

**YOUTH**

**April 30, 2017**

**S U N**

**3rd Sunday in Easter**

**D A Y**

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**

**Old Testament Scripture Lesson** Psalm 116:1-4, 12-14  
**Mary Lang Regen**

Recently I reached a breaking point, where nights on end I asked for God's guidance. Applying for college is a stressful time, as those older than me know, and for those younger than me, just wait . . . it's coming. Just last week, I was "saved," first world edition. No, the snares of death didn't encompass me, nor was I being held by the hands of Sheol. Instead I was being stretched in too many directions. From Granville, Ohio to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with my heart set in Winston Salem, North Carolina. As thousands of questions about my college decision funneled through my brain, I still couldn't find an answer for any of them. Someone had though. Someone had been listening for weeks as I mulled over the possibility of spending the next four years of my life in each of these locations.

In this scripture, the psalmist is justifying his love for God because God was able to hear his cries for help and his need for saving. In the first part of the scripture, the psalmist says, "he has heard my voice and my supplications . . . he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live" (verses 1-2). It is in these verses that I find the psalmist's true surprise: that God was able to hear his prayers and needs above everyone else and chose to save him. However, I think this passage shows that God listens before we need saving, before we pray and ask for guidance. He is preparing to listen and advise, so that he may there with us when we reach our breaking point, and need his guiding hand.

As I sat in Time Square, New York during my Spring Break (next to the naked cowboy of all things), I became washed over with emotion and realized that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was where I am supposed to be. But why? Why am I supposed to be there if my heart is somewhere else? God was the one who had been listening. He had been listening through my tears, through my distress, and through my conversations with myself in my room. He had been listening to my desires and my aspirations and pointed me in the direction at which I might achieve these. I may not know it yet, but I was saved. The girl standing right here. He heard my voice, my supplications. He inclined his ear to me and saw through my distress and anguish, showing me where I belong. Though my distress and anguish did not come from my being on the literal verge of death, and instead on my decision of where to go to college, he provided the same attention to me and with that I was saved.

But now what? How do I respond to his grace? God showed me that he listened to my cries long before I had asked for his guidance because, when I asked for help, he was at my side ready to point me in a direction. True compassion and love means preparing to listen long before you are called on to do so. This past week, my high school softball coach's daughter passed away. She had lived with her parents as long as I've lived with mine. She was 18. Her death and their loss has made me think about what compassion really is. We're always told that when someone is grieving, our best response is to listen. But now, as the scripture tells us, the real comfort comes from us knowing that God has been listening all along.

The psalmist's experience with God is a representation of how we should be inclined to live out God's word. We should be listening long before we are needed. Yes, we may say we're compassionate or loving, but do we listen in good times and bad? When we have a million things on our to do list, when we're thinking about what we're missing, when we wish we were somewhere else? Scripture reminds us that God listens all along and reminds us to do the same. He listened to the psalmist, he listened to me, and he listens to grieving families.

The book of Psalms is a book of prayers. Prayers for help, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of healing, prayers of salvation. Psalm 116 reminds us that we don't have to pray only when we are at a breaking point but that we may talk with God at any moment and through any feeling.

It's time for us as seniors to start our new adventures. One thing DCPC has taught me is that God will always be there for me. He is always listening. He is always responding to my prayers before I even know I need him. The knowledge of his grace I will carry with me through these new experiences and adjustments as I live away from home for the first time. Though Chapel Hill will accept me with open arms this fall, I know that I will always have a place in God's arms and in this church.

### **New Testament Scripture Lesson I Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

#### **Abigail Merrifield**

You know, there's something about not being prepared for every moment that actually helps you engage with the world and people around you. I think many people have a hard time not knowing what's coming. For example, right now. No one is really sure where I'm going with this, but you are all *so* very anxious to find out. Don't worry I'm getting there.

About two thousand years ago when Jesus' apostles met at Pentecost, they were downtrodden and inconsolable. Peter had gathered a crowd and let them know that there was a messiah, that the apostles had known him and walked with him. And finally, the crowd had led him, even manipulated him, into his charge and crucifixion. When Peter told the crowd this, they did not know what to do, so they asked. And Peter said, repent and be baptised. On that day three thousand people were added, and the Christian Church was born.

