

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

Let us pray. Jesus, our guide, you explained the scriptures and revealed yourself to the disciples at Emmaus. Now by your spirit enlighten our minds to understand their witness and ignite our hearts to receive you through your word.

Amen.

Our lesson from the New Testament scripture is Luke 24:13-35. Let us hear the spirit speak today.

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about 7 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 still looking sad?" Then one of them, who's 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 is 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."

Verse 25 "Then he said to them "Oh how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the 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 of the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all of 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 to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed it 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 11 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 beginning in the breaking of the bread.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen

We are always walking with God. Very often we don't see him next to us because our human emotions blind us. This time in all of our lives is a time of change. We are stepping off into the shallow end of adulthood. Many of our lives today do not look how we thought they would. At least for me. However the Lord's plan is not ours, nor is it for us to know. Sometimes God sets things in motion in our lives before we even know to look for them. When I didn't get into my first school of choice, I was devastated. I was super anxious during the entire application process, and it all felt like such a big decision, and it was a little overwhelming. But my mom kept saying "If you don't get in, then it's not where you're meant to be." I didn't appreciate her super Presbyterian predestination perspective. It wasn't very helpful. Then when I was rejected, it felt like a statement about who I was as a person and my worthiness. I took some time to be sad about it, and then I had to move on to my other options. And you know what? She was right. Don't tell her I said that. Once I was able to move past the rejection, I found a school that feels like home. When Jesus meets his disciples on the road to Emmaus, they are too preoccupied with their own emotions and thoughts to recognize the miracle of God's love that is walking with them. It is not until their eyes are opened that they recognize him at the table. As scripture tells us, not that they opened their eyes but by the grace of the Lord they were opened.

Maybe if we weren't too focused on opening our eyes, they might be opened for us. That's the part that gets me. They were kept from recognizing him. It says these two people were quite literally walking with Jesus, but they didn't realize it. They were confused, disappointed, maybe even grieving. And even though Jesus was right there beside them, they couldn't yet see it was him. And I think that's something I can relate to. Maybe we all can. There are so many times in my life where I've been asking God for answers. What am I supposed to do? Where are you in this? Why don't I feel you? And looking back I can see that God was moving. I just don't and didn't recognize him at the time.

So often, like the people walking on the road to Emmaus, I've been so focused on what I thought was missing that I almost missed Jesus walking right beside me. The beauty of our faith is that we don't have to know the plan and we aren't meant to. We can trust that God has a plan for us that is greater than any we could imagine. It's a little scary when we don't know where we are or what's going on. But maybe that's the point I believe that's faith. Maybe recognizing Jesus isn't always immediate nor obvious. Maybe we need each other's stories and perspectives to help us see what God is doing. Everything feels better and easier when we do it together in community. Hard times seem easier. Good times seem to be enriched. And everything in between is just

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

better when we embrace those around us. Sometimes we won't recognize Jesus in the moment, but that doesn't mean he's not there. It means God isn't done showing you yet. So if you're in a place of uncertainty, if you're walking down a road where things feel unclear, keep walking. Keep asking questions. Keep talking with each other like those disciples did, because Jesus and God have this way of showing up in the middle of our conversations, our doubts, and our everyday walks. And eventually we'll realize he's been there the whole time. Amen.

