

- Fools are the church in microcosm, looking sad they express to him at his inquiry their own confusion and despair, their discouragement, their darkness, and their doubt. They were perplexed by the crucifixion, by the hostility of the establishment and the fact that God had not intervened. Now they stand in the shadow of the cross and everything they had bet their lives on had gone down. We had hoped, they say to Jesus. We had hoped, and how they had hoped. They had bet everything on him, and now all that was gone. The days of inspiration were passed and Galilee was gone. There's a poignant, wistful, dark night of the soul. They are the church, darkened by it's own doubt and unaware of the one with whom they walk. There's a sense in which anybody who has ever met a moment of despair can appreciate the poignancy of their predicament. Young persons facing a future that seemed so bright but discovering doors closing left and right. We had hoped. Employable adult suddenly becoming aware that she cannot find employment. A young couple rising on the high tide of expectation only to discover that something is wrong. Parents of a young child with high hopes for what the future holds for her, then suddenly realizing that it will not be so. The middle aged woman wondering if it was all worth it. The elderly man wondering why the whole pilgrimage was started in the first place. We had hoped. The Dark Night of the Soul is the story of the difficulty of belief, the cross spelling failure, the awareness that we walk alone, and that is the story of the church. Oh we have heard a rumor that he was alive, but we have not seen him. We walk in the presence of a powerful Christ and we cannot recognize him because of our own doubts. Now what happens to them is the story of genuine renewal. We first of all, see a growing sense of understanding. Christ lets them talk, in fact, he urges them to talk, he makes them talk. There's a marvelous courtesy about the risen Christ. Remember where we are, this is Easter afternoon. If Jesus ever wanted to zap somebody into faith, this was the time and these were the candidates. And what he does is he engages them in conversation, what are you talking about as you walk along the way? And they say, are you the only stranger who doesn't know what's happened in Jerusalem? And he says, what's happened in Jerusalem? And they begin to tell him about Jesus of Nazareth. Do you see what this is? He knows more about what they're talking about than they do. That's always the way it is in the scripture. And yet he draws out from them the whole of their despair and their doubt until it's all out in the dust of the road, and then he begins to go back to Moses and the prophets, and he tells them the things concerning himself. My, how I would love to have been there, wouldn't you? This was Jesus' commentary on the Old Testament. Was it not necessary, he said, that the Christ should enter into suffering in order to enter into glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself. Now there are several things that are here. Clearly the importance of the cross. The undertone of God's costly compassionate love is what Jesus is talking about in the cross. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer in order to enter into glory? He put their pain in the larger pain of God, and he put their loneliness in the context of the eternal loneliness, and he made them conscious of the fact that if God is going to share compassionate love it's going to be costly. Don't you see, it's of the essence of things that the cross is not a tragedy or a cul-de-sac, but the cross is the necessary step toward the glory. Was it not essential that the Christ should suffer in order to enter into glory? Notice also the importance of the Scripture. Remember where we are. This is the death defying, tomb defying door ignoring, all hailing Jesus Christ. He could have pushed them into faith by any means at this moment of resurrection power. And what does he do? He goes back and begins with Moses and the prophets, to explain to them the things

concerning himself. I doubt if there's ever been a young person or child at church who has not wondered, or perhaps anyone who used to be a young person or a child at church who also has not wondered why it is that when we gather together we always gather around this old book. And the pastor or the liturgist always says, today we're going to read from chapter so and so of book so and so, starting at verse this and going to verse that. Why is that? Well, this is a part of the reason. Jesus, with the power of the resurrection upon him saw fit to go back and open up the Scripture in order to help them to come to a growing understanding, and that marks out the marching orders for the life of the church. The renewal of the church is not an easy matter of hope and expectation. It is a discipline matter of inquiry into the meaning of the scriptures as they tell us about the Christ. Notice also, the importance of the mind. He takes their intellect seriously. He honestly deals with their questions, and waits until those questions have been thoroughly exposed, and then he takes their minds and he stretches them. He helps them to begin to understand the things concerning himself. The Christian faith is not a matter of simple emotion. It is a hard-headed faith that takes seriously the fact that renewal involves the stretching of the mind. They wanna know more, and by sunset time they have arrived at Emmaus, and he makes as though he would go further, I like that. Where was he going? Nowhere and everywhere. The point is, he wasn't forcing himself upon them. They had to invite him in and they did. Abide with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. So Jesus goes in to sit with them at supper, and there the mood of the story changes. We see a growing sense of hope. As they look back on it they said, it was like a fire burning up within us. Did not our hearts burn within us as he walked with us by the way, as he opened to us the scripture? They recognized that life had been lifted for them to a new level of feeling. It can happen, it happens still. It can happen in church, it really can. Obscure reasons bring us together in any worshipping congregation. Some of us are here out of habit, some of us out of hope, some of us out of obligations of relationships, some out of family loyalty, children or parents. Some because we had nowhere else to go, and some because we would not be anywhere else. With all the ambiguities of motivation, it can happen in church. The great ah-ha, the realization of a new discovery. It happens in service, it happens in art, it happens in relationship. The burning heart of the New Testament is a difficult image for us to understand. For in the late 20th century we have come to think of the burning heart as heartburn, and it is for us simply a symptom of the fact that we have eaten too much, and this in a world that is hungry. It's part of our predicament, that we simply cannot understand what's going on in the New Testament idiom. In large measure because of the perspective of our own time. Burning heart is for us a condition for which we need relief, and we don't even know how to spell that. The truth is that we walk such different roads that it's difficult for us to understand what these men are saying. What they're saying is that not only were their minds stretched, but their hearts were stretched as well. And they recognized suddenly, that they were not alone. You see, renewal is not too mental nor is it too emotional, it is not too cerebral nor is it too sentimental. It involves the mind and the heart together with the discovery that we are not alone. Both combined in their experience to open their eyes. And so it was that as he sat at the familiar place at table and took bread, even though he was the guest and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were open. I do not think we need to move into ESP at this point. I believe what happened to them is that the unity of his life became clear to them over the divide of his death. They saw the continuity of his life above his death, beyond it. That the one who had walked with them then, was the one who walked with them now. That the one who taught them then, was the one who taught them now. That the one who broke bread with them then, was the one who broke bread with them now and he was alive. Archimedes, the great Greek scholar who anticipated so much of science. Archimedes said that if he could find the proper place to stand, he

