

Jesus shows up

Acts 3:12-19 | Psalm 4 | 1 John 3:1-7 | Luke 24:36b-48

The Gospel story this morning occurs on Easter Day. We're back again in Jerusalem, so let's get the sequence because it points out something to us in our own perceptions of our Lord's presence with us. On Easter morning, the women go to the tomb and discover that Jesus isn't there. As they leave, the Angel speaks to them, and instructs them to tell the disciples to return to Galilee. The women leave in fear and trepidation, but they tell nobody about it. In Luke's version they told Peter, and Peter didn't believe them. He goes to the tomb to see for himself; and he, too, finds the tomb empty. He comes back, tells the other disciples that are in the locked room; and all of a sudden Jesus is present in the room with them. They are naturally shocked and amazed; and he shows them his wounds, talks to them, and then leaves.

Later in the day, two men who were disciples, Cleopas and his friend, were going back to Emmaus, their hometown. They are pretty sad and dejected because they've heard the story of the women; but they haven't seen the risen Lord. A stranger comes up and talks to them and asked what is going on. They say, "You must have stayed in your hotel room all week, not to know what's going on," and they try to explain to him about Jesus. He starts talking scripture to them, but they don't understand it. They get to Emmaus and asked him to say the blessing over dinner. As he breaks the bread they recognize that the stranger has been Jesus all along – and he is gone.

The resurrected Lord appears to them, but they don't recognize him because a resurrected body is a little bit different from this body. Paul tells us later that it is like the difference between an acorn and an oak tree. In his analogy, the seed is not like the full-grown plant; but it's enough like it so that you should recognize the kinship under certain circumstances. When Jesus disappears from them, Cleopas and his companion leave their meal on the table and run back to Jerusalem to find the company of the apostles and tell them the women were right, they weren't making it up, that Jesus is alive. That is where we pick up the story today.

When Cleopas arrives, the others say, "Yes, we already know that because Jesus was with us just a little while ago, too. He showed up in this room. The doors were locked, and the windows were barricaded and he was here." They talk about that the excitement of having met him; and Cleopas and his companion talk about how they had talked to him the whole way to Emmaus about the scriptures, and about how all of the law and the prophets and the psalms are pointed to him. Suddenly, Jesus is standing there in their midst again. Note the very odd sort of circumstance occurs when he appears: they're afraid, they're startled, they're terrified, they don't know who it is, and they think it's a ghost. Now, they just saw him three or four hours earlier. Cleopas and his companion had seen him just an hour or so earlier. He had done the same thing, He showed up in a locked room, and they are still terrified and amazed.

Jesus says, look it's me, I'm not a ghost. Peace be with you. Calm down, calm down. Let the peace of God come over you. Look at the wounds, they're still here and it's still me, and I need something to eat because back in Emmaus, I said the blessing and was gone. I didn't get to eat with them, so let's have something to eat! Ghosts don't eat. Then He opened up their minds to understand the scriptures just as he had been doing that on the road to Emmaus.

This episode raises the question as to how long it takes them to “get it.” He sees them in the morning and they are assured that it is Him; in the afternoon, they are startled and terrified again. He just opened their minds on the road to Emmaus to understand the scriptures and now He has to do it all over again after dark. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, this is a contemporary story.

We find ourselves in the characters of this story every time we read it. Maybe we’re a different character this year than we were last year, but we still find ourselves among the company of the faithful who don’t quite get it. And oh, by the way, just three short days ago after swearing allegiance, the disciples, every last one of them, had abandoned Him, denied know Him, betrayed Him, and walked out on His moment of greatest need. The story doesn’t change; life doesn’t change much. And we can say “thanks be to God” for that, too, not because we still fall sleep, walk away, do bad things, do dumb things, walk away from the community. The story doesn’t change because Jesus keeps showing up and He still says, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus still brings us back to the community; He still walks with us when we are walking away from the community. He still sits with us at table and makes Himself known to us in the breaking of bread. Wherever we find our story today, in the story of these people in the first century on the Emmaus Road or in Jerusalem, we can also find ourselves in the presence of Jesus Christ today in our journey. However faithful or faithless those journeys may be, we can find comfort.

On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion were dejected, sad and unbelieving; they were leaving behind a community that wasn’t a very good one, a community of hypocrites, a community of liars, a community of people who couldn’t stand by their commitment, a community who fought over who was more important than the other, a community of people just like you and me. Yet, the first thing that happened when the Lord shows Himself to them in Emmaus is that they go back to that community. The community hasn’t changed a whit, not one bit, they’re still the same guys that they were Thursday night and Friday morning; they’re still the same guys that were there on Sunday morning. They are the same ones they walked away from, just like we stay the same in many ways. But now, Cleopas and his companion know that Jesus has risen from the dead and they go back to share that story; and that same rag-tag army has already seen the risen Lord. Jesus shows up in the midst of their hypocrisy, their deceit, their lies, their fears, and everything else.

This story is good news for us in the modern church. Jesus shows up here, Jesus stands with us, Jesus says to us, “Peace be with you.” He says to us, “If you need to see me, see me, if you need to touch me, touch me. Let us break bread together; let us get to know each other.” Jesus continues to do the same thing today he did then. It’s important to know this story; it’s important for us to grasp the joy of this story, the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, of knowing that we didn’t do anything to raise Him from the dead, but we did a lot to put Him there. We didn’t do a thing to raise Him from the dead and yet He is here with us. We didn’t do a thing to earn our salvation, He gives it to us. He still does, He still loves us. In spite of everything, maybe even because of everything, He loves us and He cares for us.

Finally, what He does at the end of this night is to say, “you’ve seen this, you’ve experienced Christ in your life, you’ve experienced Christ in each other’s lives, you’ve heard from the women, you’ve heard from Cleopas, you’ve seen for it for yourself – now

go out from here, tell your neighbors, tell your family members, tell your friends, tell the strangers who live around you. Start at home and then work your way out. You can count on the Gospel, and you can count on the resurrection. It's true: Christ has risen and Christ now dwells in you and in me. Look in each other's eyes; don't look past each other. Look in each other's eyes, and see there the light of Christ, maybe in the foreground, maybe in the background, but see the light of Christ and bring it out. And then in the company of the faithful - Go - go from this place. Share the good news, share the salvation of Christ with others and bring them home.

We have those who have been faithful to our Lord and those who have been terribly unfaithful to Him. In that room today we have the women, who apparently have always been faithful, those without power in their culture who did what they could and took the news back. We have those who walked away from the community but who came home to it; and perhaps we have some in that same room who are just now beginning to hear.

Tell each other the story; tell each other the experience you've had with the risen Christ. Listen to the experience that others are telling you. And be aware of Christ standing here with us. It may be startling, it maybe terrifying; but His words are words of peace and His word is the word of commission. Let us rejoice in this Easter season, the best season there is. Let us recognize the Christ in our own lives and let us recognize Christ in the lives of those around us; and let us always seek and serve that Christ as He has been revealed to us in each other as well as in the breaking of the bread.