Diet Pepsi, Diet Coke, and Water. These are arguably the most consumed drinks in my house. Diet Pepsi by my dad, Diet Coke by my mom, and water by me. My mom often tells people that I am a big water drinker, that you never have to worry about me getting dehydrated. But during my freshman year I spent a week in the hospital unable to eat or drink. I was admitted because of ulcers caused by medication I was taking. The ulcers were so painful that swallowing anything, even water, felt unbearable. Research says a person can survive about 3 weeks without food but only about three days without water. Even though they were giving me fluids through an IV during my hospital stay, I was still desperately thirsty. I couldn't even take a small sip of water without feeling like my throat was burning. Our scripture today comes from the Gospel of Luke. It tells us the story of two confused, heartbroken men walking away from Jerusalem on Easter Sunday. They are still unaware of Jesus's resurrection. And as they walked a man joined them and began explaining the scriptures, showing how everything that had happened was part of God's plan for Jesus as foretold in the Gospel. By nightfall the two men invited their new companion to stay with them. In verses 29 through 30 it says "Stay with us for it is nearly evening. The day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. It was in this moment in the breaking of the bread that the men recognized the stranger as Jesus. They were disappointed in themselves for not realizing it sooner. And it made me reflect on how similar I am to those two men. While I wasn't walking a literal road, confused and sad, I was on a metaphorical one. I struggled a lot while writing the sermon trying to connect it with other pieces of scripture. When I met with David, he pointed me toward Isaiah 55:1 which says "Everyone who thirsts comes to the waters." That verse really stayed with me. The two men on the road were thirsty not for literal water but for understanding, for clarity about God's plan. Right before I had a procedure done during my stay, I got a visit from our amazing youth leader, Jeanene. I was extremely nervous for this procedure, because I had never been to the hospital before and I had also never been put under anesthesia. Of course Jeanene was the sweetest, most comforting face to see that morning. Towards the end of our talk she handed me a knitted blanket. It consisted of all different colors like green, purple, blue, and yellow. She told me it was a prayer shawl made by some ladies from the church. The shawl gave me comfort as I was wheeled downstairs shortly after. I felt so connected to my Idlewild community and to the prayers of the people here that

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

care about me. After I woke up I was able to drink a full bottle of water. I had satisfied my thirst just like Jesus was able to sat satisfy these two men's thirst for knowledge of the gospel. They were drawn to Jesus because of the way he explained the scriptures and revealed the meaning behind the suffering he endured. My experience reminded me that we too are often spiritually thirsty. And, like those men, we might not always recognize the presence of God walking beside us in our moments of confusion, grief, or uncertainty. At what times in your life have you felt distant from God? Maybe you have experienced a health crisis. Maybe you have grown distant from a friend or loved one. Maybe the world's current events have made you feel helpless. In these challenging times where have you found community? Maybe it's been your family. Maybe it's been your chosen family. Maybe it's been a teacher a co-worker or a mentor. One of the amazing attributes of community is that it can appear in a variety of ways and at unexpected times. Perhaps these challenges that are placed in our lives are reminders of the importance of relying on each other to help shine a light on the path. So it is important that we don't walk the path alone. If we seek out scripture and lean into its wisdom, we'll begin to see the path God has laid for us with greater clarity and purpose. We have a particular thirst that only God can satisfy. And through our church community and the guidance of everyone here we will be led to the waters that reflect back God's path for us. Amen.

Growing up with an older brother we fought a lot. We fought over insignificant things such as which piece of cake was bigger or which glass had more Sprite in it. But we also fought over more significant things such as who got to sit next to which grandparent at dinner or who got to give mom and dad the last hug before they went out to dinner that night. Because of this we didn't always have the most smooth sailing relationship. I bossed him around like nobody's business, and he would often try to fight me, sometimes even physically. Everyone always told us when we were younger that we would be best friends one day; but as all siblings do at this age, we just rolled our eyes and went back to fighting. Flash forward to July of 2023. Reed was one month away from going to Texas for college, and I was about to start my junior year of high school. Our family was going through a hard time, and there was many different feelings. But who else was experiencing the unrest like I was? Reed was. So naturally we started getting closer. We had many a Sunday Sonic run and random late night talks in each other's rooms. But this wasn't because we were trying to like each other. It was because we knew that the 16 years we had spent together under the same roof were quickly coming to an end. Similar to how the people had their eyes open to Jesus in the village he vanished as we read in Luke 24:31. But their eyes were not opened because they chose to do so. Their eyes were opened because God opened them. However Jesus left them as soon as they realized who he was. The disciples had just found Jesus's tomb empty. What else were they supposed to do other than walk to Emmaus with each other and discuss those days events? They were somber and everyone was overwhelmed with

