

Would You Recognize Him?
Sunday, April 7, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (v.15-16)

Can you imagine, walking along the street on your way home or on your way to work, on your way to the park, involved in your thoughts, possible worries and suddenly as you walk, Jesus starts walking by your side and having a conversation with you?

Or imagine that Jesus suddenly gets on the same bus, train or plane like any other passenger and sits next to you and starts interacting with you?

I wonder, would you recognize him?

I wonder ... What your reaction would be if you knew that it was Jesus?

Would you recognize him?

To be honest, at first instance, I would tell you, that probably it would be very difficult for me to recognize him.

In the Gospel that we just heard today, we see that the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples, happened on the same day that Jesus rose from the dead.

These two disciples were going to Emmaus, and aside from these basic facts, we do not know anything about them.

The only thing we know in this gospel is that these two disciples were probably still sad, very sad, without hope, talking and discussing the terrible things that happened in Jerusalem, probably discussing the horrific death that Jesus, their leader and teacher had just suffered 3 days before.

And the interesting thing here is that we do not know the reason why the disciples were going to Emmaus.

Luke the Gospel writer, does not say why they were going there.

They may have been going home, going there to rest or just going there to get away from the terrible things that they witnessed in Jerusalem.

We will never know.

And today, even if the scriptures tell us that Emmaus was sixty stadia from Jerusalem, which is a roman measure equivalent to 7.5 miles of distance, there is no consensus of the exact location of Emmaus.

So, what is the significance of going to Emmaus then?

What is the meaning of this place?

I would say ...Emmaus as one commentary points out, could be the place where we go in order to escape, the place we go to get away.

Emmaus could be the place where we go when we are so tired and the place we go when we have lost hope...

The place we go when we are in the state of uncertainty and doubt (ambiguity).

And I would say that Emmaus could be also the liminal space.

the place we go when we are in the **VOID**

and being in the void, can last for hours, days or even months.

When we enter the void, it is a time when we leave behind all that is familiar, familiar structures, relationships, thoughts and places.

In the void we may feel that our life is changing rapidly, we may know that something new is coming, but in the present time our foundations are falling away, leaving us nothing solid to hang on to.

And this is not a comfortable place for us to be.

Many of us probably are familiar with this place of transition, a time of waiting and not yet knowing what is coming, this is the void, because we are at the intersection of many possible futures.

But you know what... it is in those moments of escape, when we have lost hope, when we are in the void, that Jesus decides to interrupt us.

it is in those moments when we have our bags packed, ready to disappear, that Jesus decides to interrupt us.

This is what happened to the disciples...

Yes, and during this interruption, paradoxically, Emmaus, the place of escape, becomes a place of Divine encounter, the place where we meet the risen Christ. Where we can open ourselves into new possibilities.

Emmaus is also the place where the risen Christ comes to us.

Where the risen Christ walks alongside of us.

And ...This is the good news of this gospel.

Jesus will always come to our encounter when we least expect it.

And he is with us when we least can sense him or see him.

Jesus will appear in unexpected ways and in unexpected people, which sometimes keeps our eyes from recognizing him.

And he come to our encounter and interrupts us as we walk to our home, to the bus, train, plane, in the streets, in the super market , in the places where we least expect him.

Let me tell you one story.

One time, I was in one of my favorite Mexican restaurants in Seattle for "*Taco Tuesday*". As I was leaving the place at night, it was raining and I saw a man standing outside. He was sitting in the corner outside the restaurant covering himself from the rain. This man was clearly in need, it seemed to me that he was living on the street and he asked me for money. In that moment, I continued walking toward my car without paying attention to his demand, basically ignoring him.

When I reached the parking lot by my car, realizing my lack of compassion, something made me return to see this person. I took a cliff bar from a box in my trunk and went back. I gave him the cliff bar and asked him if he was hungry. He said yes.

So, I went again into the restaurant and asked my friend the owner if I could buy some food for the person outside. The owner gave me food for this person without charging me.

When I went outside again, I gave the food to this person and I said to him:

Eat this while it is hot, it tastes better like that. He took the food.

What took me by surprise was the question that he asked me after that.

He said: "**Do you know Jesus Christ?**"

I cannot describe that moment with my own words. This encounter was somehow unique and profound.

I was so grateful that I returned to see this person. Clearly, for me that moment was an encounter with the Divine.

I never asked this person his name, it was a brief encounter, so as I was leaving in the middle of the rain, I said to him:

“You take care” and he responded,

NO, you... go... and... care. YOU... GO... and... care.

If I had not returned to see this person and served him, I would have missed a great opportunity.

Yes, the meaning of Emmaus is that Jesus is always present.

And Jesus appears in unexpected ways and in unexpected people, which sometimes keeps our eyes from recognizing him.

Any act of kindness, any act of hospitality always carries the element of surprise. Surprise to the unknown, surprise to discover God among us. Surprise to discover God in our midst.

And this is what I experienced at that moment.

And I tell you this story, because the experience of the presence of God, it is not a private reward, it is not only for ourselves. It is never for us alone.

It is for us to share.

This is what these 2 disciples of Emmaus did after their encounter. They went and shared with the other disciples their encounter of the risen Christ.

The same happened to Mary Magdalene, after her encounter in the garden. She went and shared her experience with the risen Christ with the other disciples.

William Countryman and Episcopal priest and writer said that,

The process of telling our own faith stories, allows us to articulate the important moments in our lives where we have encountered the **“Hidden Holy”** and received light from it.

Because ...

There are no human experiences or stories that have not been touched by God.

Yes, God presence can be seen in ordinary life, in the mundane... and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions to be aware of God's presence.

So, I wonder, what kind of stories of any encounter with the Divine can you share?

If you do not remember anyone story at this time, you can create one, it is easy... it only requires your awareness...

I wonder, what is happening around you at this time?

Is there an encounter that you missing?

Is there any encounter that you fail to see?

When we are in sorrow, when we are in crisis, when we are in a time of profound transition, we may be so distracted , that we may not notice that this is the time, the very moment when the Divine can enter and walk with us.

Yes, the meaning of Emmaus is that Jesus is present.

The risen Christ is walking with us even if we do not see him or recognizing him.

So, my prayer for today is that with God's help we can be able to recognize that the divine is always at our side, that the resurrected Christ is always walking with and among us.

These is the good news that this gospel proclaims.

Amen!

***A note from the preacher:** Because sermons are meant to be preached and therefore prepared with emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*