

**Rev. Dr. Karen Blanchard**  
**“To See with New Eyes and Hearts”**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**  
**Sunday, April 18, 2021**

**Luke 24:1-35**

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.’ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

*As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over.’ So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

**Luke 24:36-53**

*While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in*

*your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.*

*Then he 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 of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'*

*Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Let's pray together. Gracious God, we gathered together to hear your word, to wrestle with your word, to have our minds open, so, be with me as I share the word as you have led me and may we together find wisdom and comfort and peace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

The tradition at our house, and even the children have picked up on it on Sunday nights, as with many of you, is to watch 60 Minutes. A few weeks back, one episode focused on one of our nation's best-known sportswriters, Dave Kindred. Now, Kindred's writing is quite extensive because he's written about and attended many World Series, Super Bowls, and Masters tournaments. Early in his career, he was sent to interview an up-and-coming fighter named Muhammad Ali, and they became friends. That night, we also learned that he has found his most fulfilling work in these pandemic times, writing about girls' high school hoops in central Illinois. Now, in the interview, Kindred shared that he loved reading sports columns as a child. It transported him to places all around the world, and he was fortunate enough to live out his dream of becoming a sportswriter. Whatever the sporting event, he wanted to be there, find the story, and then paint a picture using words and describing the situation. And for all this, he's been honored as one of the best writers.

But then changes came with a decline of print media so he and his wife decided to retire, and they returned home to central Illinois, enjoyed life in their cabin by the pond, and spending time outdoors. But the winters there brought a desire to be with other people and so they found it, where else for him, but in the warmth of a local high school gym, and in their case, it was in Morton, Illinois. He said it was like going home. Kindred and his wife sat in the bleachers alongside parents and grandparents and high schoolers, and they cheered on the team, and his professional instincts kicked in. He offered to cover the Lady Potter's basketball team and put his accounts on Facebook and on the website. But first, he wanted the blessing of the team's coach, Bob Becker, who's been head coach since 1999. He said he was a bit apprehensive at first. Who wants to be second-guessed by a hard-boiled journalist? But then he finally said yes. How could he not? He had the Michael Jordan of sports writing fall into his lap. So, they negotiated hard for his payment: a box of Milk Duds for every game [laughter], and they're faithful in their payments.

Kindred said there's something about girls' basketball that particularly enralls him. And he said he felt he owed a bit to Title IX. He said, "I just love seeing them play. Men's basketball games are vertical, and women's games are horizontal, and they have to master the fundamentals. It's more fun to watch them," he said. "Plus, they don't pout." He said it, not me, okay. Even though COVID had shrunk the season and the crowds, Kindred was always there, fixed on the action and listening to the

huddles. And after every game, he's outside the locker room for a quote from one of the players. He ends his day as ever in front of the keyboard because he learned that some people stay up after the game until his column has come out. One student said, "I get texts from my grandparents saying, "I read Dave's article. Heard you had a good game." It's so special that he's there. He's grown with us, especially this season with the pandemic. And after 300 games and 300 columns and 300 boxes of Milk Duds, understandably, he is a legend in that town. The team members admitted at first when they learned about his background, they were intimidated. But then they realized how committed he is to supporting women's sports, and that for him, writing is a passion like basketball is their passion. And he's grateful for this because, in recent years, things started happening. His grandson died from addiction. His mother died three months later. The next year, his wife had a severe stroke, and he was devastated. He said, "One night, when I was debating whether I should leave my wife in the hospital and go to the game," one of the mothers who worked there said, 'You got to go home. You got to go.'" "She was right," he said, "I went. And that night I realized that what had started as fun had become life-affirming. The team saved me. They became a community. They became my friends. They had helped me in a most difficult time when my life had turned dark, and they were the light. And I came to trust that that light was going to be there every week."

Even in the midst of this year of the pandemic, he wrote, "We'd all lost so much that was familiar. And then the potters gave us a gift. They played their games. There was joy those nights, even in those days that had been so long without joy." I found Dave Kindred's story so moving. Even his own name, Kindred, is a word that means relations and family. He speaks of the power of community to bring joy and healing even in the midst of despair, to bring hope in the midst of loss of the power of community to sustain one another in the midst of a very difficult time. And I found myself remembering last week when Rev. Smutz spoke of the importance of humility that Dave's story is a story shared with humility. It's a story about compassion and kindness and the power of community to sustain us in difficult times even when it feels like all is lost, for Kindred said that with this community, he found that in the midst of the most difficult moments of his life that there were still other joys to be discovered.