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

what had just happened. Just as Reed and I allied at home because of the way God helped us through our season together. If it weren't for Reed I would have been alone. And if it weren't for Jesus showing up on those two men's paths, they too would have been alone. This companionship aided them in being kind to what seemed like a stranger. Lucky for them he wasn't a danger or threat. He was a really important though disguised man who was also on a journey of his own. As I am in this new threshold- a season of change. As I prepare to go off to school myself, I am on my own road to Emmaus. I have so much to look forward to in terms of what God will put on my path. And I am grateful for those who started the journey with me and kept going even when things got overwhelming and hard. My relationship with Reed and my parents is bound to change like the disciples relationship with that man—a stranger turned to a friend. God puts people in our lives at the time we need them most. And I encourage all of you to slow down when things feel hard and look for them. Jesus vanished from their sight, but he did not leave them altogether. The people who make us—our friends, our family, our peers—they don't leave us either, Whether they move to a different city, take a new job, or go to a different school, they are still a part of who you are. They walked that road with you at some point. From time to time things will remind you of relationships or events from the past. And maybe it's when you least expect it. Whenever I hear Hot to Go by Chopper Run next year, I'll think of my dad and the time we went to that concert together. Whenever I hear Fearless by Taylor Swift, I'll think of that Tik Tok my mom and I made before the Eras tour. And whenever I feel sad or overwhelmed, I know I can always call my brother, because I know together we can get through anything.

On my drive home a few weeks ago, as I turned onto the rush of traffic at the Sam Cooper and Tilman intersection, I looked into my rearview mirror and noticed something odd. I had tears in my eyes. After a confused wipe of my sweatshirt sleeve, I then realized why I had found myself crying—the lyrics of the music in the background. I started the song over, and about 2 minutes and 20 seconds later as I listened to the words "Try to give a little, try to be a little, try to see a light in the dark," the tears were flowing again Eventually I navigated the tumultuous lanes of Sam Cooper got home safely and went about my after school routine. But as I sat down to work on this very sermon's outline, I couldn't help but remember those lyrics and their message. At the beginning of this school year as I felt the weight of looming college applications and heavy and upcoming extracurricular commitments, I attended the concert of singer and artist Joy Elakun, where I heard the aforementioned lyrics live. Standing in Minglewood Hall enjoying music with two of my best friends, I saw living proof of what it means to make the decision to seek out and guide one's life by undying trust in the Lord. Like the reminder written into Jooy's brilliant song lyrics, Luke 24: 13-35 calls us higher and invites us to be courageous, to find the everpresent light even when it seems that all around us is dark. The prophet Luke makes it very clear that

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

Cleopas, his fellow traveler, and Jesus take their initial trip from Bethlehem to Emmaus and break bread together in the evening. So when the two disciples see Jesus's resurrected form sitting at their kitchen table, they have a choice. Should they do the easy thing and rest until the morning before sharing the news, or should they make the more difficult choice and endure the seven mile journey back to their starting point from just a few hours ago? It's easy for us to imagine that moment of consideration, but scripture doesn't even mention it. As the prophet Luke explains it, the two encounterers of Jesus immediately and without any hesitation get up from the table and go. Cleopas and his fellow unnamed traveler take the dark and likely dangerous multi-mile journey to tell the 12 what they've seen. Jesus has just been betrayed, crucified, body stuck in a tomb, And yet the two who saw him find the light in the darkness and immediately journey to the others who followed Jesus in order to share that very same light. I believe the story of Luke to be an invitation to choose the hard right rather than the easy wrong. In his masterful 1952 book *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck explains this privilege of human choice through the idea of Timul. As Steinbeck's principal character, Lee explains to protagonist Adam Timshiel, the Hebrew word for 'thou mayest' presents the glory of the choice, the thing that makes a man a man. Lee's advice comes at a time of seemingly undying darkness for Adam. His wife has hurt him and left him alone with young twin boys whose troubling behavior now reminds the lonely father of Cain and Abel. And Tim provides Adam with a new perspective on life that serves as the impetus for his later courageous choices to forgive the people who have wronged him. Like Steinbeck's characters the travelers on the road to Emmaus serve as an incredible example of how the divine spirit can descend upon mankind as such a situation makes a man great. For in his weakness and in his filth and his murder of his brother, he still has the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through to win. Cleopas and his fellow traveler's decision to walk the road from Bethlehem to Emmaus in the dark of night to share the fulfillment of the prophecy of the resurrected Lord serve as a reminder of the power of consciously choosing to share the goodness of the unexpected moments the world has to offer.

