

Luke 24:13-35

Third Sunday of Easter (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-25; Luke 24:13-35

Hidden in Plain Sight

April 26, 2020

“That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, “O 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 in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:13-35, ESV)

Oh, I didn't see you there!

I imagine that we have all had this experience at some time. We've passed by someone familiar to us in a restaurant or shopping mall or sports event. The area may have been crowded; it may have been that we simply had something on our mind, and didn't seem to notice anything around us. If it were just an acquaintance we may not have noticed them because they were out of context—we normally see them at work or school, and we aren't used to seeing them outside of those venues. I have had that happen to me while walking at the mall, where I have passed members who don't realize that it is me. After all, they are accustomed to seeing me in a clerical collar at church. They just don't think that I could be out shopping or going for a stroll. But then the realization dawns: “Oh, I didn't see you there!”

When Jesus walks with the two disciples on the Emmaus road, they don't see him there. Yes, they see the man who walks beside them and who talks with them. But they don't know it is Jesus. To be fair, it isn't only their fault. We are told that *their eyes were kept from recognizing him*. And yet, they will soon learn something we need to learn, too; that the Lord of life may not always be evident to us, and yet He really is with us, hidden in plain sight. Even better is the joy we have when He reveals Himself to us, that we may know His forgiveness, grace and blessing in our lives.

Oh, I didn't see you there. People tend to feel that way about God, especially in the times when trouble and disaster rear their ugly heads. I'm sure that there are more than a few people right now who are asking, “where are you, Lord? I don't see you here in the struggles with the COVID virus. Where were you, Lord, when that madman went on that rampage in Nova Scotia? Where are you, Lord, when Islamic groups are killing Christians in Nigeria—many of whom are Lutheran—with so many being killed that human rights groups are describing this as “genocide”?

We all have trouble seeing God in the dark times of life. The world has always had this problem. But like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may not see Jesus, but that doesn't mean He isn't with us. He was on that road, hidden in plain sight, as it were. We are told one of those on the road was Cleopas. The church historian Eusebius, who wrote in the 3rd century, says that Cleopas was the brother of Joseph and the father of Simeon, and thus was Jesus' uncle. Now surely Jesus' uncle would have been able to recognize his nephew, even in spite of the grief. Again, we are told that God kept them from seeing Him. As they walk home, Cleopas—and many assume it is his son Simeon who was with him—talk about all that has just happened. As they do, the hidden Christ joins them and asks what they are discussing. At first they wonder if this stranger has been living under a rock somewhere. They were sure that everyone knew what had happened. But they go on to share the story: *“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, 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 him they did not see.”

Like the apostles themselves, these 2 disciples don't see Jesus because they just can't seem to grasp what Jesus has declared over and over. Only days before his death, Jesus tells His disciples: **“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”** *But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”* (Luke 18:31-34, ESV) How sad that these people, who had such hope in Jesus as the Christ, had lost that hope! If the disciples had grasped all the messianic prophecies; if they had listened to all that Jesus had said, they would have known that the story didn't end with a missing body in an empty tomb. Yes, they were looking for the redemption of Israel, but not in the way that God had declared when the psalmist assures us: **“And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”** (Psalm 130:8, ESV) They may have felt some of that, but they likely wanted the restored Davidic kingdom, too. But Jesus has died, and so has their hope.

This has always been one of my favourite resurrection appearances, because of what happens next. Jesus lays it on the line, showing that the Christ is hidden in plain sight. He says: **“O 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 in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* How I wish I could have been in that Bible class! As Jesus says: **“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me”**. (John 5:39, ESV) Now Jesus Himself shows how the Scriptures witness to Him. He shows that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and die. Yet the reason is clear in Scripture: He did it to take away the sins of the world. The Eternal Son, the true God who takes our humanity into Himself, will die in our place for all that we have done against the holy will of God. But hope does not die when Jesus dies. The promise of life in the risen Christ also runs throughout the Scriptures, and with it the great promise that Christ gives us: **“Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”** (John 14:19, ESV)

Jesus says we will see Him. We do see Him. Christ is always with His people, and if He seems hidden, He is hidden in plain sight. He hides His physical presence so that we will learn to listen to His voice in His Word; those wonderful words of Holy Scripture that testify of Him. We see Him in our worship and liturgy, as He makes His presence known in the words of forgiveness spoken in His name and at His command by His under-shepherds. Of course, the greatest way He makes Himself known is the same way He was revealed to the Emmaus disciples: in the breaking of bread. Yet it is not in an ordinary meal like the meal He had with them, but in the wonderful supper He provides for us, as He comes to us physically with His body and blood to bring us the forgiveness, strength and health that we need for our entire well being.

Even if He seems hidden, the Lord of Life is with us in all the worries, cares and uncertainties of this life. He has promised: **“behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:20, ESV) In these days when we cannot be together, when we are urged to be physically distanced from one another, the Lord is still with us, by our side, at work in all things for our good. He is hidden in plain sight, even in the darkest days. When the people of Israel were held in captivity in Babylon, God promised them: **“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”** (Jeremiah 29:13-14, ESV) That promise is our promise, too.

Right now we may not see the resurrected Christ, in the same way that Peter and John and so many others did. Paul describes it this way: **“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”** (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV) But even now He is with us, hidden in plain sight. In His Word, in our Baptism, in His Holy Supper we see, with the eyes of faith, the Lord who died for us, and that Saviour who rose and who lives for us. How are hearts burn within us as we know His presence and His grace in all things. Amen.