could by a lever lift the whole world. The New Testament dares to say that this is the place to stand, that in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one spot from which it is possible to lift not only the church, but the world. Renewal is possible for the community of faith to understand that we are not alone. This is the word of hope that is so desperately needed today. Some years ago I was driving in a strange city and looking for a news broadcast and unable to find it on a strange radio dial, I settled for a disc jockey. He was playing his top 40. So far as I could tell, they were nobody else's top 40, but they were his top 40 and he was inflicting them on a major metropolitan area. It was the weirdest assortment of tunes I've ever heard. Until he got down to one which he announced was entitled, Everything's Gonna Be Alright. And I said to myself, that has something to do with hope, I wanna turn that up. So I turned up the volume and I listened with care, and was able to commit the words to memory. It went like this. Everything's gonna be all right, all right. Everything's gonna be all right. You'll find it pays to use this phrase, everything's gonna be all right, and that's it. (congregation laughing) Well, I said I was able to commit it to memory. (congregation laughing) And if you think the lyrics were something, you should have heard the melody. (congregation laughing) And I thought to myself, Good God in heaven, that's not hope, that's our despair. That's the ground of our predicament. We think somehow by what we say, or how we organize, or manage things, or the volume with which we sing it, we're gonna make everything be all right? No, there's a vast difference between optimism and hope. Hope is not a childish emotion which adults grow out of. Hope is rather the mature understanding that we are not alone, that we have been visited, that we walk in the presence of the risen Christ. You see the remarkable story is all here. We walk in blindness when we could be aware of the fact that we walk in his powerful presence. And by the open word and the breaking of the bread, we move to the home where we shall see him face to face. It's all here, and one thing more. A growing sense of responsibility. A growing sense of understanding, and a growing sense of hope, and a growing sense of responsibility. We read at the end of the story, they rose up that same hour and went back to Jerusalem to tell what had happened to them along the road. Do you see what's happened here? The people of despair have become the messengers of hope. Renewal has taken place, not in any shoddy sentimental sense, but in a deep, abiding sense of an awareness, of understanding and of hope, and of responsibility. But the supper was on the table, but what of that now? Christ is risen, and that must be told. But the road is always dangerous and after dark is dangerous indeed. But what of that now? Christ is risen, and that must be told. But back to Jerusalem where they killed him and they will kill you. Well, what of that now? Christ is risen and that must be told. John Calvin, that reformer of the 16th century, had a crest or shield, it signaled the symbols of his affection. On John Calvin's crest there were three symbols. The first was an open book. The second a burning heart. And the third was an outstretched hand. That's important for us never to forget, for that has to do with understanding and with hope, and with responsibility. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. (mellow organ music) (orchestral choir singing)

- Having heard God's word preached, let us now affirm what we believe. We believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the spirit. We trust God who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to reclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope, in life, in death, in life beyond death God is with us, we are not alone, thanks be to God. The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Praise be to you, oh Lord our God. The rest to the weary, the refreshment of those for whom the world grows old too early. Praise be to you, oh judge of all, who gives us your written word to guide our

lives. Praise be to you, oh God our redeemer, who gives us Jesus, your word become flesh, that our lives may be lived out in grace and courage. How good it is to praise you, oh teasing one, striding now down the other side of heaven. Now in our kitchens, now in our classrooms, now beneath the trees and bushes becoming green and fragrant with spring. Oh God of mercy, in each breath we know you as Holy Spirit sustaining our lives, uniting us to you and one another in love, rejoicing in life's newness we sing our Thanks Giving for your replenishing power. Save your people now in the dying portion of our lives. Where there is disease, bring Shalom. Where there is hunger, bring bread. Where there is oppression, bring freedom. Where there is dread, bring a hope filled courage. Fill with your holy laughter the sad spaces in our lives, and renew us in such a manner that each day's death is but prelude to each day's resurrection. Oh Lord of the universe, for a world embroiled in fighting we pray. Each nation it seems, believes that it is righteous, that it stands alone beneath your blessing, that its victory will bring a lasting peace. Each nation it seems is certain that other nations do wrong, that the blame lies elsewhere. Grant, oh magnificent one, grace to your worrying children. Grace that we will not destroy ourselves with self-righteousness. Grace that we will find new authentic ways of living in harmony. In the name of the Prince we pray, likewise, praying together that radical prayer that he gives to his faithful community. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever, amen. (soft organ music) (deep orchestral choir singing) Receive, oh God, our offerings. The poverty of our souls are always tenuous trust. Our wavering commitments, our money, our very beings. Make what is meager, great for your purpose. Make what is barren, pregnant with hope. Make of us an excited, exciting people, ministering in Christ name, and take into all of the human family, the healing, redeeming power of your love. In the name of him who is the Christ, amen. (soft organ music) (orchestral choir singing)

- Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you. Deep peace of the sun of peace to each of you this day and forever. (orchestral choir singing) (soft organ music)