

want to affirm to one another and to the world around us that Jesus Christ is risen.

And we do not have to be bound by the difficulty and pain of Friday or by the sense of suspension on Saturday.

There is no shortcut to Easter. God's terms include the crucifixion, suspension, and resurrection. And sometimes that sense of suspension can last an awful long time. Like that. But there will be glimpses of the risen Christ. Easter does not happen because we avoid or deny Good Friday. God transforms the tragedy into a comedy. And it ends well. Jesus is crucified and risen. But the resurrection is a gift of God, while the crucifixion is something that we did. Can you accept the gift of God for yourself today, and my prayer for you is that you experience the resurrected Christ as we break bread together and He gives it to you.

Let us pray.

Gracious god in these moments, may we have a glimpse of your power of resurrection through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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Easter on God's Terms
Luke 24:13-27

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Growing up in the church, as much as I look forward to Easter Sunday, I had a certain ambivalence because, too often the preacher because of the size of the crowd and the bigness of the worship service, would take as an opportunity to preach an extra long sermon. That's not my intent today. But I do want to tell this story. After a long and very boring sermon the parishioners filed out of the church and said nothing to the preacher on the way out. Toward the end of the line was the thoughtful person who always commented on something about the sermon. Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and the love of God. The pastor was thrilled. No one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before; tell me why you think that. Well it reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all understanding, and the love of God because it endured forever.

I assure you that's not my intent.

Let us pray.

Let us now God hear from you, in the power of your resurrection, let us see Je-

sus even at the table that we share. May we catch a glimpse of him so that he can change our lives, to live in this world as a resurrection people through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Last week we learned about the temptation to want Easter on our own terms. This week we look at what it means to receive Easter as a gift on God's terms. During Lent on Wednesday nights several of us had gathered to worship and to talk about the scriptures. We have focused in the story of the Prodigal Son and we've talked about what it means to leave home, lose a sense of home and hunger for God's new home. I have a friend by the name of Craig Barnes, a pastor who wrote a book called *Searching for Home, a Spirituality for Restless Souls*, and in that book he compares our search for God's home to that of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He points out that in Greek tragedy is about things that start well but end badly. But Greek comedy is about things that begin badly, and end well. And his overall assessment is, we are a resurrection people because we are willing to be there when things are going poorly, that's where Jesus meets us in the crucifixion, and discover that God's gift of eternal life is the power of the resurrection. It ends well on Easter Sunday morning.

Have you thought about Easter as a *Divine Comedy*? This Easter is on God's terms. We can't get to Easter without going through Holy Week, Good Friday, the suspension of Saturday, and then experiencing God's gift of resurrection today. We

sary of the loss of his father comes tomorrow and he is still dealing after one year with the deep sense of pain and tension about his father not being there for him. Many of us still wonder if there is a God who can help us in the midst of our difficulty, our destitution or our disease. But Jesus meets the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, even while they're in the pain.

And it's as though Luke wants to give us a sense of the playfulness and whimsy of Jesus. He doesn't suddenly announce himself and say I'm Jesus look at me; I'm raised from the dead. He plays with them a while, and doesn't show them who he is. He berates them for not seeing the obvious. For example who he is. And on this Easter do you feel like God's playing with you? That you're hungering for the resurrection to become a reality for you but you haven't seen it happen yet? Are you retreating back into Good Friday rather than advancing into Easter Sunday? Note the moment of the breakthrough of the story. It's all about the table. There's something happens when Jesus is at the meal with the two, and he breaks bread and he gives it to them, and suddenly their eyes are opened and they see the resurrected Jesus. And it's as soon as they see him that he vanishes from their eyes.

It's if we can't hold onto the resurrected Christ too long. We still have to live with the sense of faith that it's not all resolved and clear. We still live with some of the hints of suspension on Saturday. But we are gathered because we

poggiatura because you see appoggiatura is that moment in music when there is a tension and suspension of that which just hungers to be resolved.

I've asked Debbie to play you an appoggiatura so you can hear it and know what it feels like.

[ORGAN APPOGGIATURA]

Do you feel like you're life at times is kind of suspended there and it hasn't been resolved? Well Easter Sunday morning is about how God resolves the tension. How God brings the appoggiatura to resolution in our lives. And this woman who could no longer play the piano, who could no longer experience the art the way that she had loved it, had to live in this sense of suspension, and what happened for her in poetry was that she experienced the presence of the resurrected Christ as she vocalized her poetic frustration about the loss of music.

