This is the season of triumph and tragedy. There is the triumph of Palm Sunday and the tragic betrayal and death of Good Friday. There is the tragedy of the disciples’ dashed hopes, and the triumph of Easter morning. There is the triumph of seeing the risen Jesus. And there is the shrouded uncertainty of what life and faith the day AFTER Easter is all about.

The disciples who had expected great things out of Jesus found their hopes totally dashed. They had spent three years with him. Their whole present and future was tied up with him. Then in one short week their whole world collapsed. They had no idea of a triumph coming in just three days. All they knew was that their beloved Jesus was dead and buried. And then, even after those first resurrection appearances, they STILL were baffled, confused, disturbed, worried. The disciples felt totally overwhelmed. They didn't know how they possibly could go on.

Like those ancient, first disciples, we know something about being overwhelmed - so overwhelmed that we feel like just giving up and not trying to go on. Carrying the burden of a painful past that will not go away. Trapped in an unproductive present, locked into patterns with family or friends that are unsatisfying or even destructive. Or facing a very uncertain and frightening future. Stuck in a situation where you can't think of any good options. Haven't you ever simply felt like you could not possibly GO ON? Felt like GIVING UP?

The stories of the resurrection and the appearances of the risen Jesus tend to SEPARATE us from the Biblical world – they are so UNlike our faith experiences. Luke's story of the “last breakfast” is one story, however, that brings the world of the Bible and our world closer together. Our story in Luke describes who we are - and who we are called to become. For the story asks the question: how CAN you go on when you feel like giving up?

I think it is no accident that every one of the resurrection appearances was to a GROUP of believers. The women at the tomb. The TWO disciples who ran to see the empty. The Emmaus Road. The appearances of Jesus with the 12, both when Thomas was absent and when Thomas was present. Our lakeside Lucan story for today. In each case these foundational faith experiences, these “seeing of the risen one”, occurred not to individuals, but to GROUPS. Christian faith has been communal and community based from the day Jesus first called disciples to leave their nets and follow him. As a community we gather for worship, study, fellowship, and service. As a corporate body we craft what we believe and then as a congregation affirm what we believe. Even our sacred texts are the products of communities of faith, which wrote, preserved, and passed down the religious experiences of the people of God.

Psychiatrist Alfred Adler argued that the source of all neurosis, psychosis, and criminality is the failure of individuals to develop a sense of collective responsibility. Mental illness and crime are functions of COMMUNITY FAILURE - when I fail to see MY responsibility for you and YOUR behavior - when I forget that MY well being and YOUR wholeness are inseparable.

Christian faith ASSUMES that my well being and your well being cannot be separated. Christian faith is
communal and community-based. Jesus’ summation of religious obligation expresses it so well: **You shall love the Lord your God and YOUR NEIGHBOR as you love YOURSELF.**

Now Christians, like persons everywhere, have problems, and at times are deeply troubled. But in the Christian community of the church we have the strength to RECEIVE and the POWER TO GIVE. The church IS many things, and the church is called to DO many things, but we are called first of all to BE brothers and sisters of one another: to BE the community of Jesus Christ. To love and respect and care for one another – warts, sins, and all.

In the church we are called to be here for each other. And being here FOR each other, we become the community of the church we are called to be, breaking down those barriers which divide us, and building up those bonds which can support us. In the church we can go on, even when we feel like giving up.

When Jesus appears to his disciples, he asks, "Have you anything here to eat?" And they give him a piece of broiled fish. Jesus eating a piece of broiled fish is not just a curious detail of our Lord's dining preferences. Jesus eating a piece of fish is Luke's affirmation and reminder of the humanity of Jesus. Jesus really was human, really was one of us. Jesus really hungered and thirsted and suffered and worried - just like we do.

In *Honest to God*, his provocative book of the 1960's, Bishop John A T Robinson emphasized the radical humanity of the God-man Jesus. "God is to be found at the point where things really matter to us." Robinson wrote, "He seems most times to come in only at the edges of life...'out there' somewhere...but Jesus shows [God belongs to the center of our lives]." (intro)

And that is what Luke's story affirms: the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ ARE ONE. Jesus comes to us precisely where we are, sharing our needs and hopes, and guiding us in our day-to-day lives. Remember his words from the cross? "My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knew the disappointments of life, the tragedies, the sadness. His closest friends let him down when he needed them the most. One of them even betrayed him. Jesus experienced the same sorrows and doubts we know. And he endured it all. And because HE endured it all, we have hope that WE can endure it all. We can go on because in Jesus Christ God has become human flesh, suffering as we suffer, and enduring pain as we endure pain. And so we can go on, even when we feel like giving up, because we have a God who has come and entered our human lives.

A famous monastery had fallen on hard times. People no longer flocked there for prayer, and men no longer sought the solitary life of prayer the monastery offered. Only a few old monks remained. And they didn't know how they could go on.

Nearby an old rabbi lived in a simple hut. The monks respected and revered their Jewish brother. One day the Abbot went to visit the rabbi, and poured out his heart to him. The two men embraced, and with tearful eyes, sat in silence. At long last, the rabbi spoke: "You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts," he said. "You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that, no one must ever say it aloud again: **THE MESSIAH IS AMONG YOU.**"

The next day, the Abbot shared the rabbi's word with his brothers: "One of us is the Messiah!" The monks were startled, and asked themselves, "What could this mean? Is it Brother John? Or ME?"

As time when by, the monks began to treat one another with a very special reverence. There was a gentle,
wholehearted human quality about them now which was hard to describe. They lived with one another as men who had finally found something truly worthwhile, caring for one another, sharing each other's burdens. And once again, people came from far and wide to be nourished by the spirituality of the monks. The monks not only found a way to go on. They flourished. (White, Stories for the Journey)

Friends: Christ is risen. The messiah is among you. Christ is risen in us. And by the grace of God, even when you feel like giving up, you CAN go on. AMEN.

Psalm 4

1 Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
   You gave me room when I was in distress.
   Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

2 How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?
   How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?
   Selah

3 But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
   the LORD hears when I call to him.

4 When you are disturbed, do not sin;
   ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
   Selah

5 Offer right sacrifices,
   and put your trust in the LORD.

6 There are many who say, “O that we might see some good!
   Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”

7 You have put gladness in my heart
   more than when their grain and wine abound.

8 I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
   for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

Luke 24:36-48

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

38 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

39 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,
beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.