

The Lord Has Risen Indeed

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Easter

Luke 24:34

God is everywhere just waiting to be recognized.

Greg Anderson tells a story in his book, *Living Life on Purpose*, about a man named Phil, whose wife had recently left him. Phil was depressed. He had lost faith in himself, other people and God. One rainy, dreary day, Phil went to a neighborhood restaurant for breakfast. Several people were in the diner that morning, but no one was speaking to anyone else. The only sound was the cook frying eggs and bacon. The hopelessness in the place was pervasive. Phil sat hunched over the counter, stirring his coffee with a spoon, wondering if life was worth living.

Seated in a small booth near the window was a young mother with her little girl. They had just been served their food when the little girl broke the gloomy silence in the diner by almost shouting, "Momma, don't we say our prayers here?" The waitress, who had just served them breakfast, turned around and said to the girl, "Sure, honey, we pray here. Will you say a prayer for us?" The little girl looked around at the people in the restaurant and said, "Bow your heads." Surprisingly, one by one, heads went down. The girl folded her hands, bowed her head and said with childlike trust, "God is great, God is good and we thank him for our food. Amen."

That prayer changed the entire atmosphere. Customers began to talk with one another. The waitress said, "We should do that every morning," and many of the regulars nodded their heads in agreement. Phil said, "All of a sudden, my whole frame of mind started to improve." What happened at the diner? God's presence was suddenly recognized.

God is everywhere, friends, just waiting to be recognized. Maybe you've never been formally introduced!

Jesus is alive! He walked out of the tomb Easter morning and into the hearts of his followers everywhere.

Jesus is here. He's everywhere. He's here in this sanctuary and down the road at First Baptist and St. Mark's. This week he'll be visiting classrooms and board rooms. We forget this simple fact. We forget!

Jesus is alive! The grave could not hold him. In our Emmaus road story, Jesus appears, disappears and then reappears again. One day he's here, the next day he's gone. His unpredictable presence reminds me of the carnival game Whack-a-Mole. You never know from which hole the mole will appear. There's no telling where Jesus might show up or how long he'll hang around.

There will come a time for seeing, but in their current state of blindness, Jesus has things to teach them.

When Jesus initially appears to his two disciples on the road to Emmaus, his disciples don't recognize him. Luke tells us, "Their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus" (v. 16).

What kept them from recognizing Jesus? Was it spiritual blindness? Blindness is consistent with everything we know about the disciples in Luke's gospel. As I've said before, the only thing these 12 disciples share in common is their denseness! They repeatedly fail to understand Jesus' teaching (9:45; 18:34). They have eyes to see, but fail to see; ears to hear, but fail to hear.

There may be another explanation that keeps them from recognizing Jesus. God could have prevented their seeing. The passive tense of the verb "were kept" suggests that the responsibility for seeing Jesus lies outside these disciples. Perhaps God kept them from seeing to give Jesus time to explore the Scriptures concerning his death and resurrection. There will come a time for seeing, but in their current state of blindness, Jesus has things to teach them.

These two disciples are engrossed in intense conversation about the events of the last few days when Jesus asks them a seemingly innocent question, "What are you talking about?" (v. 17).

Cleopas responds, "Are you the only one who doesn't know what things have taken place?" (v. 18). Helloo! What planet are you living on?

Jesus seems to play along. "What things?" he asks (v. 19).

The disciples explain how this mighty prophet was arrested, tried and executed. Yet, reports have surfaced from the women who went to the tomb that Jesus is alive. They are not quite sure what to think.

"We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21). Their long hoped-for Messiah was supposed to liberate them from the pagan Romans. Instead, he died at their hands.

These two disciples can't quite put the pieces of the puzzle together, but Jesus fits the pieces into place by explaining that the Messiah will suffer these things before entering into his glory. His disciples want the glory without the suffering. Jesus teaches that suffering comes with glory.

When they arrive at the Emmaus Travelodge, they invite Jesus to dinner. Luke's language reverberates with Last Supper terminology. "He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (v. 30). Although Jesus is their invited guest, he assumes the role as host.

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (v. 31). The verb "were opened" appears in passive tense, much like the words "were kept" at the outset of the narrative. The eyes God had closed are now open.

