

Sermon Prepared by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes for Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021

(Luke 24:36b-48)

Today's reading from Luke is a continuation of one of the dominant themes we find in the sequence of readings beginning on Easter morning: the theme of *transformation*.

Remarkably, this Lucan passage takes place late on the same day as the resurrection. I invite you to go back when you have a moment and read chapter 24 in its entirety. You'll discover that everything through verse 48 occurs within a span of *hours*, not *days*. With verse one, for instance, we begin the journey with the group of women – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others – and then Peter as they first discover and then wrestle with the meaning of the empty tomb. Later, beginning at verse 13, we bear witness to the encounter of two unnamed disciples with Jesus as they journey on the road to Emmaus ... an encounter that ends with the two immediately rushing back to Jerusalem after Jesus vanished to share their news with the disciples.

(As an aside we see in the Emmaus section of chapter 24 simply that the two got up and returned to Jerusalem. That, my friends, is what I see as an example of *understatement*. I don't think it was a slow and casual stroll back along the seven miles they had just walked. I think they *leaped up and ran* – ran faster than they had ever run before, perhaps even leaving behind some of what they may have been carrying with them. I don't care what the author of Luke has written: you simply don't see the resurrected Jesus ... you don't walk and talk with him ... you don't sit to share a meal with him ... and then casually *stroll back home*.)

Now, with this morning's reading, we pick up where the previous section ends ... with those two having rejoined the 11 and others to talk about all that had taken place. We're given the blessing of witnessing Jesus appear among this group and hearing his voice speak words of reassurance: "*Peace* be with you." We share in the wild swing of emotions felt by those in that room in the first moments following Jesus' appearance in their midst. They are startled. They are terrified. They are overjoyed. They are confused. They are wondering. We stand next to them as they stare wide-eyed and see for themselves the wounds in his hands and feet and side. We experience relief and comfort as the Jesus we had watched die and be buried on the first day now on this third day look at us ... and talk with us ... and eat with us.

Despite all of the emotion, fear and uncertainty, they know without question that they *and we* have witnessed ... have experienced ... a transformative moment. Old life has been transformed into new. Death has been transformed into life. Hope and promise have been transformed into fulfillment and reality. Everything they thought they *knew* was *no more*, transformed into what they were now *learning* ... and *living*.

This morning we as disciples gathered here in this sacred space are about to share in the blessing of witnessing yet another moment of transformation. The gift of new life ... new life as a member of this community ... and new life ... a spiritual rebirth in the baptism

event ... are soon to be received by little Sawyer Wence, in the presence of his parents and siblings, grandparents and godparents, and each and every one of you.

As much as *Sawyer's* life will be transformed ... as much as the lives of those in his family will be transformed ... *you also will be transformed*. It is a transformation we experience in *every baptism*: the transformation from *casual observer* to *active participant*. When you walked through the door this morning, you came simply as *worshipers* ... but you will depart this place as *so much more*. You will leave with an *added call*. You will leave with *added responsibilities and expectations*.

The first vow you will take is a promise of responsibility to Sawyer: to do all in your power to support him in his life in Christ. But then your role expands into even greater responsibilities, *to yourselves and the world* ... and through them, *to find yourselves transformed and to transform the world*.

It is transformation found in continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. It is transformation beginning with persevering in resisting evil, and, when necessary, repenting and returning to the Lord. It is transformation born through proclaiming through your speech and your actions the Good News of God in Christ. It is transformation based in seeking and serving Christ in all persons ... *all persons, without exception* ... and loving your neighbors ... *all neighbors, without exception* ... as yourselves. It is transformation rooted in striving for justice and peace among all people ... *all people, without exception* ... and respecting the dignity of every human being ... *every human being, without exception*.

The first disciples accepted, embraced and lived into their moments of transformation. As he grows, we pray Sawyer will live into each of the moments of transformation he encounters. May each one of you accept your roles and your responsibilities: to love; to accept; to nurture; *to be transformed*; and *to transform*.

Amen.