Tim, thou mayest take the glowing ember of divine glory not as a source of light for ourselves but as the spark meant to share with others. Tim, thou mayest walk down the path of danger and despair to share the good news of a risen savior. Tim, thou mayest get up from a comfortable resting place and do the thing that scares you, trusting that your God is walking alongside you, likely just a little bit ahead.

I'd like to think that if the two travelers found themselves at the Sam Cooper and Tilman intersection one day, they too would have been a little bit weepy at the song lyrics I found myself listening to just a few weeks ago. For it is in their attempt at trying to give a little, trying to be a little, and trying to see a light in the dark that we should be emboldened today to do the same. To know that we have the glory of the choice. To know that we may make the journey. Amen.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025

I've looked forward to my senior year since I was about 14. I've always been so excited about the parties and the dresses and the freedom and the lasts. Throughout high school, senior year has always sat on the horizon waiting for me to walk into it to the sound of trumpets fanfare and cheering. And before I knew it, I did walk into my senior year. But there was no fanfare and no cheering. And I was the same person I had spent years becoming. As my senior year went on, I found myself in a position increasingly similar to the position in which we find the two disciples in today's reading, plodding forward having having been promised salvation, redemption, someone who could redeem the world from darkness, a savior, and receiving only their friend Jesus's crucifixion. Unbelievable stories about an empty tomb, confusion and grief. On November 19th of what I thought would be my perfect senior year, my mom died. I lost the life I'd expected to have just as the disciples lost their expectation for a perfect painless redemption. Truthfully, I can't paint you a picture of an 18-year-old girl who suddenly lost her faith. Nor can I tell you my faith grew stronger than ever. More than anything I think I felt like those disciples as they walked towards Emmaus, having no choice but to move forward, grief and heartbreak in tow. And as I walked the road just like those disciples, Jesus himself could have appeared to me in the flesh, dusty sandals and all, and I don't know whether I would have recognized him. But the good news is this. Your ability or inability to see Jesus plays absolutely no role in whether or not Jesus is there. Jesus was with those disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their disappointment and sadness, their humanness clouded their view. But Jesus was there. Even with Israel's chief priests and rulers wreaking havoc on the land they had grown up in, even with this mysterious empty tomb, even with life as the disciples had known it taking a sharp left turn, Jesus was there. And that didn't solve every problem, that didn't heal every wound, but Jesus was there. My mom died and Jesus was there. That doesn't mean that everything is okay. That doesn't mean that things happen for a reason. That doesn't mean that she's in a better place, but it does mean that Jesus was there. It means in the middle of my sorrow, I could cling to a God whose presence and love I never had to doubt even if I did. And God loved my doubt too. Some of us might get lucky like the disciples did and see God revealed to us in some way shape or form in this lifetime. And some of us might not. God is still there. Maybe God's timing will align with your own and your expectations will be met and you'll have the perfect senior year. Or maybe not. God's still there, and God is still planning You might hear God's call clear as day. Or you might not. God's still there and God is still calling. Maybe when you feel the breeze on your skin, you feel the breath of God. Or maybe you just feel wind. You might get a kind, handwritten note that says "Sorry for your loss," and recognize the warmth of God in the ink. Or maybe you just read the words. Perhaps you're deeply familiar with God's presence. Perhaps you're not. God is there in all of it. You do not have to be aware of the presence of God to be held by it. Amidst our grief and our joy, our busyness and our stillness, our task isn't to force ourselves to see God. It's to trust that even when we can't, God is still there. Amen.

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

High School Seniors - Youth Sunday
Sunday, April 27, 2025