I would have loved to see their reaction at the moment of recognition. Rembrandt's painting, *The Road to Emmaus*, captures the startled expression of these two

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- Company Executive

disciples and innkeeper when they realize they’re talking to Jesus. Maybe you’ve had the experience of talking to someone and suddenly realizing you’re talking to someone special?

The story concludes with Jesus disappearing just as suddenly as he appears at the beginning of the story.

Jesus comes to us in this story in three ways. **First, Jesus comes to us as friend.** Jesus said to his followers, “I no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what the master is doing. Instead, I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:13).

Jesus didn’t sneak up behind these two disciples, cover their eyes and blurt out, “Guess who?” Jesus joins them on the road as their traveling companion. He patiently and lovingly opens the Scripture to them. What a friend we have in Jesus.

This week, I passed a young man on the street recently who was wearing a T-shirt with Jesus’ picture on the front. My attention was drawn to the caption underneath the picture, “Jesus is my homeboy.” I did a double take. I walked by him a second time to make sure I wasn’t seeing things. I know homeboy is urban slang for a close friend, but is the T-shirt meant to express devotion or ridicule?

Teenage Millionaires, the company responsible for marketing the shirts, also sells a companion T-shirt, “Mary is my home-

girl.” One company executive justified why they jumped on the Jesus bandwagon, “We were looking for pop icons of the 21st century and Jesus topped the list.”

These T-shirts are chic among Hollywood celebrities. When Pamela Lee Anderson was asked about her “Jesus is my homeboy” T-shirt, she said, “Christians have always been saying you need to have a personal relationship with the Lord. Well, I do. He’s my homeboy. I think Christians are intolerant and boring, but I think Jesus is somewhat cool, in a trendy sort of way.”

Well, how do you like that? Jesus is cool, in a trendy sort of way. He’s the biggest pop icon of the 21st century. After 20 centuries, Jesus continues to fascinate people. Even people who are negative about organized religion are drawn to Jesus’ captivating presence.

Second, Jesus comes to us in community. Nearly every one of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in the gospels are to multiple people. He appears to two disciples walking down the road, three disciples by the seashore, 11 disciples in the upper room and 500 disciples sitting on a Galilean hillside.

These two Emmaus disciples play a vital role with each other. They sound each other out and try to make sense of what has happened. Some things about Jesus we learn only in community. Jesus said, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst” (Matthew 18:20).

If we want to experience Jesus Christ, we must put ourselves in the place of greatest potential.

Jesus communicates his message most often through people. Jesus could come to us any way he wanted; his preferred method of revelation is through people.

Anne Lamotte tells a story in her book, *Traveling Mercies*, about a man sitting in a bar in Alaska. He tells the bartender how he recently lost whatever faith he had, after his twin engine crashed into the frozen tundra.

“Yeah,” he says bitterly, “I was there in the wreckage, hour after hour, near death, crying out for God to save me, praying for help with every ounce of strength I had left. But God didn’t raise a finger to help me. So I’m done with this whole charade of religion.”

“But,” the bartender said, “you’re here.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” says the man. “But that’s only because some Eskimo came along and rescued me.”

Could it have been that the Eskimo was God’s means of rescue? WE can miss the presence of Jesus, especially if it comes disguised as, say, an Eskimo!

The “C” in our name stands for church not club. Our primary mission in this church is learning how to become Jesus’ disciples. We believe we can become more effective disciples together than we can alone.

We’re delighted you chose to spend Easter with us. You could have spent your Easter any number of ways and we are honored you chose to spend it with us. We

invite you to join us all year long in a community of disciples who want to discover Jesus as friend.

Third, Jesus comes to us through World and sacrament.

The point of recognition with Jesus in the story occurs when Jesus “took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples” (v. 31). Jesus is known through the sacrament of bread.

Jesus is also known through his Word. “Were not our hearts burning when he opened the Scriptures to us?” his disciples said (v. 32). The Reformer John Calvin’s criteria for authentic worship included the Word effectively read and preached and the sacraments rightly observed.

If we want to experience Jesus Christ, we must put ourselves in the place of greatest potential. We must endeavor to hear his Word and receive his sacraments.

Our story closes with an invitation. These two disciples invite Jesus to stay with them. They invite Jesus into their homes and hearts. Walk this lonesome valley with us. Break bread with us. Stay with us. Go with us.

