



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “God Shows Up”

Scripture Lessons: *Psalm 34:1-22; Luke 24:12-35*

*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr.  
on April 23, 2023, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church  
in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### **Psalm 34:1-22**

- <sup>1</sup> I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.
- <sup>3</sup> O magnify the Lord with me.  
and let us exalt his name together.
- <sup>4</sup> I sought the Lord, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.
- <sup>5</sup> Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- <sup>6</sup> This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,  
and was saved from every trouble.
- <sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- <sup>8</sup> O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- <sup>9</sup> O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.
- <sup>10</sup> The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
- <sup>11</sup> Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- <sup>12</sup> Which of you desires life,  
and covets many days to enjoy good?
- <sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil,  
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- <sup>14</sup> Depart from evil, and do good;  
seek peace, and pursue it.
- <sup>15</sup> The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their cry.

- <sup>16</sup>The face of the Lord is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
- <sup>17</sup>When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,  
and rescues them from all their troubles.
- <sup>18</sup>The Lord is near to the brokenhearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- <sup>19</sup>Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the Lord rescues them from them all.
- <sup>20</sup>He keeps all their bones;  
not one of them will be broken.
- <sup>21</sup>Evil brings death to the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- <sup>22</sup>The Lord redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

### **Luke 24:12-35**

<sup>12</sup> But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloth by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

### **The Walk to Emmaus**

<sup>13</sup>Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" <sup>19</sup>He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." <sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

<sup>28</sup>As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered

together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” <sup>35</sup> Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

### **God Shows Up**

I have heard James talk on more than one occasion with the students and friends of our church family about God sightings - these occasions of grace wherein the students identify and celebrate the work of God in the world. Sometimes a God sighting is oriented around a relationship – maybe it was kindness shown or an unexpected reconciliation.

Of course, sometimes it has to do with the mere natural revelation of God, for, indeed, as the Scriptures testify, the very heavens are telling the glory of God.

Ah, to be certain, God is present and active in the world whether we see him or not! That said, it is not enough to assert that God is everywhere or to affirm that there is nowhere we can be where God is not. What does that mean? More to the point, what does it mean to say that God is with us?

Pastors refer to God’s presence all the time. I do it myself and in prayers when I visit someone in the hospital, assuring them that God is closer than our hands, than our feet, than the very breath in our lungs.

(pause)

When people are in the hospital, it is easy for them to think that God is absent. They get the terrible news that their loved one’s situation is terminal, and the question sometimes surfaces: “Where is God?” As if God is out of the office ... as if God’s heart does not also break.

I dare say that sometimes our misplaced understanding of God’s sovereignty (manages to keep God close) but only to ascribe reason or cause.

A woman’s father lay still on his hospital bed, and she asked me the theologically desperate question: “Why did God give my father a heart attack?”

Have we ever felt that sad ... that alone ... that disconnected? Have we ever felt so separated from God that we presume that, if God is present, and if God is in control, then God must have done this? Is that our God sighting?!?

Friends, let me assure you that there is nothing about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that justifies us feeling that way.

And that's not to suggest that God can't do whatever God sees fit. But to suggest that God is out to get his children – to suggest that God is hell bent on causing us harm ... that is not the God who loves us and who sent his son to die for our sins!

Our Old Testament lesson this morning reminds us that in life we have need for refuge ... there are occasions of trouble. If we were to read it through again, we would see references to evil, and deceit, and hunger, and fear ... but we will also see in the midst of it all, unmistakable references to God.

According to King David, God helps the humble to be glad, saves the souls of his people, takes the broken hearted – those who are crushed in spirit – and rescues them. Delivers them!

At the end of the Psalm David declares: "The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

Friends, that's the posture of God ... to redeem ... to save ... to love!

And that is exactly what God did in the person and work of his son Jesus, the one who came not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Oh, praise be to God that the word became flesh! In other words, God showed up. And he dwelled among us full of grace and truth, and, at the right time, he died for us ... for the ungodly ... "while we were yet sinners, the Bible says.

That was the message we proclaimed at Easter, barely two weeks ago ... and as a resurrection people we attest to God's saving work. In fact, we live and die by it. But that doesn't mean that everything goes our way. That doesn't mean that we will never doubt the nearness of God's Spirit.

Take the disciples in this morning's New Testament lesson for example ... Jesus has been raised, but that is not yet been their experience ... and as they walk along the Road to Emmaus, we would do well to remember that.

