

Incognito Christ | Luke 24:13 – 35

First UMC Red Wing | Pastor Katie Matson-Daley | April 26, 2020

Lots of detective stories use the idea of a disguise or a mask or someone being Incognito to further the plot of the story. Sometimes it is the sleuth who is in disguise, other times it is the criminal, but there are often characters in mystery stories who go incognito. And we have the story of an incognito Christ in today's gospel.

See as readers of this story, we know early on that this "stranger" is really Jesus, the Christ. But these two friends do not know who it is. We don't know why they can't tell that it's Jesus, if he was disguised or transformed, or if their grief made them blind to who he was, the language in the passage is incredibly ambiguous, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." The sentence is in the passive voice, we really do not know who or what kept their eyes from recognizing him.

But throughout the story there are some things that reveal the stranger's identity to the pair.

When the story opens, there is a sense of lament or grief between Cleopas and his friend we had hoped that this was the Messiah who would redeem Israel.

I wonder if some of us are feeling the need to lament these days. I wonder if some of us have been trying to power through with hope and optimism, but really need a good cry? A friend of mine recently lost her father and was sharing about her grief on Facebook, a second friend commented but the day her mother died all she could do was walk.

Shirley said that she walked for 14 miles the day her mother died years ago. The walking helped her to process the grief. So here are the friend and Cleopas walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, maybe just walking and talking out their grief. And this is no quick walk around the block, seven miles, about the distance from downtown Red Wing to Bay City, or Wacouta. Not extremely far but an effortful walk. They walk, and they talk and my guess is they are grieving.

This week I was on a zoom call with Todd, one of the funeral directors and managers at Mahn Family Funeral Home here in Red Wing. While Mahn can host small gatherings of up to ten people during the pandemic these gatherings are usually limited to the immediate family. Children and spouses then are getting the opportunity to say good-bye to the deceased loved one, but the next-door neighbor, or the buddy from the softball team, or the cousin who lives in Arizona are not getting the same opportunity.

And many people are grieving other things, the loss of a job, the loss of connections, the loss of routine and many other losses in this time have us all feeling different levels of grief, even those who recognize that they are more fortunate than others readily admit that there are things that they miss.

There has been a lot of talk about the grief that our 12th grade seniors are feeling, but elementary kids moving to middle school, preschoolers moving to kindergarten, middle schoolers moving to high school and college seniors moving to career or graduate school, these students and their parents are grieving the rituals of the end of the year. There are probably dozens of things that we are grieving this year. So maybe it's easy to imagine ourselves walking along the seven-mile road with Cleopas and his unnamed partner than it has been in previous years.

One of the ways that we can create the conditions where Christ is revealed to us, is to be aware of our emotions and to be honest about them. Making opportunities to express emotions in our conversations with God creates a pathway for the realness of our hearts to connect with the realness of God's love. For some the challenge is slowing down enough to know what we're feeling, for others the challenge is to express or confess the feeling. Truth sets us free and that includes emotional truth.

Giving space to be emotionally honest, is an important part of looking for the resurrected Christ in our midst.

As the two walk along the road with the incognito Christ and talk about what they have experienced and the events in Jerusalem, Jesus begins to talk through the whole narrative of scripture, from Moses to Jesus himself, and explains all the different things. Our first step in creating an environment where Christ can be revealed is emotional honesty. The second step is to open the scriptures. Last

week I was facing a hard decision, I shared it with a friend and the next morning she texted me, “as I was praying for you and your decision today, I was reminded of the story of Mary anointing Jesus with expensive nard, and Judas being outraged at the exorbitant cost.” As I read her message to me, the truth of God’s lavish love settled in my spirit and I knew what the right decision was.

Reading scripture can sometimes seem completely overwhelming, and it is an easy habit to fall out of. If you have a smart phone, I recommend the “Bible” app from YouVersion and Life. Church as an easy way to have scripture available to you. You can search for reading plans, if you’re new to reading the Bible, or it’s been a long time since you’ve had a regular reading plan, don’t commit to reading through the whole Bible at once, that’s just too much of a commitment. Try and find something you can read in small pieces, maybe to encourage emotional honesty, you could read a Psalm every day. Or maybe you want to read through one of the gospels. But try it and talk about it.

The disciples still don’t recognize Jesus on the road, but later we learn that their hearts were burning within them as they walked. They were starting to wake up to God’s presence on the road.

As they get to the house where they are going the pair of disciples invite the Incognito Christ into their home for a meal. The first step to seeing God revealed in the ordinariness of regular life is to cultivate emotional honesty, the second step is to open the word, particularly if you can open the word in community, the third part, and the one that finally opens their eyes, is to invite Christ into your home and to break bread.

Lots of us are missing church and gathering as a group. But as Jesus tells the woman at the well, the time is coming and is now here when the question of whether we should worship on this mountain or that mountain will no longer be important, because true worshippers worship in Spirit and in Truth.

The early church always met in homes, they didn’t call themselves house churches or small group;, they were just the church. We may be sheltered in place at home, but that doesn’t stop us from experiencing God. In our story today, Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the other two. Take, bless, break, give. It is in the taking, blessing, breaking and giving that Jesus is finally revealed to the two friends.

What do you have in your home that you can take, bless, break and give to others? Maybe it is bread or some other food. Maybe it is cloth that you are taking, blessing, breaking (cutting and sewing) and giving away as masks to protect people from the virus. Maybe it is paint that you are taking, blessing, breaking (spreading) and giving to folks in homemade cards. Maybe it is words of encouragement in phone calls. But it is in the taking, blessing, breaking and giving that the disciples finally see him.

Then Jesus disappears, and like the women in our Easter Sunday story, the two disciples start running. They have good news to tell the other disciples.

When you experience God's presence during the ordinary, it is important to tell the story to others. We are encouraged our hearts are strengthened when you tell the story of how the mysteries of God are being revealed in your life.

So, my invitation to you this week is that you would allow space for emotional honesty; open the scriptures (in community or partnership if you can) and welcome Christ into your home as you take, bless, break and give what you can to bless others. Then remember to tell others about how your eyes were opened and you saw Christ in your midst.

Amen