Sunday, April 13, 1986
HELLO AND GOODBYE
Luke 24:44-53

During the season of Lent leading up to Easter, we followed the journeys of Jesus. We also noted that our own lives are, in fact, journeys. From the time we are born into this world until the time we die, each one of us is on a journey through time. We have our outward journeys as we physically grow, mature, and move from one place to another. We grow up. We go to school. We leave home. We go to work. We change jobs. We grow older. We meet obstacles. There are detours. We change directions. Always we are on a journey from birth to death, and we have our inward spiritual journeys.

Throughout our journey, we discover that life is a long series of transitions. Life is filled with changes. Mature people accept this and deal with it so that life ultimately moves forward. Immature people fight and put off, even deny change or transition. But changes come to all of us, whether we choose them or not. Children are born; relationships change. Jobs come to an end. Roofs leak. We grow older. People die. There are many things that happen in life whether or not we give our permission.

To use a different metaphor — our lives are filled with saying, “Hello” and “Goodbye.”

In fact, I believe it can be said that saying “Hello” and “Goodbye” are the two major learning tasks all human beings need to accomplish.

The sad fact is that some children come into this world and have no one in their family really say “Hello” to them. Their existence is hardly acknowledged. They do not feel welcome. The other sad fact is that some people never learn to say “Goodbye” to mama or daddy, or to other things as well. There are those who let mama or daddy still dominate their lives even though mama or daddy have long since passed on.

Not only do we need to learn to say “Hello” to new people and new situations, but others need to say “Hello.” And just as we have to learn to say “Goodbye” to individuals and events and feelings — so others need to say “Goodbye” to us.

Here’s another kind of example. Let’s say your job change has meant that you need to move to another city, to new surroundings, to a different environment. You won’t be able to truly say “Hello” to that new place and all that it means, until you have said, “Goodbye,” to the place you moved from. “Goodbye” and “Hello” are often related.

Jesus Christ knew how to say “Hello” to life, to individuals, to new situations, and He also knew when and how to say “Goodbye.” Jesus also knew that it’s not until we are able to say “Goodbye” to something in the past or present, that we are able to say “Hello” to something new and let it be a part of us. It was not until Jesus said “Goodbye” to the disciples and they to Him, that they were able to experience Him in another way following the resurrection appearances.

This morning then, let’s look more closely at how Jesus said, “Hello” and “Goodbye” and what that has to say to us about our own “Hellos” and “Goodbyes.” I believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the Christian faith which followed, gives us a framework for understanding and being able to say both “Hello” and “Goodbye.”

To be able to say “Hello” is to be able to greet and accept the human being in other people. Look again at what Jesus did.
Jesus said “Hello” to individuals that most of the rest of society treated as outcasts. He said “Hello” to people like Zacchaeus, for example. Zacchaeus was a rich man. He’d gotten rich by exploiting the poor people of his own country. He had defrauded them in the service of the Roman occupying government, extracting taxes, feathering his own nest, and he was hated by his fellow citizens as a corrupt traitor.

So the crowd in Jericho was angry when Jesus chose to say “Hello” to an obviously unworthy man. However, sometimes saying “Hello” can work miracles. Zacchaeus was amazed, overwhelmed. By saying “Hello” to him, Jesus was acknowledging him as a human being, a child of God. He was acknowledging his basic existence.

Have you ever been in a room and ignored by everyone? No one speaks to you. No one says “Hello” to you and means it. It’s the most lonely feeling in the world because no one has taken the time to simply acknowledge that you exist.

When we say “Hello” to someone — we give them life! But how difficult it is for you and me to acknowledge the human being, the child of God in other people. Frequently, we instead label a person. He’s a grouch! She’s a reactionary! He’s a radical! She’s uptight! He’s a bore! She’s on welfare! Instead of saying “Hello” we squeeze the humanity out of the other person and turn off our own humanity at the same time.

Jesus could say “Hello” to all kinds of people because He saw their essential nature as being children of God. He was saying “Hello” to that God-image which is in every human being, and when we do that we call forth that God-image.

Jesus was able to say “Hello” to so many people that others ignored — lepers, prostitutes, Samaritans, the crippled, women, and children. Our lives are filled with “Hello” situations. We greet a new baby in a family. We need to say “Hello” to a new member of the family who comes in marriage. When a child goes to a daycare center, it’s a whole new world saying “Hello” to that child. Or when a child comes here to Sunday morning church school for the first time, we need to say a warm “Hello.” This morning we are receiving new members into the congregation and the ceremony of reception itself is a way of saying “Hello” to them. Last Sunday morning we said “Hello” to eighteen 9th grade young people in the confirmation class.

The church is especially to be a community where we are able to say “Hello” to each other as human beings — as children of God — as equals.

Secondly, we Christians are to be the kind of people who are able to say “Hello” not only to all kinds of people, but to life and to God’s creation and to God! To be able to say “Hello” means we are willing to greet and accept the new that is always coming in life.
Thus Jesus was able to see God working in new ways. He could greet each new day with the words of the Psalmist, “This is the day which God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” The Bible tells us that God is always making things new. We need to be able to say “Hello” to God’s new ways of working.