I like to think that God is a fan of a little dramatic irony. Because in 2017, we can look back and see that none of this could have happened without Christ's death. Those three thousand people wouldn't have heard about the miracles and blessings that these apostles had witnessed. They wouldn't have wanted to join them and spread the good news. And Jesus would have just been known as some nice guy from Nazareth and not as the son of God.

But the apostles and the three thousand didn't know the plan. Not even Peter, the rock upon which this church was built, knew what the plan was. All they could feel was far from God, when in reality he was closer than ever.

When I was in the third grade, and my parents told me we were moving Davidson, I was, for lack of a better word, upset. I had never even heard of the town, and for longer than I would like to admit, I thought we lived just north of Charleston, not Charlotte. It was tough. We had to find a new house, a new school, and a new church. No one, not even my parents could have known what would come of it. We just had to make this leap of faith, and see what would happen.

Spoiler alert: it all worked out. I am about to graduate from high school, and I am happier than I ever thought I could be. We found a church that somehow brought together the most amazing people that I, or anyone, will ever meet: my best friends, my mentors, and a supportive church family. Thanks to them I was introduced to youth conferences like Massanetta and Montreat, and the uncoordinated, silly, loves-of-my-life: energizers. This church and the people in it have helped me through the best and worst moments of my life. And finally, I was shown, like those three thousand at Pentecost, what it means to be a real Christian.

The bottom line is, God knew the whole plan. And he always does. He knew that to save his people, he had to send down his own son to be our messiah. He knew that Jesus would be doubted, mocked, and even killed for his teachings. God calls us to turn and trust. He calls us to come and trust in Jesus Christ as our hope, to come and find grace and forgiveness and renewal.

## **New Testament Scripture Lesson II 1 Peter 1:17-23**

### **Dottie Sloan**

Reading this passage from Peter, it got me thinking about my own life. It reminded me about how I have been able to deal with my sins, and how when I do sin, I am able to own up to it and then seek for forgiveness from God. This past year I have been fortunate enough to have a wonderful group of seniors and small group leaders I can meet with every week to discuss my growing faith and my relationship with God. In my senior year I have finally grown enough as a person and with my faith to know that I can come to God with my highs, lows, thanks, and asking for forgiveness any time I feel is necessary. However, this journey in faith did not just instantly launch on the first night of youth group this fall.

I have always had a relationship with God, but everything just clicked for me over the summer. Sometimes we have to be knocked down to as low as we have ever been in order to come back even stronger. This is what happened to me. Last summer I went on a camping trip called Teens Camping Tour of the West. I am going to talk about one special moment from that trip.

One evening, in Wyoming, the trip leaders took all of us into this tiny chapel in the middle of a field looking out on the Grand Teton mountain range. This was to be a night of reflection. Sassy, the trip director, started to speak to us about different things we went through on the trip as we sat there. She spoke about how some people may have put in more effort to help out on others' assigned jobs we had to do during the trip, even though it may not have been their day to do that job. She also mentioned that maybe we were not aware, but as we stopped at gas stations to fill up our water bottles with ice and water, that we were supposed to pay for the ice. No one paid. Even if it was just a few cents, it was still stealing.

When Sassy spoke about being helpful or selfless, or making the decision to choose between admiring nature and the beauty that God created or to take a shower and call home, she got me thinking about the many decisions I had the freedom to make on this trip. I was away from home and there was no one to make or influence any of my decisions but me. So who was I? She asked us this and, for some reason, this question hit me deep. I really started to question myself. I first began to justify reasons for maybe not helping out with someone else's job, or that I never saw the signs saying we had to pay for ice.

As Sassy continued to speak, I sat there in silence, becoming more and more lost in my thoughts. So many things began to add up into something almost unbearable. I began to ask God how I was able to live with all of these sins consuming my life? How could he possibly love me through all of this? I broke down and just sat there crying, feeling that I had completely let God down. There was no way that I could live with myself. I was

at the lowest point that night in that chapel that I had ever been in my entire life. I felt so lost and afraid that now I didn't know if God would ever forgive me. I sat there for what felt like an eternity, apologizing to God for all that I had done and I repeatedly asked God for forgiveness. Soon after I found clarity.

