

"Where Do You See Jesus?"

Acts 3:12-19; Ps. 4; Luke 24:13-48

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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Last week we heard the story of the first Easter evening and how Jesus simply showed up even though the disciples were behind locked doors. But Thomas missed the meeting and so he had to wait a week until Jesus again appeared to the group at a time when Thomas was there.

One of the teachings from that text is the importance of gathering in fellowship and the fact that the Risen Christ meets us in church.

Today's story is another very familiar story from the Church's recollections of Easter and the resurrection. It concerns a pair of disciples who headed out of town on Easter day making for the town of Emmaus. It doesn't say why they were leaving. Maybe they had run out of vacation time. More likely they were heading back to wherever "home" was for them.

Passing the time in conversation, a stranger joins them and asks what they are discussing. We know who he is but they do not. It is the Risen Lord. At that point they stop and it is as though the finality of his death has simply caught up with them yet again.

They are amazed that this stranger is unaware of all that has happened in Jerusalem since the previous week, but they proceed to tell the story of Jesus up to the time of his death.

Then they include the accounts of the empty tomb and visions of angels and how the women and some of the other disciples saw things they

could not explain, ending with: "But him (meaning Jesus) they did not see." (vs. 24)

Now it is Jesus' turn to tell the story. He chides them for not understanding or believing the story the ancient prophets told about him. Then he discusses those Scriptures as they make their way to Emmaus.

Arriving at their destination and still unaware of his true identity the two disciples insist that Jesus stay with them, which he does. At dinner Jesus repeats the actions from the Last Supper and finally their eyes are opened to recognize him for who he truly is!

Then, immediately, he is gone. Vanished! No time to hang on to him. No time to talk more with him. All they can do is agree that he had caused their hearts to burn while he talked with them on the road.

With no time to lose, armed with the best news anyone had ever received, they pack up and head back to Jerusalem. Night has fallen. Let's hope there is a moon out. It is the Passover so there should be one to help light the way, but it seems they have no need of any light now that their hearts and minds have been illumined by the knowledge that Christ is alive!

When they get back to the Upper Room they find the other disciples. But they don't get a chance to share their news because the others blurt out the story of the resurrection and Jesus appearance to Peter.

Then they are able to share their experience on the road, how Jesus talked to them and taught them and how his true identity was revealed through the breaking of the bread.

But they get interrupted in their story by none other than Jesus himself. Still gun-shy and fearful, they are not used to these sudden appearances by Jesus and think he is a ghost.

Once again he shows them his wounds and encourages them to touch him and see that he is more than just wishful thinking, more than just an apparition. Even so, they still have wonder and amazement and some disbelief as if it is just too good to be true.

Then he asks his stunned followers for something to eat. They give him a piece of fish. In Emmaus it was bread, here it is fish...sound familiar? Such a simple thing as eating conveys the fact that he isn't a ghost. His body is a real body and his presence is a real presence.

Then, just like along the road to Emmaus, he reviews the Scriptures with them and all the places in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms that refer to the Messiah and the necessity of the Cross as a prelude to the resurrection and the unleashing of God's redeeming love into the world.

They are to be part of that unleashing. Powered by the Spirit they will be witnesses to God's forgiveness and love.

This is hardly what they expected! Who would have thought that Jesus would show up? But the fact of the matter is that Jesus does show up and often at the most unexpected, the most inopportune, the most needed times. He is there in the waiting times, the in-between times, when it isn't clear exactly how things will turn out... those times when we ask ourselves, "should we high-tail it to Emmaus or hide out in the Upper Room?"

Jesus simply shows up. He doesn't wait for an invitation. He doesn't wait until we figure things out. This is Good News, especially for those who don't think they are spiritual enough, or educated enough or good enough to deserve to experience the living God.

Jesus comes to us as one unknown who opens our minds to the truth of God's undying love for us. He comes to us in our time of need, willing to do whatever it takes for us to have the full wealth of conviction.

He comes to us in bread and cup, that we might be filled with the joy of knowing him as our Lord and Savior. And that we might be his resurrection people, his body in the world... that we might be his Witnesses!

Friends, there are people around us in desperate need of our witness. There are those who have been hurt by people who call themselves "Christian" and by the Church that Christ founded to be a witness to his love.

Many are disappointed when individual Christians or when the Church as a whole doesn't live up to its calling to love sacrificially - when we don't practice what we preach about acceptance and forgiveness and grace and hospitality that were the hallmarks of Jesus' ministry and the signs of Christ's presence in his beloved community.

There may be folks here today who are trying the Church again in hopes that things will be different. There may be people you will encounter this coming week who are hoping to have a more positive experience of Christianity.

Will you be a witness to them? What kind of witness will you be?

We are here today because of the witness of others to Christ's presence in the world. People like us who were not there to see the Risen Christ eating and talking with his disciples have the witness of those who did.

And we have become the body of Christ in the world. In the famous words attributed to St. Teresa of Avila who lived in the 1500's:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours,
yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion
is to look out to the earth,
yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good
and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now.

If we are to be Christ's body in the world, the question becomes, not so much: "Where do we see Jesus?" as "Where does the world see Jesus? Does the world see Jesus through us?"

If I tell someone that the Church is really full of loving people who practice the welcome of Jesus Christ, what am I to do if she asks for names?

Maybe she has a hard time believing me based on her past experience. She wants to see Christians witnessing to the redeeming love of Christ in the world. In short, she wants to see Jesus.

She doesn't want generalities. She wants names. What can we do? Can we give her our names? Can I give her yours? Would you give her mine?

A friend of mine, Thomas Schumann, wrote a poem in which he tried to capture the connection between Jesus' ministry and ours. It is called "Show and Tell:"

if we showed you our hands,
would you find them nicked from building a house
for the homeless;
or a callous on our thumb
from using the TV remote too much?

if we showed you our feet,
would you find them toughened by walking the corridors
of a hospice with the terminally ill;
or wrinkled by too many hours in the hot tub?

if we showed you our hearts,
would you find them broken over the struggles of
the lost, the little, the last, the least;
or would they be clogged with the plaque
of our consumerized lives?

if we truly want to be your witnesses,
God of the empty grave,
would you show us how?

The world is waiting for our witness. The world wants to see how our experience of Jesus has affected us. It wants to see the Body of Christ. It wants to see Jesus through us.

Amen.