For them, there was no fanfare. No extraordinary trumpet voluntary the likes of which we had here on Easter morning. There were no angels shouting "hallelujah," not at that moment.

Their steps were probably slow, scuffing dust along the way. It probably didn't take Jesus any time to catch up to them ... to overtake Cleopas and his friend.

Now, there are two things I want to make sure to emphasize at this juncture. First, Jesus meets the disciples in their dejection ... in their disappointment. The second is this ... Jesus meets them in their dejection ... in their disappointment. And what I mean by that, is that their feelings were not

miraculously soothed. Jesus didn't just snap his fingers and change their disposition.

What Jesus did do however, was to come alongside them ... and in a manner all too consistent with his earthly ministry ... Jesus walked with them in all their weakness and in all their confusion. He took that journey with them.

Most of you know that we have a strong Stephen Ministry program here at First (Scots) that is comprised of men and women who have been trained to offer compassionate care to those who need it. It's almost as simple as that.

And if you ask a care-receiver to describe their relationship with a Stephen Minister, what you will often hear is a testimony to the fact that their Stephen Minister cared enough to show up. They didn't judge. They may not have had all the answers. But they listened and they loved and they helped them navigate through it ... whatever "it" was.

That sounds like a ministry very near the heart of our Savior if you ask me ... but obviously Jesus does much more. Oh, we may dabble in counsel, but God is the Wonderful Counselor!

Consider again how Jesus interacts with his disciples in Luke 24. As he walks with them ... and takes that journey ... he opens their eyes and roots their story in another story.

Simply put, Jesus talks with them about the stories of the Bible. And, in doing so, he helps them to become like those trees we read about in Psalm 1 ... those trees that are planted by streams of water, and that yield their fruit in their season. It is good to know that for Cleopas and his friend, despair would not mark the end of their journey!

Granted, we don't know very much about their life. We know only the name Cleopas – the other man remains nameless, his name ... lost to history, it seems.

Over the years, I have wondered if the omission of that man's name was intentional, because Luke, a Greek physician, doesn't seem to have any trouble remembering some rather long names elsewhere ... Why this man? Why this story? Why now?

Some have postulated that this story is God's way of having us put on someone else's shoes ... of inserting our name ... and to have a sort of God sighting for ourselves!

We, who throughout another day, have heard the Good News of our Savior, we find ourselves walking along the various roads of life ... Easter is behind us ... and we are told that we go forth with the Risen Savior ... but sometimes it doesn't feel like he is here.

Nevertheless, over, and over, and over again, Jesus does draw near ... and isn't it wonderful that Jesus has us to help bring him up to speed!?! "Are you the only one who doesn't know the things that have been going on?" And Jesus says, "What things?"

Why, there was another school shooting ... and the war in Ukraine ... it's still going on. And just a few weeks ago, a tornado swept through Mississippi and killed at least 25 people. We thought God might do something about it, but alas, he's not here ... (pause)

And to that, perhaps God would say again, "Oh how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared." And what would that word be for us? What would Jesus say to you and to me? Well, I dare say that it might be different for each of us, but one thing is for sure ... whatever God says will be rooted in his Word ... in the law ... in the prophets and in the words of Jesus himself.

God has said it as plain as day, "I will never leave or forsake you!" And Jesus put it like this: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Upon hearing these words and others, are we not challenged to say ... "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the Scripture to us?" Still, there are other ways to celebrate the nearness of God; indeed, the presence of God can also be realized in Henry's baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Let me add that while what we have in our New Testament lesson may not be the Lord's Supper, per se, it is nonetheless a gift of God's grace! The Bible says that when Jesus was at table with Cleopas and his friend, he took bread, he blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and their eyes were opened ... and they recognized him!

In just a few moments we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and the miracle is that Jesus continues to be with us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup – and through this sacred meal, we are fed, and we are nourished – and our eyes are opened.

Upon tasting and seeing that the Lord is good ... may we believe it ... and live it ... and when we feel alone, and when we think there is no one on whom we can depend, may we, by God's grace, depend on Him!

Let us lean not unto our own understanding but let us lean ever more intentionally into God ... let us cast our cares, our fears, our anxieties. Let us cast them upon God. Because, for having done so, Jesus has promised that in the end we will find rest unto our souls.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The above sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.