

“Receive Love, Joy, and Peace”
Message by DD Adams
Kemptown Providence U.M. Church
3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER
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The Old Testament lesson is taken from Psalm 4:3-8. Know this: the Lord takes personal care of the faithful. The Lord will hear me when I cry out to him. So be afraid, and don't sin! *Think hard about it in your bed and weep over it! Bring righteous offerings, and trust the Lord!*

Many people say, “We can't find goodness anywhere. The light of your face has left us, Lord!” But you have filled my heart with more joy than when their wheat and wine are everywhere! I will lie down and fall asleep in peace because you alone, Lord, let me live in safety.

The epistle lesson is from 1st John 3:1-3. See what *kind of love* the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us. Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure.

The gospel lesson is from Luke 24:36-48. Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you startled? Why are doubts

arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have."

As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. Because *they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness*, he said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish. Taking it, he ate it in front of them. Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he *opened their minds to understand* the scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. This is God's word for God's people.

Please pray with me. Jesus, you are the Son of God and the Risen Christ! O Lord, let your spirit arise anew and afresh in our hearts today! You give to all a measure of faith to believe and receive, you give us partnership and fellowship with you and with other believers, and you give us a determination and a will to forgive others and ourselves. O Lord, give us a will to receive your love as we are your children. Give us a will to receive your joy and peace as we serve you faithfully as your servants your Father in all things. Give us hearts to trust you,

minds to understand the Scriptures in the midst of our lives, and give us courage to be your witnesses in all things so we might glorify you. Amen.

Peace be with you! Last Sunday we talked about faith, fellowship, and forgiveness. Today I'd like to focus on love, joy, and peace. Each of the six gifts are progressive in nature. Each is grounded on faith that Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah, was crucified, died, and was buried and rose again on the third day; this we purpose to believe by faith.

What follows is fellowship/partnership with Christ through participating in the Lord's Supper, in worshipping, in giving in all things as we serve and pray. In all these, we have fellowship and partnership with each other. As we *live out* faith and fellowship, we find that forgiveness is essential within the body of Christ.

When we do forgive one another we live out what's called—*agape* love—an unconditional love we have for one another. *Agape* love doesn't love because love is given in return. It's not based on how someone treats you. It's based on the kind of love that God loves you with—unconditional love. *Agape* love forgives because Christ has forgiven our sin. It's the highest form of love. Love that God has for humankind originating solely *from God for us*.

This is how we can call ourselves children of God. God first loved us, and without God first loving us, we couldn't love God or one another. 1 John 3:1 says this, "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of

God; and this is what we are.” We know God loves us, and we must trust God unreservedly that we are loved because Christ died for us and bore our sin so we could be his children and live eternally with him. And to remember and know this my friends gives us joy!

Psalm 4 says *we have* been set apart for him, and he calls us faithful! The Psalmist says the Lord hears us when we call him, when we’re anxious and upset. When we think in our hearts how to sin, but God tells us to be silent and to put our trust in him. He calms our heart as we sense his presence and remember the promises he’s made. We agree with the Lord as we commune in prayer, and it makes us glad and joyful! And we lie down and sleep in peace.

In Luke 24, the disciples looked at Jesus after he had resurrected from the dead and stood among them. They were startled and terrified! They thought they were seeing a ghost, but Jesus says to them, “Peace be with you!” “Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts?” Even in their fear and doubt they were filled with joy the scripture states.

And in the midst of their joy—they were doubting! But Jesus reminded them, that everything in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled. Then Jesus *opened their minds to understand*.

Maybe you question God in your heart when you hear this passage and link it to your life. You say, “Why can’t Jesus just open my mind now!” There’s

nothing wrong with questioning God. It's good if our intention is to know God more deeply. Life can be messy and feel so muddled at times. Fact is this.

I don't think we can know and fully discern what God is saying until we abandon ourselves completely to trust in God's love. Maybe the question to ask is this. Have we taken a back seat when it comes to acquiring a knowledge of God's word? Do we connect the details of our experiences in life as we read God's word? And then ask God, "Where's the lesson in this?"

Let's admit this. We do discard parts of the Bible we think we have the right to reject. We tend to rely on our denomination or better yet, our own judgment. We're cherry pickers. It's much easier to embrace what feels comfortable, but then we ignore or reframe what seems "radical" or unreasonable for our society.

The disciples couldn't understand Jesus' death and resurrection just as we cannot understand some things in our lives. Only Jesus can open our minds, so we might understand the Scriptures as they're linked to our own lives, but let's abandon our trust fully to trust in God's love. Let's rely on his care God's beloved.

To doubt God isn't a sign of weak faith; it's a sign of spiritual growth. When we find ourselves doubting and questioning God, that's good, because we're asking ourselves who this God is and why would God allow our comfort to flee, our family to walk away and reject us or our finances to take a nose dive? Who is this God who allows this terrible suffering in the world?

So now you may be asking the “so what” question to this message. You’re thinking, “Preacher, okay, so what!” Here’s my bottom line using a wide paint brush taking wide strokes.

Faith is our grounding with God. Just because life gets tough doesn’t mean we stop believing. It means we hang on because that’s what it’s all about—trusting God! It’s about pursuing a faith that trusts God love for us no matter what.

It means having fellowship with Christ in prayer, in Holy Communion, and worshipping together. It means forgiving one another, staying in love with God and receiving and trusting that agape love that’s attached with peace and joy.

Let’s pray. Lord, when our faith hasn’t provided space for us to question and doubt, remind us, it’s a relationship we engage in with you not a religion. When we find ourselves feeling uncomfortable and wondering who this God is and why he would let this happen, remind us again Lord that our need is to receive your love, joy, and peace by abandoning ourselves to your love. Help us to surrender and trust you. And above all else, keep the faith. Amen.