

“Where to find Him”

Luke 24: 13-35

Over the years, I've read a lot of religious, sacred, and devotional material. Most of it has, of course, been Christian and Jewish in content, but it has also included Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, and other texts. One thing that seems to be fairly consistent in nearly all of it, especially the stories, whether intended to be factual or just devotional fiction, is that it is written to make sense. I mean that the characters are in the right places for the events that unfold, and the main characters always take the lead in whatever action is scripted. Actions that unfold make sense as well in furthering the story line. Extraneous story lines are exceedingly rare.

In that light, the Resurrection accounts in the Gospel just don't measure up. There's so much extraneous stuff; things that just don't promote the main plot line. There's a lot that just doesn't make sense. It's exactly that point though, that gives these accounts credibility. These accounts don't work like the inventions of a creative writer's imagination. They're more like the scattered and conflicting accounts of live witnesses to a real event.

Take the very first Resurrection appearance of Jesus for instance. It happens to Mary Magdalene. Any devotional or fiction writer would know that it should have happened to Peter, or John, or maybe Andrew, or maybe even Jesus' mother, Mary. They were much more main characters, central to the action and the plot line than the Magdalene. Then there's the account of the second Resurrection appearance in our lesson from the Gospel according to Luke this morning; Jesus appears to two hitherto unknown disciples. Only one is named, Cleopas, and while they both seem to have an association with the 12, they neither one have any other place in the Gospel stories. They're extraneous to the story. They've not been even mentioned before, nor will they ever again. This is not good fiction writing! Of

course, again, that's because it's not fiction. It is a live account from real people to an actual event.

So, what of these two disciples in our passage? What can we surmise about these two seeming extraneous characters? Well, for one thing, we know from our passage that their home, Emmaus, was within walking distance of Jerusalem, on the road that led seawards: some six miles to the west of Jerusalem. They had probably been among those who had gone up for the great Passover pilgrimage, full of hope and expectation. They had shared the desire that Jesus, whom they took to be the Christ, might manifest himself at the feast. "We hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel," they said. And on them had fallen the crushing disenchantment, the overthrow of all their hopes, the arrest, the crucifixion, and the death. They had seen him numbered with the criminals; they had perhaps helped to carry his body to the grave; and upon this miserable morning, sick at heart with grief and disappointment, they had gathered with the other disciples, plunged in speechless gloom of bereavement and spiritual despair. At least we know that, when tidings reached them of an empty tomb and of a vision of angels, it did not even keep these two in Jerusalem. It did not kindle any gleam of hope. They thought of it drearily, as one more unkindness to the dead. The festival was over; they must go their ways; and, with perhaps the customary prayer of parting in the temple precincts, they took the homeward way.

It was late afternoon as they passed out of the city gates, taking the high road westward with their eyes facing into the hot glaring sun. Alone together, as friends will, they opened their hearts. Sometimes they walked, talking rapidly, aloud, and then again, "they stood still, looking sad." How graphic it all is! So absorbed in their own thoughts and griefs, they hardly noticed the stranger who overtook them and became a silent sharer in their conversation. It is the same Jesus who in the Gospel narrative seems always so unmistakably himself. He gently

chides them in his own accent of wondrous, clarifying love. And yet, “Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” How was that? Perhaps it was due to the glaring sunset light in their eyes, at least in part. We might guess better though by interrogating our own hearts. What is it, as we go wayfaring through life, that holds our eyes so that sometimes we perceive the voice of Jesus, and then at other times, though he is close and speaking audibly, and in the very ways we might expect, we do not know or recognize him? How is it that we “believers” believe that he is risen, and yet we are not always sure where he can be found? How can we know where to find him? Christ’s action with these two disciples shows us. Let’s look!

For, Jesus’ first action tells us that he can be found in fellowship. Jesus once had said that wherever two or more are gathered in his name, there he can be found. So it was for Cleopas and his companion as they communed together; suddenly the Lord was with them. So it is with us as we come together in deep fellowship and turn our thoughts upon Jesus. It is as though the glaring lights of those circumstances that blinded us begin to fade, and the light of Christ begins to be seen. Even as that sunset glare on that road began to fade and Christ’s presence began to set a fire in these disciple’s hearts. Fellowship is one place to find Jesus. That’s why we continue, during this time of “social distancing”, to offer opportunities to connect here at Christ Church. It’s online, and we still gather face-to-face, and encourage you to be part of every gathering. Because fellowship is one place to find Jesus.

Then Jesus second action shows us that he can be found through the Scriptures. Jesus opened to them the Scriptures. Jesus could have opened their eyes with a word as with Mary Magdalene in the Garden only that morning. Or he could have made a full revelation of himself his wounds to be seen and touched, as he would to the others later that night. But with these two he was leading them into a gradual discovery. And it started with the Scriptures. But this should be no

surprise to you and me. How often has it been that just what we needed was found within these pages: that assurance of love, that acceptance and approval, that perfect expression of our deepest thoughts and fullest emotions, right there, leaping off the pages into our eyes, preparing us for the presence of Christ; setting our hearts on fire as we suddenly knew that God had heard and had answered? So it was for these two; the outer darkness creeping all around, but the heart fire now glowing stronger. The Scriptures are a place to find Jesus.

Jesus' third action shows us yet another place to find him, his table.

Now it was evening. The travelers had reached home. The stranger would not compel himself upon these two, so he made as though he had intended to go on; though it was only for them that he was there at all. But these two were feeling the fire within, even if they were still not fully aware of it, and they would not let this one who had been that fire's messenger go. They constrained him to come in. Gathered about the dinner table the stranger picked up the bread and began to break it. They had seen this before...those hands...those same hands?...
...breaking bread in just that way. The flame flared full blazing through their eyes from within, revealing what they saw in the full power of inner light. Yes! Yes!...And he was gone. But not really...the burning fire of his living presence was still there. And the promise that whenever that fire might ebb to a flicker, or even just an ember, he would come himself again to rekindle it and fuel it by his own life force.

This is the experience of Eucharist. The Holy Sacrament, so named because our Lord gives his living presence to each one of us to rekindle that low-ebbing fire again. This is why we continue to celebrate it and offer it, even though, for now, we can't all be here together at the Altar. In these moments he still comes among us spiritually again, and our eyes glowing with the fire of faith are illumined to see again. Eucharist is still a place to find Jesus.

But there's one thing more here. These two disciples who had known the Lord in the breaking of bread, these two were not among those at our Lord's "Last Supper." They had not been in that upper room for the Passover Seder. That had been an occasion reserved to the twelve only. Where had they seen those hands break bread in blessing before? Even as Jesus had ritually broken bread at the institution of the Eucharist, so had he broken bread to feed the hungry at other times; as he had just broken bread for these two disciple's dinner. Breaking bread was what Jesus did all the time, and in the most common of moments. And that's the point.

It is not only in the meal at the Lord's altar table that we can find Christ; we can find him at the dinner table too, or the lunch-counter, or the breakfast nook. He is not only the host in his church; he is there in every home. He is not only in here; but he is out there; wherever and whenever his people open their eyes and let the inner fire shine out. Wherever bread is broken, is a place to find Jesus.

Easter not only happened; it happens. It is not only an historical event to be celebrated; it is a living presence to be experienced. Jesus can be found if we will use the eyes he has given us. He can be found wherever you are.

In everything you do, remember that he is with you. Look for him, in the fellowship of believers, in the pages of Scripture, in worship and Eucharist, and every time you break bread with another.