

**EASTER III**

**ST DAVID'S, LAURINBURG NC**

**APRIL 19, 2026**

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A few questions I find myself asking on this Third Sunday of Easter. Where is our Risen Christ these days, and what might He be doing and saying? This is the holy season of Resurrection, the time we glory in new life, new purpose. So what is He up to at this critical—and dangerous moment—in human history. What is his mission calling from us at this point in our lives?, What is He saying to us—and where is he saying it? And do we have ears to hear, and eyes to see and hearts to embrace?

Let me start with a story about his presence with us. In the fall of 2013, our beloved Bishop Curry called me one

afternoon. I couldn't imagine why he would be calling me— of all people—and I had the immediate reaction of Oh my heavens, what have I done now! Instead, in his most gracious and winsome way, he said “Stuart, my friend, I need your help; I want you to do something for me.” Before he said another word, I came within a cat's whisker of saying, “No, thank you. I am retired. I need to rest for 20 years.” As I guessed, he told me that he needed me to take on a big project; to get out my black shirt and white collar from the storage closet; and go calm the waters at one of his larger congregations which was in crisis. He went on to explain the details, and I grimaced: but “somehow” I had the wherewithal to say, “Here am I, send me.” As you've probably discovered in your own life, the adverb “somehow” is oftentimes a synonym for God. Listen to your self talk; — how and when

you use the word “somehow” - and see if God and you are up to something.

I took the assignment, it was a church crisis and a big one, and I ended up having one of the best years of my life—go figure! My most memorable day in the pulpit of that church happened to have been the 3rd Sunday of Easter—the anniversary of which is today—wherein the Gospel lesson never varies from year to year. It was exactly the same lesson from Luke - as you heard a few moments ago— that of the Risen Lord walking and talking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. After I finished the sermon, I had the congregation stand and asked that we would repeat that gospel lesson, only do so in a musical dimension — to wit a hymn that almost everyone of them knew; but a hymn nowhere to be found in the Episcopal Church hymnal; a

hymn that touched almost every one of them in the deep places of memory and one that honors Jesus as one who walks with us, and talks with us, and tells us that we are his own. That right there being a truth we all need to hold tightly as we live through a nightmare of confusion, degradation and war that has settled on us like a very dark cloud.

I come to the garden alone,  
While the dew is still on the roses;  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,  
The Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own,  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,

None other has ever known.

That's not a hymn we hear very often in the Episcopal Church. And apparently that was a hymn that almost every single one of those people in that crisis-filled church had learned somewhere along the line, so much so that they knew somewhere in their innermost being that Jesus walks with, talks with us, and tells us we are his own—and that he does so through his spirit. When I have visited that church in succeeding years, I still have people say, "Hey, remember that time you had us sing "I go to the garden alone." What that says to me is listen to Jesus. Hear his Words. Behold his actions. Obey his commandment to love one another—that being the only law he ever issued. He is forever and a day talking with us, walking with us, and telling us that we are his own. My question is: Can you hear his words; better yet can you act on them? What is the Spirit of the Risen Christ asking of you and me in our conversations with him?

Walking and talking with Jesus was how St Luke wrote about the Risen Lord in his first appearance as the Resurrected Christ. **And then** there is St John who writes about what he had heard as the first word of the Risen Christ. We read that lesson last week. See if you remember.

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."*

In St. John's account of the first resurrection appearance, the disciples were huddled together in a locked room, trembling with fear, troubled about Judas' betrayal, and waiting for the grizzly fate that befell Jesus to come and befall every one of them. And not only did fear color the emotional climate in that upper room behind the locked door, I suspect there was guilt, corporate guilt, and plenty of it. The eleven must have been perishing in their sin as they recalled the events of Friday, and all the recriminations, blamings, and desolations of the

next two days as together they remembered and processed how each of them had deserted and abandoned their friend and brother Jesus; how they had left him on Calvary to die in the company of common criminals; how at the end they had fled to the four winds to save their own skins.

Into this huddle of fear & grief, guilt & shame comes what must have been an enormously confusing, yet awesome promise of a second chance and a new start. The Resurrected Jesus walks to the center of the room, and says to them: PEACE BE WITH YOU. The very first word of the Risen Christ to his frightened and guilt-laden friends; surely the last thing on earth any one of them ever expected to hear or feel again. How contrary human beings can be, and yet, wonder of wonders—here stands the Risen Christ with the word *shalom* on his lips: now that is a huge word, a broad umbrella-like term that encompasses notions of absolution, reprieve, exculpation, forgiveness, acquittal, pardon and remission of all sins—big ones, little ones,

middle-sized ones / mortal, venial and trivial ones. The Good News of Easter is especially marked for those—like the eleven disciples—who least deserve to hear it. The presence and promise of the Risen Christ is especially targeted to those whose souls tremble with fear and guilt, and know beyond a shadow of doubt that they haven't so much as hoot of a chance. *Peace be with you.* How timely a word for us, right now, today: how coincidental, serendipitous, I would say Intentional that we have an imperative of peace given to us by Christ, our King. How ultra important it is for us to hear it, savor it, memorize it, discuss it, employ it, act on it & pass it along.

Peace is on our minds right now; on my mind I should say. I want it, need it, depend on it, and I find myself praying for it. Frankly, I have had a rough go of it lately. Not only the war, but my consternation at the acrimony in our country, the devolution of morality, the spiraling degradation of public discourse. Peace is an earnest and prayerful plea. And speaking of peace—A friend gave me

a book for Christmas, and I put it on the bedside table where sits a stack of books that I had hoped to finish before I start a new one. When I finally got to it on Easter Day, I was surprised to find that the author's thesis is all about becoming peacemakers in the world. Williamson is her name and her thesis is that our mission as disciples is one of service; and that service is peacemaking; and peacemaking is accomplished through reaching out to the suffering, whoever and wherever they are: the poor, the weak, the sick, the lonely, those in prison, the naked, the outsider. You've heard it, you know it.

How do we do such a thing? First of all we pray, pray like mad; pray like our lives depend on it, and they do. My own prayer list right now is longer than it has ever been, and it will undoubtedly grow in the days to come. Second, it is to serve those for whom I pray—get out of my and your comfort zone, and accomplish some something for the Kingdom's cause—to wit that long list of service opportunities that Jesus gives us in Matthew 25. Third - stay connected.

Connection is deepest longing of the human soul, especially in times like these—and disconnection is nothing but unmitigated hell. If at all possible, avoid isolating. We are made for community. Fourth, back to the Bible as the old billboard on the highway used to say. Read Scripture—that's where I get many of my own marching orders. Let Jesus be a model of what to say, how to do, where to go. Read The Beatitudes, mark the entire Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew, and inwardly digest Matthew 25—all 3 have been most instructive to me lately; each one speaks clearly of what it is to follow He who saves us.

I do believe I could go on for several more hours on the subject—but I'd better slow down. And let the Risen Christ feed us at his Table. I love to read a modern translation of Scripture along with the tried and true, the Revised Standard translation of the Bible. Let me conclude with the Beatitudes as paraphrased by a biblical scholar some 20 years ago. A lesson about whom it is we are called

to serve and make peace; a lesson about ourselves and how much we need such tender words and tender touch.

*When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:*

*“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.*

*“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.*

*“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.*

*“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.*

*“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.*

*“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

*“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.*

*“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.*

*“Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.*

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” – Matthew 7:24<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:13-12), as paraphrased by Eugene Petersen, *The Message*,