

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Sunday, April 23, 2023**  
**10am**

Text: Luke 24:13-35 (NRSVUE)

[prayer]

Today is Earth Sunday, the Sunday closest to Earth Day, and Native American Ministries Sunday, one of six special Sundays in The United Methodist Church. These two Sundays serendipitously combined today to honor the wisdom our Native siblings share about our sacred relationship with Creation. This is a gift indigenous Christians bring to the Church. Our Eastertide series, New Life, invites us to spend time reflecting on our relationship with the earth and its creatures as we ponder all the ways that God's resurrection power is present in creation.

I have brought with me today a unique translation of our Gospel lesson. Two years ago, Rain Ministries<sup>1</sup> and InterVarsity Press published a revolutionary indigenous translation of the New Testament, the *First Nations Version*. They write this in the Introduction:

*“The First Nations Version Translation Council humbly submits this new translation of the Sacred Scriptures as our gift to all English-speaking First Nations people and to the entire sacred family, which is the body of the Chosen One. [This version] was birthed out of a desire to provide an English Bible that connects...to the traditional heart languages of the over six million English-speaking First Nations people of North America. The FNV is a retelling of Creator’s Story from the Scriptures, attempting to follow the traditions of our oral cultures...This way of speaking, with its simple yet profound beauty and rich cultural idioms, still resonates in the hearts of Native people”* (p. ix).

[Reading of Luke 24:20-35 (FNV)]

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://firstnationsversion.com/about/>

I love this translation's name for Jesus: Creator Sets Free. Jesus's Hebrew name, Yeshua, has its roots in *Yah*, the shortened form of Yahweh (the Hebrew name for Creator), and a second word that means 'to rescue, deliver, save, or set free.' So, Jesus's name is literally Yah (Creator)-Sets-Free. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has set us free to new life! We are not bound by sin and death, but instead walk in the freedom of faith in Jesus. Amen? Amen!

Today's Gospel lesson features a famous walk in our tradition, the walk to Emmaus. Which of you have participated in the spiritual retreat that takes its name from this story? The location of the town of Emmaus is no longer known, which is perhaps providential. The road to Emmaus has become whatever journey each of us is on where we encounter the Risen Jesus.

In our story it is still Easter morning; the resurrection is not yet a widespread revelation. The disciples who walk this road walk it with the grief and despair of having watched their hope die on a cross. Like our other resurrection appearance stories, these disciples do not immediately comprehend the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, even after he opens the scriptures for them and explains the purpose of his death.

Which raises the question: If these disciples do not recognize Jesus by his teaching, how then *will* they recognize him?

[pause]

How do we come to recognize the Risen Christ in our midst? The reading and interpreting of Scripture is an essential part of developing our ‘spiritual sight.’ It was during a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to the Letter to the Romans that John Wesley had his encounter with the Risen Christ. He wrote about that experience: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”<sup>2</sup> When Wesley heard the Scriptures read, his heart burned, not unlike the disciples in our story.

But Wesley taught, and we continue to believe as Methodists, that revelation is not contained in Scripture alone. It is also contained in our reason, our tradition, and importantly our experience.

It is not until the *experience* of breaking bread together that the disciples’ “eyes were opened, and they recognized [Jesus]” (v. 31).

Faith comes through revelation, and the table is a central form of revelation in our tradition. We do not ‘fence the table’ and require baptism or church membership to take communion because as Methodists we believe deeply that the Risen Jesus will meet at this table any person who desires to know and love God. At the communion table we receive a unique form of divine revelation – revelation not in the form of words, but in the form of action: The action of breaking bread together. This action is called the *anagnorisis* – the moment when our eyes are opened and we recognize the body of the Risen Christ in the people gathered around this table, the hands upheld for bread, the common cup we share.

---

<sup>2</sup> Journal (ed. N. Curnock) 24 May 1738

Before the Church was the Church, with all the freighted meaning that word carries, it was a small community gathered around a meal with the belief that Jesus was somehow present in the bread and the cup. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.” Sharing food is central to our spiritual DNA as Christian disciples. Truthfully, it is central to our spiritual DNA as human beings. At the meal table, we recognize our common humanity. At the meal table we build relationships around our shared need to be fed. At the meal table, our souls are refreshed in hospitality and fellowship. Every meal has the potential of being a sacred occasion.

This sacredness of our table is connected to the sacredness of the earth, who yields up her life for our sustenance. Our egg-emerging creature this week is the fish, specifically the salmon. This creature holds special meaning for our region because of its crucial role as a source of food.

In seminary I served a rural congregation in western North Carolina. My host, a lifelong resident of the area, was a passionate home cook. She made me classic Southern recipes: shrimp and grits, baked okra, pimento cheese sandwiches.

“What kind of food do you eat in the Pacific Northwest?” she asked. The first food that came to my mind was salmon. Salmon is a regular source of protein in my family’s household: wild, not farmed; Pacific, not Atlantic. In the fall we would camp at Kootenay Lake Provincial Park in Nelson, BC and watch the Kokanee spawning in the creek. We learned about their lifecycle. We learned about all the other wildlife who depend on salmon for food. We learned about their importance to the Ktunaxa and Shuswap First Nations.

Perhaps more than any other food I eat, salmon reminds me of relationships. It reminds me of my family and the lifegiving ritual of sharing a meal together. It reminds me of my dependence on God's gift of Creation to nourish and sustain my body. It reminds me of the beautiful and varied landscapes I am blessed to call home. And ever more the salmon reminds me that I am also called to be in reconciling relationship with my Native neighbors and do my part to help right some of the wrongs of the past. Native American Ministries Sunday is a small step in that direction as we build awareness of our Native siblings and affirm their sacred worth to the Church and the world.

[pause]

Today at this table we will encounter again the Risen Jesus and receive his gift of new life. But we have not been set free into new life for our sakes alone. It is for the sake of our mission that we have been set free. And our mission is to partner with God and our neighbors in bringing new life to the places and systems that are crying out for the hope of resurrection. We extend the hospitality of this table through our works of justice and compassion in the world. In the breaking of this bread, we recognize not only our sacred relationship with our Savior but also our sacred relationship with our neighbors and the earth.

The late Colville Tribal elder Mary Marchand once said, “If you bring back our salmon, you will bring back our culture.”<sup>3</sup> We know that salmon are increasingly endangered, and their endangerment is having widespread effects on ecosystems across the Pacific Northwest. For decades dams have kept salmon out of their historic habitat in the Spokane River, to the economic, cultural, and spiritual loss of our local tribes. A week ago, the Coeur d’Alene Tribe did their annual release of juvenile chinook salmon into the spring flows of Hangman Creek. This creek will carry the fish into the Spokane River, out past the dams on the Columbia, and to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>4</sup> The fish that are lucky enough to survive this journey will spend four years maturing in the ocean and then make their way back up the Columbia to Bridgeport; but because of the Chief Joseph Dam, that is as far as they can go. So, members of the tribe will travel to Bridgeport and collect the salmon and bring them home to our waters.

Thanks be to God for their lifegiving witness to justice and stewardship! May that witness bring new life to all our tables and inspire each of us to be good and just stewards, too, of our sacred relationship with each other and Creation.

Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://outthereoutdoors.com/tribes-help-salmon-return-to-historic-habitat/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/v4tGwbiHrls>