from: for me, gun violence is at the forefront recently, with horrific, racially-motivated shootings making headlines; there have been devastating legislative attacks on the teaching of Black history in schools, and on lgbtq persons, especially transgender people; continuing draconian assaults on reproductive rights; looming

environmental collapse and degradation; immigration, border crises, wars; unsettling UFO sightings, predictions of the use of nuclear weapons; government leaders entrenched in their own bids and quests for power at the expense of the well-being of those they were elected to represent.

I'm not ignoring these issues, and lord knows church, or our faith, isn't a place where we come to escape from the brokenness and suffering of the world; again, Good Friday is our lesson there.

But I offer these words of comfort and solace this morning about our corporate life together because they are the balm we need, or at least the balm I need, to summon the courage to confront the principalities and powers; to do my part to encourage us to find the collective will, as a people and a nation, to join with new leaders who will confront and address these issues. And Jesus walking on the road with those disciples, and with us, this morning, is the reminder that we are not, and have not been left, alone, bereft, or without consolation.

We don't always recognize it as it's happening; indeed, today's lesson teaches that it is usually upon reflection, "were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?"! that we come to discover Christ was present with us all along; we're just not always aware of it in the moment.

When I think about what we might be looking for in our next rector, I think about the way Caro+ has treaded, or navigated, that very challenging path between priest and friend. It's not easy, you know: to maintain boundaries, and be vulnerable, to be authoritative, and yet intimate, takes a special person, and we have had that.

Those are some of the qualities, I would presume, we're going to be on the lookout for; and we're going to need people to step forward to be part of that search process.

If you're feeling moved to do so, please consider applying to be part of the search committee for our next rector; you're going to be asked about that, as the date to apply is looming. We really need you. The diversity of gifts I have encountered, here in this hallowed space and out in the community with us, is truly amazing. I understand it involves a sacrifice; but sacrificial work is often the most meaningful as well.

In closing, I will leave you with two questions I learned along the way to ask myself when preaching: first, where is the Good News in all of this?, and second, how does it relate to the Eucharist?

The Good News, of course, is that the Risen One is walking alongside us, as a friend, even if we are unaware; and the connection to the Eucharist is that our eyes are opened, and we apprehend Christ's presence, in the breaking of the bread.

Alleluia, Amen.