

With a Little Help From Our Friends

By Rev. Eric Moeller, delivered at St Lucas UCC, May 4-5, 2019

Jewel and Alice, ladies and gentlemen. There's another clip from this interview in which they state that their faith is most inspired by one another. These two incredible women met here at the church and their first bond was over tending to men that just had appendectomies, probably commiserating about the fun I'm sure that was. Until Alice's passing, what followed was a deep friendship of sharing life together, keeping each other going, inspiring the growth of faith, and walking the walk of discipleship together. All of us should be so lucky. Alice and Jewel serve as an example of the relationships that can be formed among disciples of Christ, and they carry on a legacy set before us in scripture, as we see such sustaining relationships in the friendships of the first disciples, the early church.

The first disciples were all pulled together by Jesus; by their faith and what they saw in him that compelled them all to follow him. As they journeyed together, they learned together, they grew together, they experienced hardship together, and their bonds of friendship grew strong. Thus when Jesus was killed, they didn't disband, but stayed together. For three days, they were waiting in fear and uncertainty, wondering what would come next, and perhaps even if their lives were in danger. In the midst of all of this, two disciples, two friends, take a walk to get out of town.

So what do you do when things don't quite work out the way you hoped? Or when things are just kind of shocking and bewildering? What do you do when you need to work out a perplexing problem? What do you do when you've suddenly lost someone you love, especially when you thought they would be there forever? You likely call a friend, maybe take a walk, and you share your story in its fullness and try to pull it apart and analyze it to make sense of it, and try to figure out how you can or should handle the situation you're in. That's exactly what's happening on the road to Emmaus. It's two friends on the journey of discipleship together just trying to process everything that they've experienced.

As they walk along, someone who seems a stranger comes alongside them and wishes to join in the conversation of friends. He asks the disciples, 'What are you discussing as you walk along?' At first the disciples are stunned with saddened disbelief that someone didn't know what was going on. But it doesn't take much pressing for them to spill their guts and tell the story. That's how we are in tough situations, right, willing to open up when a person expresses concern or curiosity, and this, I suppose, is how friends are made. They come alongside, at times maybe out of nowhere, and simply ask, 'What's going on?' And, if we are able to drop our suspicions and follow perhaps our best instincts, we open up and share. Then, if we're able to be vulnerable with one another, that's when the wisdom can surface, from even an unexpected and unknown source.

On the road to Emmaus, after the disciples open up to this stranger, he then opens up to them. Of course he already knew, but he heard their predicament and confusion, and he is able to make sense of it all. He is able to explain how all of these happenings, even suffering and death, fit into God's ultimate story of God created the world, creation fell short of God's intention, and God seeks to redeem and restore it. It all is laid before them, and it, miraculously, makes perfect sense. The things this new friend shares is exactly what they need to make sense of the past and the mysteries of the present to move into the future in hope. This is precisely what we hope for from our friends: wisdom that can help us figure things out so we can keep going. It's no wonder then that the disciples seek to draw this stranger in, as they ask him to stay with them when he begins to walk away. They've found a new friend.

As friends do, he accepts their invitation, and, as they share a sacred meal together, he reveals his identity, and then disappears. They only caught a glimpse of the Risen Christ, but, he was indeed there, as he is indeed here. We catch glimpses of him most clearly in the friendships we form here with one another. He appears when we are able to walk together as those early disciples, expressing concern for one another, and making room for new friends in our conversations and our lives, perhaps people we've never spoken deeply with, or spoken with at all. He appears when we journey together, share our joys and our sorrows with one another, take the time to talk complex problems through, share our wisdom with one another, give each other courage to continue on the journey, share sacred meals together, maybe call each other fools every once in a while, but continue our journey together, as friends, nonetheless. Like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, we too may feel like we are in a strange and

uncertain time, unclear about what is to come. But, also like them, we will get by with a little help from our friends.