



LESSONS for LIFE

April 6, 2008

How Do We Know Jesus?

Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: Psalm 116: 12-19

Today you may have noticed we're doing this part of the service a little different than usual and instead of having a gospel reading that's read separately from the sermon because it's a long story and I want to talk about the story as it develops we're going to intersperse the gospel reading with the sermon this morning. So it's just an experiment and we'll be back to usual next Sunday.

Just imagine what it must have been like for the followers of Jesus. It is now, in the scripture, just three days after Jesus was arrested and tried and crucified. They were left with all kinds of questions; they were confused, they were afraid; they had dispersed out of fear. And two of them are walking together on the road to Emmaus.

That day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all of these things that had happened.

I'm sure as they walked along that day, they must have had questions for each other. How could this happen? Was Jesus *really* the Son of God? If Jesus had all of these powers to be able to heal people and miracles were happening, why couldn't he have saved himself? I'm sure there were all kinds of questions and they were walking together with those questions. You know there are folks in our world today who want to prove that Jesus existed. They want to be able to find evidence and prove; every little thing is proof: to try to find proof that Jesus existed, that he was crucified and that he rose again. And there are folks who want to prove that it didn't happen; who believe that Jesus was probably, they say, just another example of a prophet throughout the ages. The proving people and the disproving people. I think there's a third way. I think there's a way that we could call Holy, not knowing. That to be able to live in that place to say that whether there is proof or disproof, I believe. I'm in the middle. I don't know, I can't prove it, but I trust and I will follow the one who is called the Prince of Peace. I will live my life the best way that I can using His example and walking the path that he walked. And I believe there needs to be room at the table for all of us. The proving, the disproving and the Holy not knowing folks, together at the table, as full partners, walking on this journey together.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Now what happened that day? Was Jesus disguised? Had God closed the eyes of the two followers walking so they didn't know who Jesus was? Were they so consumed by their fear and their questions that they didn't see who was right in front of them? I think many of us are so consumed by the busyness of our lives that we miss what's right there in front of us. The blessings, the goodness, right there in front of us. And Jesus said to them, 'What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still looking sad. You know, many of us in our lives allow the sadness of a



LESSONS for LIFE

moment to take away all of the blessings and all of the possibilities and all of the goodness around us and right in front of us. We let sadness dictate the whole picture. Now I do believe that living with loss is important and that grieving is important and recognizing the sadness of what we've lost is important, but we cannot let that sadness cloud out everything else that is around us. The goodness, the holiness, the blessedness, of what remains right in front of us.

And one of them, named Cleopas, answered Jesus. 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And Jesus said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priest and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.'

Often our expectations cloud us to the possibilities. We enter a situation expecting that bad things are going to happen and we miss the good things. We enter a situation expecting the best and miss the goodness in front of us. We allow our expectations of what we think should be, cloud out the reality of what's right there, in front of us.

Yes and beside all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover many women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in morning and did not find his body and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said but they did not see him.

I think it's fully clear that because it was the women who went and saw the angels and saw Jesus and when they brought that message back, that message was discounted by the people around them. Women's voices not counted. I think many times we miss goodness, we miss blessedness, we miss good news because of our prejudices and biases against those who are carrying that good news to us.

And Jesus said to them, 'Oh foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them, all in the scriptures the things concerning himself.'

You know, sometimes we can know all about the Bible, we can have a great education, great seminary training, raised in Churches and still miss the point. And still miss the point of the spirituality and goodness in front of us. We let the theology and the doctrines, and the teachings and taking scripture out of context, to cloud the truth right in front.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going and He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him saying, 'Stay with us for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. So he went in to stay with them and while he was at table with them he took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized him.'

A few days earlier Jesus had gathered together with his followers and during that time together he celebrated the Passover meal, reaching deep into his Jewish tradition and his Jewish faith for



LESSONS for LIFE

that holy moment. That evening also included humility around the washing of feet; it probably included Jesus saying goodbye. It included him giving some spiritual strength to those who remained through this meal, it included the moment of betrayal when someone would storm out of the evening, realizing what was about to happen. And yet, something happened that evening that was so holy and so powerful that when it re-occurred a few days later in the breaking of the bread, they recognized Jesus. For many of us, we come from traditions that the Lord's table, Communion, the Last Supper, the Eucharist, whatever name we place on it, that this moment in our worship service is the central moment for many of us. For it is again in the breaking of the bread that we recognize Jesus.

And they opened their eyes and they recognized him and he vanished out of their sight.

So often in our lives goodness is present and then it's taken from us. This week we recognize the anniversary of the shooting, of the assassination, of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A holy presence of non-violence, a challenging voice for peace and justice. Present with us and taken from us. The spirit of who remains with us, challenges us, to carry on the journey towards equality and justice. And so often in the lives of us as individuals there is something that is precious to us that gets taken from us, maybe someone close to us who dies, maybe a relationship that ends. Whatever that goodness is, that has been close to you and you may have lost or may lose in the future, I think we need to be able to look at the gift that was, take the goodness that's there, the challenge that's there and to be able to continue to carry the torch today and to carry on the journey to be able to live with the loss of a person who's died, or to live with the loss of a relationship that's ended and to still be able to celebrate the gift that was.

And He vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he walked with us on the road and when he opened the scripture to us?'

We knew all along that something was happening after the fact.

'And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem and they found the eleven gathered together and were saying to each other, 'Jesus has risen indeed, he's appeared to Simon'. (They didn't say He'd appeared to the women, again women's voices discounted.) 'He appeared to Simon.' And then the two followers said what had happened to them on the road and how Jesus was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

You know there is also another way that Jesus is known to us. There is another way that Jesus will be known to people around you: through your life, through the questions that you have, through how you interact with people you are traveling with on the road; how you deal with your questions together and your insights and your losses and your fears together. How *you* can be that presence of God, or Jesus, or of Spirit, in the lives of people around you.

I want to read you the words of a song that's familiar and sometimes in these words you're on one side of the conversation and sometimes you're on the other. Sometimes it's you talking and questioning and sometimes maybe it's God talking and questioning. So move in and out of these together words as I share them with you.

*"Don't go changing to try and please me. You never let me down before
And don't imagine you're too familiar and I don't see you any more.
I would not leave you in times of trouble; we never could have come this far
I took the good times and I'll take the bad times, I'll take you just the way you are*



LESSONS for LIFE

*I need to know that you will always be, the same old one that I knew
Believe in me and I believe in you
I said I love you and that's forever and that's my promise from the heart
I could not love you any better, I love you just the way you are"*

Let Jesus walk beside you, let him say to you, 'I could not have loved you any better, I love you just the way you are.'

May we love each other just the way we are; and if we do, people will experience Jesus in us and through us.

Amen.