Bringing this back to the reading from Peter, I found that the insight it gives on the relationship we have between God and how we should act parallels with how I was able to face my sins after being so lost within myself in that chapel. The first thing this passage says is that if you say that God is the ultimate judge for each and every one of us, there is no need for us to try and determine if others are good or bad. When we judge someone else, we are more than likely unaware of that other person's life and what things they went through. They might have had certain experiences to shape the way they act and they may not be able to help what they do. Judging others will not elevate us in God's eyes. As we say "he will come to judge the quick and the dead." This means that where we ultimately end up depends on who we choose to love in our lives. If we choose to have love for God and others then we will go to heaven, but if we just choose love of self, well then that means that you may end up in hell where God's presence does not extend.

This leads right into the second main point that Peter makes in this passage. It is one thing to worship and put your faith in God, but if you also sin and love yourself more than others, while also not asking for forgiveness for the wrong things you've done in your life, then finding your path to heaven and total trust in God may be a little bit more tricky. God wants us to be the best people we can be, right? He understands that we may make mistakes and sin. However, no material thing will be able to give us full forgiveness for our sins. Only full forgiveness can come from God. This calls for admitting your faults, realizing that you are wrong, and asking God for forgiveness. This special vulnerability and letting your guard down can be hard to do, especially if you do not have a firm relationship with God. What is the point of living if you never have to face hardships and problem solve? How will you grow? It is not always easy to search for and find God, and realize that you have done wrong.

So during that evening in Wyoming in the chapel I figured out how to handle the weight of my sins. After being at my most vulnerable, and probably feeling the most lost I have ever been, being physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted, I finally got the clarity I hoped for. I walked out of the chapel, and looking up at the thousands of stars that lit up the sky and I realized that God created me for a reason. I would not be where I was, surrounded by people who loved me if God thought I was not good enough to be his child or that I failed him. It was at that moment that I realized that I can and should confide in God with everything in my life. He understands that you may hit some bumps in the road and do some regrettable things, but he wants the best for you. From then and up until right now, I have lived every day, trying to be the best I can be for God. I try to live how I think he would want me to live, and I have strong faith in him that everything he throws my way happens for a reason. Heading to NC State this fall, I will face many challenges and be in new situations that I am not completely used to yet. In order to keep a level head through this new experience, I am going to find a group of Christians that I can go to if I ever feel like I am struggling to find God again. If I do something that I regret, I know that I will have them to help me see God and ask for his guidance and forgiveness.

So from this passage and the story I have just shared with you, I want you all to know that God is always there for you, no matter what. When dealing with your sins, it is okay to realize that you have done wrong. Ask God for forgiveness and work to make yourself the best you can be, living to be how God would want us to live. We need to live our lives loving one another and God with our whole hearts. We need to do the right thing. It was no easy task for God to sacrifice his blood for the sake of us. I will continue to love God and spread his word as I move on to the next chapter in my life and experience new people and places.

## **Gospel Lesson** Luke 24:13-35

### **Peri Beatty**

Let me set the scene for you: it's Easter Sunday and the disciples have just learned that Jesus' body is MIA from the tomb. Jesus warned his disciples that he would "rise again on the third day," yet, through their shock, they completely forgot about his warning and automatically assumed that they were being pranked and that someone had stolen the body. I guess I can understand that, how often is it that a dead person just up and comes back to life 3 days later? So sure, we can forgive them for this lapse of memory. When our story begins, Cleopas and another unnamed disciple decide to journey from Jerusalem to another village called Emmaus. We aren't given a reason why, but I imagine it's most likely to spread the word of the missing body. As they begin their seven mile walk to Emmaus, Jesus, disguised as a stranger, comes along asking about what had happened. The travelers are taken aback by his question as it seemed to be common knowledge by this point that Jesus had been crucified. This strange man ends up joining them for the remainder of the day. As they talked more, the stranger shared parables from scripture and listened as they began to question why Jesus had to die. Then he says: "How foolish are you and slow of heart" (verse 25). He goes on to remind them of the scriptures which explain why Jesus had to die for them. Jesus, still a stranger at this point, basically calls them dumb to their faces, yet they seem to be unfazed by this and continue walking with him.

It's very normal to go through periods when you have doubts in your faith and questions about the Bible. Everyone has to go through these periods in their own, but that doesn't mean you have to go through these times alone. Sometimes, it's the people who don't see it from your side who are the ones that help you the most. From their perspective, you may seem "foolish" for having these doubts, so they try their best to walk with you until you understand.