We, in our trouble, hunger to know that someone is going to be out there to bring resolution to our pain. Saturday is like the appoggiatura of faith in life. It rolls out a dissonance, it yearns to be resolved, but it cannot be resolved by us. It can only be resolved by the resurrection of Christ the gift of God.

God will resolve it. God did resurrect Jesus from the dead. Our losses will be turned to gains. Our tensions will be resolved, our grief will turn to joy. If there is a Good Friday, there must be an Easter Sunday. This is Easter on God's terms.

I was just talking to a member of our congregation this past week whose anniver-

must live in the reality that we live in everyday life of a wilderness, our desolation, our despair, grief, even our disillusionment. We can't experience this gift of new life unless we have come to grips with the lossness of much of what we have in life. And Luke right after the disciples scattered and hid, when Jesus died they were on their way to many parts of the nation of Israel, particularly their homes and these two were on their homeward bound way to the road to Meas.

They had lost everything. They had been beaten and Jesus had failed in his mission. They were disillusioned and wondering what had happened. They were sad living in the tragedy, grieving the loss and disorientation, and they were feeling all of this on Easter Sunday morning.

It was at that moment that a stranger comes up alongside of them and begins to ask them questions from the Bible. And to get them to talk about their experience of what had gone wrong. And it was that stranger who said, you need to be remembered that Jesus was the one who said he would be crucified and then raised from the dead. It was what the angels had said to the women at the empty tomb that morning. And the Apostle Paul summarized the Gospel in this way, that he preached Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

It's the Gospel on God's terms. We love to believe it's all about the resurrection, but that's the end of the Comedy. It's also a lot about the pain that Jesus went through, the suffering and his lossness, that He gave up all of life and success and vic-

tory in order to be given that new life in the resurrection.

Some churches today celebrate this Sunday as holy humor Sunday. Because they understand it as the conclusion of the Divine Comedy. But most of us live between Good Friday and Easter Sunday morning like the two people on the way to Amaeus. We live in that Saturday suspension, wondering what is going to happen, Jesus has somehow died and left us alone, and we don't know what the resurrection is really about or whether it really even happened. We get caught between the two places, Good Friday and Easter Sunday morning. We get caught in that space at the crossroads of life and we wonder which way to go.

Several years back when I was interviewing for the senior pastor job in the Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania they interviewed me and had me preach in a church in Amaeus. And very near that church there is across the street sign of five points that come together and the sign says if you go to Amaeus it's this direction, Nazareth's this direction, Bethlehem is this direction, Egypt is that direction, and the fifth one, East Texas, is over there.

Texas is bigger than we think it is.

We get caught in that five-point connection between the spaces of where we might end up, as long as it's not in Jerusalem where Jesus died. We live much of our lives in that crossroads and state of suspension. But we are here on Easter Sunday to be drawn into the gift of the resurrection that God gave to Jesus and

gives to us.

As Dante experienced in the Divine Comedy, it is a movement through Hell, through Purgatory and on into Heaven. Good Friday, Saturday, and Easter Sunday. How do we live in that suspension when life doesn't make sense to us? When we haven't yet had the resurrected Christ appear to us?

We have some hints for that in how the two men to Amaeus walked together. They kept walking and talking, dealing with their disillusionment; this as if they were in a recovery grief group together. They talked about their loss and grief, they dealt with the tragedy, wrestled with life and death, they asked questions and then they shared a meal together with their stranger.

It always helps in our suspension of not understanding life completely to be together and to wrestle with it. We're so tempted to go off on our own and hide and be isolated on those suspended Saturdays. We want Easter on God's terms. And God wants to give it to us as a gift. We can't demand it, we can't make it happen, we receive it as the power of God in our lives.

I knew a woman in Washington D.C. who wrote poetry about faith and music. And she published a book that she called *appoggiatura*. She happened to be a pianist who lost the use of her hands, because of a debilitating disease that wouldn't let her play the piano any more. But she learned to write poetry by vocalizing it into a recording system, and then she titled her book of poetry *Ap-*