

April 7, 2024  
Luke 24:13-22

### “Resurrection Stories: Encountering Jesus on the Road”

I know that this may seem self-evident when I say it – but something special happened to Jesus at the resurrection that really change him. We don’t often think about it, but there are two different experiences of Jesus that the disciples have with Jesus, the pre-Easter Jesus, and the post-Easter or after Easter Jesus. Last week we talked about Mary the Mother of James, Mary Magdalene and Salome going to anoint the body of Jesus with spices on Easter morning. John’s gospel tells us that one of the Mary’s stood weeping outside of the tomb, and when Jesus reveals himself to her, she believes that she is the gardener, she doesn’t recognize him until he calls her by name.

Likewise the disciples in today’s reading about the road to Emmaus don’t recognize Jesus, even though they seem to spend a great deal of time with him on the road talking about the scriptures and who Jesus was. Something has changed with this after-Easter Jesus, so much so that even people who knew him before the crucifixion don’t know who he is right away. Other differences that you may remember from your own scripture studies is that Jesus does things differently after the resurrection – now he comes and goes through closed and locked doors, he breathes God’s spirit upon the disciples, and he allows the disciples to touch and see his wounds.

It is this post resurrection Jesus that meets us on our journey as well, and that is good news, because the resurrected Jesus is eternal, not bound by space and time the way the pre-Easter Jesus seems to have been. I think that if miracles surrounded the birth, and life of Jesus, it is no less likely that miracles continued to be at work in the risen Jesus as well.

One of the best places to meet with Jesus is when we get out on the road and meet with people and get to know them, and hear their stories, like these disciples did. They were feeling down and disheartened about the death of Jesus, and even still their hearts burned within them when they shared their understanding of the scriptures with what they believed was a stranger on their journey on the road to Emmaus. Understanding the scriptures in a new way can reveal Jesus to us on our personal journey and make our hearts burn within us as well with the fires of compassion.

John Wesley was on a mission trip to reform the Anglican church of his time, and he ended up visiting a congregation of Moravians. He heard a message about personal salvation being for all people, even people like himself, and he felt that he was experiencing forgiveness to the uttermost parts of his soul. He wrote in his journal that knowing the love and forgiveness of God in this personal way made his heart “Strangely Warmed”. This is a parallel to the Emmaus story, although Wesley would never have thought of himself as a disciple in the same way as those two travelers were identified, it was his moment of enlightenment and awakening.

When I was in High School I had something of an Emmaus moment on a ten day canoe retreat to the boundary waters of Minnesota with a group of total strangers. The call had gone out for youth from Methodist Churches to join in this adventure, and I answered the call. By the end of the trip we were gathered around one of our last campfires when the pastor’s leading the group invited us to share in the sacrament of holy communion. The juice was lime kool-aid mixed with luke-warm lake water, the bread was ten day old sliced bread from the bottom of one of the packs we were carrying. But we were invited to discover Jesus on our journey, and to give our lives to being Christians and followers of Jesus.

I answered the call, even though I wasn't sure what it was going to mean for me and my future, but God heard the sincere prayers of my heart, despite my doubts, and continued to develop within me a calling that would develop into becoming a minister. In that journey I have had the privilege of hearing the stories of many people who have come to meet Jesus on their journeys, particularly during their efforts to serve others.

One woman I know went with a group of people to build houses just across the border in Mexico, where people were living in poverty. They mixed cement and built simple structures using concrete blocks and put on tin roofs, and the people who received them were grateful for strong shelter from the sun, wind, and storms. She worked side by side with the indigenous people of the area and claims that she learned more about Jesus and love and compassion and kindness from them than she was ever able to give away to them, despite her best efforts.

In Sedro-Woolley the Youth Group Leader would take the Youth group down to downtown Seattle to cook a meal for homeless people at the Union Gospel Mission there. The youth almost always believed that they were giving a gift to the un-housed men and women that they were feeding, but when they witnessed the acts of compassion and politeness and courtesy that these people shared with one another they found it was themselves who were blessed by the experience of serving in the name of Christ.

There was another place where a man I know crossed the street to talk to his neighbor, and help pick up some of the trash that the wind had blown out of the trash bins the night before. They talked with each other, discovered some common history of both having served in branches of the military and come from similar backgrounds. They kept talking, and over the weeks found that as they were on the lookout for opportunities they helped one another, and found the love of God working in each other's lives, despite the fact that neither of them went to church. They recognized love in the actions of the other, even though they probably wouldn't have told each other that, but when one began going to church the other decided to come also. Their journey was just across the street from one another.

We discover the risen Christ in the mission, in the work, in the sharing of compassion and love for other people, particularly when we do this without the expectation of thanks or praise for our actions. We discover the living and resurrected Jesus at work in our hearts when we are doing what is right, not always what is easy or comfortable, but when we are doing what is right to serve one another and our neighbors in the world.

Do you remember a Sunday School teacher or Youth Group leader who helped to shape your faith when you were a child? So often these are simply people who love God and want to do their best to share the love of God with others, particularly those who are young and willing to learn. Many times they served for decades without any payment, save for perhaps the recognition of a grateful congregation from time to time, yet they made a difference. And as much as they brought the love of Jesus to the children, the children in turn have shared the love of God with their teachers and leaders through countless acts of loving-kindness along the way.

Just in the few weeks that Diane and I have been here, our children have shared with us the joy of their stuffed animals, hugs, and various present's and pictures that they have made – just out of the goodness of their hearts. They are showing the love of God with us on our journey with them, even as it is just beginning for us. Serving children as volunteers in the community, homes, and schools as well as in our families helps to reveal what it means to be in the presence of the risen Christ – at least part of the time!

The disciples on the road to Emmaus really recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of the meal, with Jesus, which is one of the reasons that we share in the sacrament of communion as often as we do. It is also why potluck meals and fellowship times are almost sacred or sacramental in their own right in the United Methodist Church. It is why we have such strong memories of having prepared and served spaghetti dinners, mission teas, and bake sales for our community. It is why it is so healing for each of us to share in ways that are appropriate to our own family situations to help out families in need by giving to our shared Hispanic Ministries program. It is not so much that we are a blessing to those we serve, but rather, that through loving service, we discover the blessings of Christ alive and well and growing in our own hearts.

Reading the Emmaus story once again encourages us to get out and get on the road, to get on the journey of life in ways that are appropriate for us and in ways that are helpful to others. It is by making this journey that we ourselves encounter the risen Jesus on the road, and are blessed by his presence. The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? The cup we drink, is it not a sharing in the love of Christ? Jesus is waiting for us in the sacraments this day, and in the world where we will encounter him in more ways than we can imagine. Thanks be to God for the risen Christ at work in our lives. Amen.