

## Recognizing the Resurrection Luke 24: 13-35

That same day [the first Easter day] two [followers of Jesus] were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

“What’s this you’re discussing so intently as you walk along?”

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend.

Cleopas: “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?”

Jesus: “What has happened?”

Cleopas: “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn’t find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn’t see Jesus.”

Jesus : “So thick-headed! [Jesus was always caring and compassionate!] So slow-hearted! Why can’t you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don’t you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?” Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on, but they pressed him.

“Stay and have supper with us. It’s nearly evening; the day is done.”

So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

“Didn’t we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?”

Their eyes were open. They finally saw him and he was gone. Didn’t our hearts burn within us when he talked to us? Oh yes, that was Jesus. Didn’t we feel on fire as he spoke to us on the road?” That very evening, they raced the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that they had seen Jesus.

What powerful story! Imagine it being told and retold in the early Christian Diaspora community, being told by the writer of Luke’s gospel ca. 85CE (50-60 years after Jesus). How long was that from the actual events of Jesus’ life? Who among us remembers the Korean War. The time from the death of Jesus to the final writing of Luke’s gospel was probably about the same as the time from the present back to the time of the Korean War.

These two disciples were not among the twelve, but knew Jesus very well. They did not recognize him when he came to them on the road to Emmaus. Why not? Perhaps this post-Easter Jesus had power to obscure their minds or vision or maybe he didn’t look much like the human Jesus did. It’s possible that the disciples just couldn’t imagine the possibility that he was alive; literally couldn’t see it. It’s possible that the disciples were so wrapped up in their own worries and concerns that they failed to really look. Perhaps they were too afraid to see.

When did they recognize him? It was only when he broke bread with them; in the Eucharistic image of his incarnation – “take my body and my blood into yourselves.” The living Christ Spirit in us lets us recognize the living Spirit in others and in the events of our lives.

The post-Easter Jesus (the risen Christ) doesn’t look the same as the man Jesus did. Many modern day Christians wish they could have had an opportunity to see and hear the historical Jesus in person – that their faith would have been much stronger as a result. This story, as well as that of Thomas from last Sunday, are powerful statements that faith in God through Christ does not come from clinging to the historical Jesus, but from recognizing and confessing the risen Christ – the Spirit who is alive and accessible today. This Spirit is alive now in the same way as she was alive and accessible to the community of Luke’s church near the end of the first century.

Their challenge was to find the meaning of Jesus’ life for them in terms of their faith in God, and to learn to see the living Christ in their own lives. Luke’s was a church of the Diaspora. They were increasingly cut off from the Jewish roots of the early Jesus’ faith. There was no longer a simple Jesus movement. So, what would Jesus look like for them? We face the same question, what does Jesus look like for us?

We travel many roads in our lives: roads of success and roads of failure and hardship, roads of celebration and roads of struggle. Like those two disciples, our road of faith can be filled with feelings of confusion mingled with wonder and hopeful expectation. Many of us here have been walking a road of theological exploration – seeking to take seriously the questions raised by modern science and contemporary

biblical scholarship concerning Jesus, the Bible, and the traditional faith of the Christian Church. There have been, and continue to be, many questions and lots of deep conversation. The study we are doing in House Church – of Marcus Borg’s book *The Heart of Christianity* – is bring new hope to many and challenging questions to all.

Always, on the roads we travel, the living Christ waits for us and walks with us. More often than not, I suspect we don’t recognize who it is that walks beside us. Always, we have the option to invite him to linger, to stay with us. In these moments, in the humble and significant acts of our lives such as the breaking of bread, our eyes become open and we see who this is. Christ now comes in the different faces of those we encounter and in the world we inhabit.

Several years ago, I hosted a weekly discussion group for homeless men at a Washington, DC ministry center. It was only the second week of this RAP group and attendance had not been overwhelming to this point. Nobody showed up the first week – even with free food. This day, however, a small, older gentleman came quietly in. He was dressed in a disheveled suit, almost certainly procured from the clothes closet downstairs. Then, two more men came in. They were not neither quiet nor small. They enjoyed being intimidating.

The first twenty minutes was a nightmare. These two men continually challenged and berated the older man. Any attempt at conversation was cut off. Finally, he mentioned he interest in Booker T. Washington. Almost magically, they became interested. Like many of the homeless men who came through that group over the years, this gentleman spent many hours each day in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Public Library. He was quite well informed about Booker T. Washington and spoke, almost without interruption, for the remainder of the time. At the end, they thanked him with a tone of reverence. Then, all three left. I never would see that older gentleman again, but the two younger men were regular RAP group participants for many months.

It was as they left the room that the realization struck me. I knew that the living Christ had been present in that older gentleman. In a way that was both mysterious and also clear and compelling, I knew this to be true. My heart burned within me

You and I are believers out of choice. Our faith is a matter of choice, will, and commitment. Along the road of our journey, there are many opportunities to see Jesus in the life of others, and in our own lives. Those involved with Crossroads’ current production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat* are finding the presence of the risen Christ in the faces of each other. I see the reality of the Christ Spirit in the lives and actions of so many who are working on our capital campaign. The living presence of the risen Christ waits for each one of us to recognize him in the face of a loved one, or a co-worker, or a child or parent, or in the face of a stranger.

What causes us to miss seeing the Christ among us? Usually, it’s being pre-occupied with our own worries and concerns. They obscure our spiritual vision.

- What’s to become of me and those I love?
- How am I going to take advantage of an opportunity?

- What's it going to cost me?
- What will people think of me?

And we don't hear Christ speaking. We don't recognize the evidence of resurrection standing in front of us.

On the roads we travel, Christ is the Spirit who walks with us. The Holy Spirit is the companion of our inner journey who also waits to encounter us in the persons with whom we share life. Our ability to recognize Christ in each other

There is one secret we often miss on the journey. To see Christ clearly in our lives is to see ourselves as God sees us. To capture the vision of resurrection is to embrace the truth of our individual potential and the possibilities for which our community exists. I heard several people say, after seeing Crossroads' production of Joseph, "I can't believe this church could do something like that." But we can and we have. We have done many amazing things. We have begun a mission relationship with a community in Guatemala and are helping them move toward a place of financial independence by providing them sewing machines. People from our congregation have gone there to help and have come back revitalized.

We have sponsored neighborhood partnerships with a two block neighborhood over on Wayne Avenue and with an apartment in the Community LINC project. We have provided thousands of dollars for ministry work and relief efforts in Kansas City and around the world through the Alliance of Baptists, Baptist World Alliance, and the Heifer Project. We have these and many more amazing things as church. And we can do more. We have seen these things. We have done them. Now we have a vision for what else can be done. Right now, we are raising money through a capital campaign to help us buy a church house. We'll do it because we have the vision.

Our faith is grounded in a living God. The Spirit is always present in and around us. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have the option of inviting him to linger, to stay with us. In these moments, in the humble and significant acts of our lives such as the breaking of bread, the sharing of worship, the meeting of minds and hearts, our eyes become open and we see the living Christ in the faces of each other. Go ahead. Look around. Recognize the resurrection. It's happening in you.