For example, Jesus saw that God was working through the despised Samaritans as well as through the Jews. The early church saw God at work among the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

Today we can see God working through some of our new technologies. In the early days of the church, God's message was spread first by word of mouth. Then as more and more people were able to read and write — the written word was used. When the printing press was invented many years later, the Bible was one of the first books to be printed. Again, the church said "Hello" to the new. I believe that today the use of television for churches like this one is a way of saying "Hello" to the new.

Thirdly, Jesus also knew how to say "Goodbye" and He called on others to say "Goodbye." We can learn from Him how and when to say "Goodbye."
Our lives are filled with "Goodbyes" as well as "Hellos." In birth, we say "Goodbye" to the womb. Later there is weaning. Then the "Goodbye" to the security of the home as we begin school. There is the first "Goodbye" to our own bed when we stay overnight at someone else's house. There are the "Goodbyes" we say to various objects which have become very important to us as children, the pacifiers, the security blankets, the special toys.

When we leave home for college or to take a job, or rent our first apartment, we are saying "Hello" to something new, but also "Goodbye" to a former way of life. There may be the "Goodbye" involved in the breakup of our first love affair. If we choose to marry, that involves a different kind of "Goodbye" to our former way of life and to the family in which we grew up. And unless that "Goodbye" is said properly, it can interfere with our new family.

In today's world, more and more people move from one job to another and from one part of the country to another and this means saying "Goodbye" in many ways. Divorce, the death of relatives, friends, parents, facing our own death, all are a part of learning to say "Goodbye."

Each day we say "Goodbye" to the past. When we celebrate birthdays, we are saying "Goodbye" to another year and "Hello" to a new year. One reason for New Year's celebrations is to have a way of saying "Goodbye" to an old year, as well as "Hello" to the new one.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples several times in different ways. It was His way of saying "Goodbye" to them. In the scripture reading for this morning from the 24th chapter of Luke, Jesus tells His disciples "Goodbye." He will no longer be with them in the way that He was.

Because of the rich fellowship they have known is no more, He comforts them. There will be no more intimate conversation with Him as they wrestle with His person and mission. Now it is their opportunity to work out their own salvation and to realize that God is at work in them. He takes time to say "Goodbye" so that they may be Easter people with resurrection in their eyes.

Jesus knew that until He said "Goodbye" to them properly, and they therefore to Him — they would not be able to get on with their lives and the work that He had left them to do. The disciples had to say "Goodbye" so that they would no longer be dependent on Him in the same way as they had before His death and resurrection. Furthermore, there had not been time for proper "Goodbyes" right before the crucifixion. Jesus had been arrested, put on trial, and the disciples had fled in fear. There was some unfinished business that had to be taken care of before they could now get on with their work.

So too, for us. Unless proper "Goodbyes" are said, we are hindered in going forward and saying "Hello" to the new that is waiting for us. A young woman breaks up with her boyfriend and has difficulty in establishing new relationships. A wife moves with her husband to a new job location, begins to drink heavily, and picks up men at a nearby bar. A mother whose

children have grown up and left home, eats herself into obesity. Proper “Goodbyes” have not been carried through.

“Goodbyes” must be said before we can get on with new “Hellos” and if the “Goodbyes” are too abrupt, they must be worked through.

A few years ago, a family called to talk with me about a member of the family who had died while overseas in another country. The body had been cremated, and no kind of funeral or memorial service had ever been held. It had been over six months since the death, and members of the family felt that some unfinished business had not been taken care of. I suggested that the family members choose a day and time when we could gather together in their home and together I would lead them in a memorial service. This we did one Sunday afternoon. I led them in prayers of thanksgiving for the life of the one who had died. Then various family members took turns talking about and remembering incidents from the life of the one who had died. The brief service closed with another prayer. It was a “Goodbye” event. Following that service, members of the family have since told me that now their lives could go forward in a way that had not been possible before.

So Jesus arranged some “Goodbye” appearances with His disciples and then they saw Him no more. They did not forget Him. They now were able to experience Him in a new way. But first they had to say “Goodbye” to experiencing Him in the way they had previously. They were now ready to move on to the next “Hello.”

Each of us lives with “Goodbyes” that have taken place but are not acknowledged by us, and until we say them and act them out, we are not ready to say “Hello” and move forward. This is true in our spiritual lives as well. We have to say “Goodbye” to fear to say “Hello” to courage. We need to say “Goodbye” to greed and covetousness before we can say “Hello” to generosity and thankfulness. We need to say “Goodbye” to the idols we worship, the false gods before we can say “Hello” to God.

We are to be both “Hello” and “Goodbye” people.

This morning — look into your own life. What things are lingering there that need saying “Goodbye” to? And then also ask — what things are present now that I need to welcome and accept and say “Hello.”

And the good news is that in our “Goodbyes” and “Hellos,” we meet God who is always making all things new! Amen.