### 1 Peter 1:17-23

**17**Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. **18**For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,**19**but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **20**He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. **21**Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

**22**Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. **23**For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

### Luke 24:13-49

**13**Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14**They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15**As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16**but they were kept from recognizing him.

**17**He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. **18**One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

**19**“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. **20**The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21**but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22**In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23**but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24**Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

**25**He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!**26**Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” **27**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

**28**As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. **29**But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

**30**When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31**Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.**32**They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

**33**They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34**and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” **35**Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

**36**While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

**37**They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. **38**He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? **39**Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

**40**When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. **41**And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” **42**They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43**and he took it and ate it in their presence.

**44**He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

**45**Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. **46**He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, **47**and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48**You are witnesses of these things. **49**I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

“Black Thumbs and Imperishable Seed”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

April 23, 2023

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There are two simple points I hope to share with you this morning, and both are so crucial to our lives of faith that I hope you will listen very closely. In fact, their simplicity is rooted at the center of our faith. Maybe we won’t use the word *crucial,* or speak of the *crux* of the matter without thinking of the cross at the center of our faith after today. That is the root of the word crucial, after all. This morning, we can know that our rebirth from imperishable seed, and our encounters on the Emmaus Road are as important in our lives as Jesus’ crucial act for us on the cross.

While teaching at Kent School in Connecticut, I had the privilege of working with a man named O.B. Davis, who had written the text for our class in Biblical Literature. Teaching a program of fairly significant literature through the ages, O.B. had realized that students knew less and less of the biblical stories that are alluded to in many of our most significant novels and poems. So, rather than moan about the kids’ illiteracy, he decided to teach them what they most needed to know about the Bible, at least from the perspective of an English teacher. Even if none of us ever pick up a novel or poem that mentions it, I hope that after today you will have a sense of you own Emmaus experiences. We all have them, I’m sure.

Have you ever had an *a ha* moment? The disciples sure did. Think about it. Reeling in the aftermath of their good friend and teacher’s prosecution and crucifixion (There’s that root word of cross again.), two of the disciples walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and Jesus joins them. Somehow, though, maybe because of their shock or maybe because they don’t expect to see Jesus, they don’t recognize him. They walk and talk for a long while, but it is not until they invite him to share dinner with them, in the breaking of the bread that their eyes are opened to Jesus’ presence with them. I’m sure that I, for one, have had more than one of these Emmaus moments. You see, what Jesus promises to the disciples after he reveals himself to the larger group is true for us. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, so that we also might know God’s presence with us, walking beside us and opening our eyes. Sometimes, though, we are too much like the two who spent so long a time with him, never seeing Jesus for who he was.

Context is everything, isn’t it, and too often we also aren’t looking for a resurrected Christ. While in Massachusetts some time ago, I bumped into two women. I knew that I knew them. In fact, what crossed my mind was this thought, several times: I know you very well, and I love you, but I don’t know who you are. I finally figured it out when one asked whether my mom were with me. A ha! They are from the Camden Church! In fact, one was the wife of the pastor, and we had stood for hours talking in coffee hour through the years. But I wasn’t looking for them in Massachusetts. Maybe the disciples simply didn’t recognize Jesus because they weren’t expecting to see him. In fact, and this is kind of an amusing part of the story, if you didn’t catch it. They tell Jesus . . . about Jesus—about his death and what had been their hopes of him. They were thinking about a crucified Jesus, and not a risen one. Maybe we do the same thing.

Opening our eyes to His presence, Jesus still has the ability to grant us the peace he wished for his disciples. When we look around us, not blinded by our busyness or dulled by our skepticism, but open to seeing God in what surrounds us, we may indeed have the *a ha* gift of recognition. Jesus, you know, is among us today. He told us as much when he broke bread with his disciples, before he was crucified, and when he returned to them after his resurrection. How much do we remember Jesus in the breaking of the bread? We have the opportunity this morning when we share in a time of fellowship after worship, and again on the first Sundays of each month when we celebrate Communion. You may keep this in mind when you have the kind of clouded over, down in the dumps, can’t see the possibility for light or renewal kind of day that you believe will never turn around. I have had these kinds of moments and sometimes days, and on this side of it, with the literal sun shining through the windows of the church and my life, I believe God will continue to make God’s presence known, if I will open my eyes.

Sometimes, though, I get in my own way. Thinking about our lesson from Peter today, I chose the title for this morning’s sermon, and I hope that you don’t join me in having a black thumb. You see, when it comes to actual, should-be living, green and colorful plants, I don’t do too well. I am best off sticking with cacti and the occasional pachysandra. Otherwise, I either ignore them too much or water them too well, it seems. You can ask Val Libby, who gifted me with a sea onion, proclaiming then that it is “impossible to kill.” She took it back after about a half a year, having to resurrect it. Even my daughter Emma asks for regular photos for proof of life of the cacti she left in my care while she is away this semester. That said, despite my worst attempts to keep them alive, and often apparently killing plants in my home, some persist. Others appear to regenerate without paying any attention to my inattention. Thankfully, the image that first Jesus and here Peter uses for us isn’t affected by my own efforts. God is the one who tends our growth. Jesus is the more careful gardener of our lives. While we may sometimes have our eyes closed to the way in which Jesus cares for us, we *are* reborn into imperishable seed through life in the Holy Spirit.

Given my black thumb, I have only twice tried to start plants from seed. One time, the seeds rotted from over watering. The second time, the little sprouts that came up tipped over in their weakness and eventually shriveled and died long before I could transplant them. Again thankfully, the seed in my life that is imperishable is not a physical seed to rot. First Jesus and now Peter makes clear that it is not our physical nature that is born again in a life in Christ. The Holy Spirit within us draws us into a life of the Spirit that is eternal. If we were to count as the entirety of our life what happens to our physical bodies, even our hearts, of course we might remain in the dark place of discontent or even despair. This is not what Jesus promises, though, and in opening our eyes in faith, and in leading us through the Word of God that is the Bible, we live into the imperishable stuff of our existence that has the greatest value.

And all around us, with our eyes searching for Jesus, we can see this Spirit in others. When we look for Jesus, that is, when we look for the goodness in others, we may find Jesus in unexpected places. I would like to ask that you *each* find Jesus in someone this week. Yes, I am asking each of you to see Jesus this week. You may find him in someone you know, or you may find him in someone you meet for the first time. If we are *not* looking for Jesus, though, Jesus may remain hidden from our view. *Expecting* Him to be everywhere we look, we may indeed *find* him everywhere we look. Then, in finding Jesus all around us, we will know the new hope of resurrected life in the endless possibilities for renewal and for peace that we see in new places. Maybe it will be at the dinner table with family. Maybe it will be while picking up a coffee at Bucklin’s. Maybe it will be while making copies at work or while pumping gas and receiving a smile. Let’s look, and let’s know the presence of the Holy Spirit stirring us to new life. Amen.