Back in middle school, I struggled with figuring out who I was and where I fit in with my friends at school, as we all did. But I could always count on youth group every Sunday to see my real friends and take a break from worrying about that kind of stuff. To be honest, during middle school, I didn't go to youth group for the purpose of enriching my faith. Back then I was also struggling with what I believed in and where my place, if I even had one, was, in the church.

The summer between 6th and 7th grade I went to a youth conference at Massanetta Springs in Virginia, not looking for answers, but because all my friends from youth were going and I have serious FOMO or "fear of missing out." That summer, I sat in the chairs only half listening to the keynotes and pretending I was *way* too cool to participate in energizers (I'm not by the way). But during devotions at night, I really started to pay attention. Per tradition, everyone went around the circle and shared their thoughts on that day's keynote, their highs and lows of the day, and where they saw God. Hmm. Where they "saw God"? I didn't know you could see God. Now I was intrigued. Back then I had the "I'll believe it when I see it" mindset and seeing God is not really something that I thought could happen. When finally, it would reach my turn to share, I never really knew what to say, so I would start with my highs and lows and then re-word someone else's thoughts on keynote. But when it came to seeing God, I was at a complete loss.

Throughout the weekend I talked to my soon-to-be best friends Kate Beeken and Meg Houck about what that meant. We've talked at length about this over the years, but back then they couldn't really give me a straightforward answer. On the last night my roommates and I couldn't sleep. Luckily, our cool college chaperone, Greg Curis, was the hall monitor that night, so we spent upwards of two hours just sitting in the hallway whispering and chatting with him late into the night. We were mainly gossiping, but we also talked

some about life, our beliefs, and whatever else you talk about at middle school church camp. It wasn't until the last night when I was sitting in the hallway chatting with my roommates, way past curfew, that I finally understood what it meant to "see" God. God wasn't making himself physically visible to me, but he was working through the Holy Spirit. And for the first time in my life, I felt the Holy Spirit moving inside me. I hate to sound like that girl who was "totally changed at church camp," but I totally was. That night was the night I decided to start my journey walking with Christ. I wasn't expecting the girls to be there as much as they were for me, but they helped me through a lot that summer.

Jesus came to the travelers as a stranger, someone who they thought knew nothing about Jesus. When they reached Emmaus that night, Jesus kept walking on as if he were going further, but then disciples welcomed him in for a meal. After blessing and breaking the bread, he finally revealed himself to them and disappeared. This is when it all comes together. The disciples finally realized how "foolish and slow of heart" they had been not recognizing Him after that whole day. Their epiphany comes only moments too late to share it with Jesus, but it was just the push they needed. At first, the travelers didn't understand why Jesus had to be crucified, but Jesus was patient with them and walked with them until they understood.

Even after that night at Massanetta and for a while throughout middle school, I didn't know if I believed in God, or even how to go about having faith or believing. It was a difficult process taking that first step and it would have been a lot harder to go through on my own. Even though I thought they didn't know much more than me, Kate and Meg turned out to be huge role models for me, even still. They couldn't force me to understand, but they walked me through those early beginnings. The girls were patient with me and showed me how to get started, but I had to begin my journey on my own just as the travelers had to figure out the stranger was Jesus on their own.

Sometimes in life, we are going to run into people who have questions about Christianity. These people will come to you with their questions and doubts not realizing what you actually know. Jesus set the example of how we are to live our lives as Christians. When he was crucified, he left it up to us to be his witnesses and to share his love for *all* the world to know. You can't force anyone to believe in the same things as you, but as a witness to Christ, we are asked to walk with the people who have doubts, ask them questions, and *then* share what we know to help them understand.

This past summer as well as this coming summer I have to opportunity to walk with someone else. I will be serving as a small group leader, or enabler as we call it, back where I started at Massanetta. I did this last summer and I'm super stoked to return again because sharing my faith with middle school youth is a really special and amazing gift. Part of my job as an enabler is to listen to their questions, provide support, walk with them, and try my best to help them understand.

If we all remember what our mission is as Christians, we can really make a difference in someone's faith. When someone comes to you with questions, be patient with them and walk with them. If they don't understand at first, help them and do not give up on them. The opportunity to do this walking thing is rare, but very humbling. Don't take advantage of those who want to deepen their relationships with God for your own self confidence boost. Take it humbly instead, as a compliment and rejoice in the honor of sharing it with them. God's never dying love for us is a wonderful thing that you can help spread, so take every opportunity you can to walk and share it with all of God's children.