

Luke 24:1-42

In the Luke passage we just heard, two disciples are walking on the road, and a stranger joins them and talks with them. When they get where they're going, they invite the stranger in. And when they break bread together, they recognize that the stranger they've been traveling with is Jesus.

A companion on the road, a conversation partner, a dinner guest, became Christ. It's Easter season, the part of the year where we often read stories about what happened after resurrection. These two disciples walking on the road, walking out of the urban center where so many difficult things had happened, where someone had been purposely killed, they are walking away from the location of these events and talking.

That's how I see us. So much rough stuff is going on. A long history of patriarchy, under which all of us are oppressed; queer folk, and women, but also men, and everyone. Racism. The pandemic. The war in Ukraine. Rising costs of rent and food. School shootings. Climate change. I think for many of us, this feels like a particularly rough moment in history.

About 10 days ago there was a gathering of delegates from across our denomination, Mennonite Church USA, and the delegates passed some queer-friendly resolutions. That's reason to celebrate; but the celebration can feel in equal measure to the grief. At the very least, it can feel very costly, emotionally and spiritually, for queer identity to be up for discussion like that, up for a vote. And yet, those of us who are queer leaders in Mennonite circles might end up receiving money and resources because of that vote. So.

There's a lot of complexity in our world. I see us trying to make sense of all of it, mulling it over as we travel on. Not walking alone. Showing up for Zoom church.

And I'm wondering, in the one or two or twelve times you've attended Community of Hope, in all the past year and a half of events that we've offered, where Jesus has become known to you.

What moment as mundane as breaking open a loaf to share it, became holy?

How has your experience of this church, brought you hope, brought you resurrection?

I'm asking because I'm wondering where to go from here. This is our 12th regular monthly worship! Our first monthly worship was last year in July. And things are changing. In Bellingham, it has been safe for me to work in cafes again, to socialize a bit more. The library is allowing us to come inside because our hospital COVID case numbers have been low enough for the past few months. I'm wondering if it's time to talk about reaching out to queer folk and their families in Bellingham, to begin to gather an in-person cluster of this Community of Hope.

I'm asking where you've encountered resurrection during your time at this church because I'm wondering whether it's time to increase our frequency of online gatherings. Maybe with the

giving we've seen from within the congregation, and with the grants we're expecting to get this fall, we could start meeting weekly online. We could do prayer and action events where we call our representatives. We could do educational events open to other congregations: trans 101, non-binary 101, what does the Bible say about queer stuff 101. We could have a prayer group. We could do online karaoke. We could have a regular Bible study for just us. We could join the Coalition's activism through their monthly prayer and action hour.

I'm wondering where Christ has become known to you in the life of this church because those are the moments I want to cultivate more of. If no one is being nourished by playing a Kahoots! Game like we did at our New Year's party, then let's not do it again! And if lots of us are all feeling nourished by delving into Scripture, then by all means let us partake more of that rich nourishment!

Chatting and fellowship, prayer and silence, virtual choir and singing, photos of what God might look like, solidarity work with Indigenous partners, grassroots training for nonviolent resistance, Lenten devotionals using queer theology and Scripture, personal stories and testimony, grieving together, celebrating together.

What has been giving you life?

Why did you show up tonight?

What are you hoping to continue?

One of the ways I discern the invitations of God, as I preached about last fall, is joy. Flora Slossen Wuellner, in her book about how to recognize God's voice, calls it abundant life. She says that we know when God is inviting us to something because the Spirit will leap within us. It might be a daunting choice, we might be nervous or anxious or afraid, but somehow we will also be excited, energized, buoyed by the thought of this choice.

Like putting on shoes that make you feel like your best gendered self, the invitations of God feel just right for who we uniquely are. The invitations of God feel joyful, exciting, they feel like life and life abundantly. They don't feel like dread or exhaustion. God's invitations have a yes flavor. They remind me of this poem by Kaylin Haught called *God Said Yes to Me*:

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly

what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don't paragraph
my letters
Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes

We gather as a church united around stories of Jesus, a healer and teacher who kept coming back to life whenever the forces of oppression tried to kill him. We are called to bring our real, messy, messed-up, fabulous selves into this community, to care about one another and to care about the world and to show it through our actions. We are called to seek out abundant life, to feed one another, to touch the holy.

Now I'll invite us to grab a way of writing things down, whether it's your phone or a piece of scrap paper, and write down 5 things that feel like abundant life to you, and/or 5 things you're grateful for in your time at Community of Hope.

I'm hoping this will help our communal visioning about our goals and plans for this next year, the second year in our worshiping life as a church. But at the very least, studies show that gratitude practice is more powerful when we write things down. May this little exercise be a form of mental health bread for you, and offer nourishment. May we be faithful to our God, Holy Wisdom, in experimenting together in these coming seasons, bringing life to we who are here now; and bringing life to those who aren't here yet. Let's build a church for them. May it be so.

Songs during reflection time: Welcome Here + What is your dream for me + Go Out with Joy