I think Kindred's story is a contemporary take on the events that Luke is describing. First, we heard about the women going to the tomb, then the two walking to a mass. The two on the road had been earlier followers of Jesus, and they knew the other followers well. But now their world had been turned upside down. Jesus had died and they heard rumors that he had risen, but they hadn't seen it for themselves. And so, they head home with heavy hearts, supporting one another. and commiserating in their grief when suddenly, a stranger appears and walks with them, and they begin to share the story of their sadness about the death of their beloved leader, and they are startled when the stranger asks who they're talking about. So, they tell him, and they speak of this most unexpected death and their sorrow and the hopes that had died with him. And the stranger speaks to them words of teaching and hope about the Messiah, about the good news. So, when they arrive at their village, in accordance with the hospitality rules of the day, they invite him to share a meal. But at the table, the stranger, not the host, the stranger breaks the bread. And in that moment, they realized just who it is who has been with them. It's Jesus! Jesus was with them even when they didn't realize it. He suddenly vanished, but they're so moved, so overjoyed that they head right back to Jerusalem because they want to share with the community. They now realize what he was trying to tell them, and they want to tell the others that it is as the women had told them. They had been with him. They had been with one another in the midst of terrible loss and grief, and now they wanted to bring them the good news. And they're in the midst of sharing the good news, when Jesus suddenly appears and shares with them the simple words of greeting, "Peace be with you," and they are startled beyond belief.

It may have felt like a homecoming on some level, but I also think that we read, and it's understandable, that some were terrified. They'd heard about it, but seeing Jesus stand right before them is something else altogether. And I imagine they were experiencing different feelings. Some may have felt ashamed because they had run off at his arrest, others because they denied him or were hidden away in locked rooms. No doubt all of them were frightened at the presence of someone before them that they thought was dead. And maybe it was all of those things--joy, terror, shame, and hope, each one struggling to believe that Jesus really is there among them in spite of all that has happened. And so, at that moment, they are together in community, and he speaks to them as his beloved community. He shows them his wounds and then he eats. "Yes, it's me," he says, "I'm

really here with you." And then, he begins to speak with them. As the passage says, he opens their minds with words of challenge and comfort. He opens their minds to prepare them to go out into the world for the time when he will no longer be with them in their daily lives, they are in that place. The story of new life comes out of death. And I found myself thinking this Easter, I could really relate to that. We, like Dave Kindred, have felt isolation, worry, and anxiety, the loss of loved ones of the many things that did happen and could not happen during this last year. But today, hope abounds. We have weathered much of the storm. I don't know about you, but for me this Easter brought about a new sense of rebirth that I experienced in a more profound way. We are coming out of the other side of a difficult journey that has impacted so many of us physically and mentally. Perhaps, we can have our minds opened up in new ways, and like the disciples, experience different feelings.

Today is an Eastertide moment when we can be together here in person as well as online, and I know I speak for the staff when we say we're grateful. We're grateful for the livestreaming because it is more than odd leading worship in a nearly empty sanctuary, but it was good to know that you were out there. I'm also deeply grateful that our theology says we are together in the spirit in worship, even when we are apart in body, and thus able to share the Lord's Supper from afar.

Jesus said the words, "Peace be with you," and they reverberate each time we gather in body or spirit. The words were true then, and they're true now. So, today does feel like a homecoming of sorts. I imagine that those of you online also feel some sense of comfort in meeting and seeing people in the pews, offering all of us a deeper sense of connection to the church community. Seeing others provides the gift of hope that comes with our growing ability to be together bit by bit, a sense of joy in knowing that there is light at the end of this very long tunnel. So now we begin to see one another face to face, even if it is mask to mask, and we feel a sense of relief to be part of something that's a little more normal for us in our daily lives. A reminder that we are really part of a community, a serving community, a worshipping community, a caring community.

As Dave Kindred said, "We are witnessing how joy can come again, even in the midst of loss and change." The kind of joy that comes from being with others who care and support us in the midst of the challenges of life. That is the power of community, to be together, maybe not always embody, but always in spirit, through the body of Christ. A community that allows for the sharing of feelings, the gift of presence, the promise of support in challenging times, to do things in new and creative ways, and to know that, as a community and as a nation, there's a lot of healing that needs to go on with the violence that is going on all across our country. I know locally many of you reached out with notes and calls to others and came to realize that writing the notes was almost as important as knowing that somebody would receive them.

Many of you brought food and supplies for KirkCare and the students in the Kirkwood District or made casseroles for St. Patrick Center or gave to Room at the Inn. Your generosity has been life affirming, and I hope it made you feel like you were helping to ease some of the challenges that others were facing. Like those on the road to Emmaus, moments of action brought moments of hope and brought you closer to others and gave a sense of purpose and meaning in a time when so many normal things couldn't be done. And that's the power of the church, to create a community, a community of support, encouragement and compassion, both in times of joy as well as sorrow, to be the body of Christ moving into the world, to work for peace and healing, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, to be those who served others sometimes when it was least expected and thus even more appreciated, to be the good news as well as to share the good news. And so, like those in the room with Jesus, there is hope. There is anxiety. There is joy. There is challenge. We have more work to do, more serving to do, more loving to do, and that will be a part of our healing. So, thanks be to God, for we are the Easter people. Alleluia! Amen.