

**A sermon preached by the Rev. Anne Slakey  
Sunday, April 19, 2026**

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**The Third Sunday of Easter  
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Sacramento**

I'm going to preach on both the Psalm and the Gospel today, and there are two reasons why. The first reason is particular to these texts, the second is more general.

The Road to Emmaus is one of the more familiar resurrection stories: Jesus walks beside two disciples for seven miles, but does not reveal who he is, even as he interprets how Scripture applies to him. The question is, why? The Gospel says they were prevented from recognizing him, it was intentional. I think its because Jesus is in teacher mode. He wants them to learn and remember what he is saying. If he reveals himself, they will be so busy wondering and rejoicing they won't be able to take anything in. So Jesus is teaching them something important, something still important today. We need to learn how to see and hear Jesus in Word and Sacrament, in Scripture and in breaking of bread. He spent a long time on this, seven miles of walking and conversation.

Usually when we look for Jesus in Scripture, we turn to the Prophets. Luke says that Jesus began with Moses and the Prophets, but continued to the whole of Scripture. In verse 44 of this chapter, Jesus says everything written about him in Moses, the Prophets, *and* the Psalms, must be fulfilled.

When we turn our minds back to Holy Week, we can find several things from the Psalms that have already been fulfilled. Psalm 118, with its chorus of Hosanna, predicts Palm Sunday. Psalm 22 is used on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, because it describes how enemies strip him and divide his clothing, and because he calls out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" from the cross, but also predicts his vindication.

Praying the Psalms as if they were written about Jesus is one of the most time-honored ways of using the Psalms as a springboard for meditation. When we do that, something else happens as well. When we see how the Psalms speak of Jesus in all his humanity, we learn that they also speak about our humanity. They speak to us in sickness and trouble, in triumph and joy. So this sermon is about how to pray the Psalms in general as well as being about how to find Jesus in the Psalms, as he taught his Disciples.

Just two more quick things by way of introduction. College, graduate and seminary level Bible classes will tell you not to do this. Those classes have a place, understanding the original intent and message of a text is a critical part of interpretation. But Scripture is a text uniquely interpreted by the Holy Spirit to reach us and bring us closer to God. When we understand that a text can have several meanings, and when we keep the lines between them clear, we allow the Spirit room to move.

Finally, there's something important to know about Hebrew poetry. It doesn't rhyme, it makes no attempt to rhyme. It also doesn't scan, it makes no attempt at rhythm. Instead, it works as poetry by a rhythm of imagery. One line will state an idea, the second line will echo it in slightly different words. Please turn to the Psalm in your program, and you'll see that Verse 1 of Psalm 116 has this pattern. I'll read to the asterisk, you read what follows.

1 I love the LORD, because he has heard the voice of my supplication, \*  
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.

Verse 2 also.

2 The cords of death entangled me; the grip of the grave took hold of me; \*  
I came to grief and sorrow.

You won't find this pattern in every verse, but because of this the Psalms work as poetry in any language. You cannot translate rhyme from one language to another, you cannot translate rhythm from one language to another. Metaphors you can translate. That same flexibility of metaphor makes it possible for a Psalm to be meaningful in many settings, its original setting in the Temple, its place in the life of Christ, and its place in our own lives. Please keep your program open to the Psalm.

So let's look first at the Psalm in its original setting, which was probably the Temple itself judging by the end. As we've seen, this Psalm is for use by someone who has come close to death, probably from sickness. Now, the person is in the Temple to give thanks to God, probably with an offering of wine. A cup would be filled with wine, the Psalm would be sung or recited, and then the offering would be lifted up and poured out at a designated altar. See verses 10 and 11

How shall I repay the Lord\*for all the good things he has done for me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation\* and call upon the name of the Lord.

Most believe that the Psalms were collected for use in the Second Temple after the people returned from exile. This, it is thought, is the way the Psalm was used for 500 years up to Jesus' time.

Now, what might Jesus have said to Clopas about this Psalm? The imagery of death applies not to sickness, but to the cross. We skipped verses that become very poignant when applied to Jesus. "The Lord watches over the innocent," and "I believed, even when I said, no man can be trusted." Jesus trusted in God even when everyone deserted him. Verse 13,

Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his servants  
Could apply particularly to Jesus. As they celebrated the Eucharist, other verses took on new meaning for the Christian community. Verse 15

I will offer the sacrifice of Thanksgiving  
And call upon the name of the Lord.

Is thought to refer to the Eucharist. We still call the Eucharist a sacrifice of Thanksgiving, and we still call the chalice "the cup of salvation." As far as Christians were concerned, the whole Psalm was intensely Christological. It tracked Christ's path through death to the right hand of God in the heavenly Temple.

I apologize if that is a lot to take in. I imagine that this is the kind of work Jesus did with Clopas and his friend as they walked to Emmaus. One thing I am unable to convey is the sense of wonder and peace this kind of meditative work can bring. Perhaps Clopas and his friend can convey it. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened the Scripture to us?"

As you pray the Psalms, open your hearts and minds and allow the metaphors to apply to Jesus, and also to apply to you. How is the grave gripping you? What cords of death have hold of you? Or, conversely, what are you thankful for? How has God rescued you? Bring those things with you when you pray. Allow Jesus to reveal himself to you, in Word and Sacrament, in Scripture and in Breaking of Bread.