

Hiding in Plain Sight / Luke 24:13-35
Calvary Presbyterian Church, Alexandria VA
April 30, 2017
Gene Kendall, Jr.

A man goes to basketball game, sits in his seat, gets settled and starts to read the program. A few minutes later there comes another man searching for his seat about three rows down. Just before he sits down, the man looks up, and immediately flashes a big smile, waves and calls out the first man's name. The first man waves back exchanges a friendly no-name greeting! The problem is, he has no idea who the guy is. Not at all. He looks familiar. He thinks, is he from church? Maybe the Rotary Club? Who is he? It starts to drive him crazy. Later in the game he bumps into him while in line to get a beer, and says to him, "I apologize, I know you. I know I know you, but I don't know you. Who are you?" The man looks at him again, smiles, calls him again by name, and says; " You don't normally see me in my street clothes. I'm Dr. First, your dentist."

Have you had the experience lately of not remembering the name of someone that you run into at the grocery store, or at your kids school, a ballgame, or when you out walking the dog? Their face is familiar; you may carry on a conversation as if you are old friends, yet you walk away from the conversation thinking, who is that? What is her name? In what context do I know her? I hate to admit it, but instances like this one are happening to me more and more as my brain gets older. Can I get some sympathy and see a show of hands if any of you are right there with me?

It is sometimes hard to remember people's names when we come across them in an unfamiliar context. I know you, but I just can't place you? The lectionary text you read this morning, on this 2nd Sunday after Easter, is a story about the failure to recognize. A story about meeting someone out of context, and not knowing their name.... sort of.

The story is a familiar one, two companions walking on the road to Emmaus. This story comes around in the lectionary at this time of year as an extension of the Easter story. It's here where we have the first of several appearances of the resurrected Lord in Luke's gospel. It's a road trip.... Luke was fond of using road trips or journeys as a framework in his storytelling. But this wasn't just any road trip. It was a 7-mile walk back home, after an incredibly tumultuous and dramatic week.

What do we know about the two walkers? We know one of their names... Cleopas. Scholars identify him as a follower of Jesus, perhaps even an insider who may have been acquainted with the inner circle of the disciples. And who was the unnamed co-walker? Some scholars have suggested that *he may be a she*; this unnamed person perhaps was the wife of Cleopas. Which makes sense, because women so often appear in scripture without a name. If this conclusion has any validity, it means that the risen Lord appears first to a couple and immediately blesses their home with his presence. Think about it! It would have been the woman who urged

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him to stay for dinner, right? She would have prepared it. That was her role. I like this interpretation, though it is not clear in the text.

And as they are walking, they are talking. What else do you do on a 7-mile walkabout? And there was plenty to talk about. Imagine being in their sandals, having invested so much of your time and energy and belief in this person who they were sure was "the one"! The one who finally fulfills the Messianic expectation of freeing the Jews from their oppression. After generations and generations of oppression and living under Roman rule, at last, God's long promised Messiah was here to deliver us! And then in the matter of a week, he is tried, convicted and put to death. Walking home after the drama of that kind of week, you would certainly have a lot to talk about. What happened, how did this happen, how could we have been so wrong. We had hoped he would be the one. Broken hearts.

We had hoped he would be the one...those are words we can all relate to. How many times have you said those words to yourself? We had hoped this doctor would be the one to make this disease go away...he came with the highest of recommendations. And then the news in the hospital waiting room, after surgery, that he did all that he could, but there was just too much disease.

We put our hopes in doctors, lawyers, new managers at work, elected officials of all kinds, new spouses, new pastors. How human it is to put our hope in someone, and how equally human it is to be disappointed when they don't live up to our expectations. *We also know this disappointment when the cancer shows up again, or the addiction returns, or when we are betrayed or backstabbed by someone we trusted, or the job that doesn't materialize after an initial promise.* Its not just the tragedy of what happened that hurts, but the gaping hole of all that could have happened...but won't. We grieve a future that will never be. "We had hoped that he would be the one."

In the midst of that long 7-mile walk home mired in disappointment and sadness, a stranger appears. They did not recognize him. They still had their "grief goggles" on...their eyes still blurred by lost hope. This stranger asks them a question.... "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" Surprised that this stranger must be the only one on earth who hasn't heard about the execution, they pour out their hearts to this utter stranger and tell him the story of what happened and what they saw.... *and that is when it gets interesting.*

You would expect some comfort, maybe some "I feel your pain". But no, he says nothing nearly so trite. In fact the stranger is downright rude. He calls them Idiots, Fools. Luke writes "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his Glory?" The stranger takes THEM to school, starting with Moses and the Prophets, connecting the dots for them and how those dots lead

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to right up to him. It is as if Jesus was saying, "let me help you see what is hiding right in front of you."

As they reach their destination of their walk, hospitality is offered. Again, if the second walker was indeed the wife of Cleopas, it would not be unusual for her to extend this courtesy to a fellow traveler, for she knew the roads were not a safe for a stranger walking by himself at night.

It is interesting to note that the Greek word that Luke uses here for extending an invitation, is *Parabiazo*...It is used only twice in the New Testament, and the verb literally means "to twist someone's his arm". This was more than a simple invitation. They were so eager for this stranger to stay with them that they would have almost forced him.

Stay a little longer with us, stranger, please.... we beg you.... please stay. And so the stranger accepts, they share a meal, and in the breaking of the bread, the big Reveal. Their grief goggles fall off; they see what they could not see before, the context of where they knew this stranger returns, and AHA. "*Didn't our hearts burn when he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us!*" This wasn't their dentist.... this was their Lord! From broken hearts to burning hearts, their eyes were opened because they they'd been stuck in a particular story. Jesus reframes that story and everything changes. I like the way theologian NT Wright puts it. "They, like everyone else in Israel, had been reading the Bible through the wrong end of the telescope."

If we go to the balcony and look over Luke's shoulder as he was writing this Gospel, what we see is Luke as a theologian, weaving together these glimpses of the crucified Christ and resurrected Christ, the visible and the invisible Messiah, with images of the early Christian community at worship. The story has all the components of a good worship service: Gathering, scripture reading, storytelling and proclamation, prayer, and finally Eucharist...all leading out into witness and mission. By weaving all of these elements together, Luke reminds his readers, and us, that the worshipping community is the primary context where will where we catch the best glimpses of God. Worship is a social space, where the church gathers to watch for and describe the presence of the resurrected Lord in its midst. And Easter, according to Luke, is about seeing clearly. Seeing clearly that God is with us, for us, walks with us as a worshipping community...whether we know it or not, feel it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, the risen Christ is always hiding in plain sight. That's the good news.

Last Sunday many of you participated in our third Be the Kingdom Sunday. All the elements that Luke mentions were present. **Gathering**...we had some new faces, including members from our sister congregation Torre Fuentes. **Worship**: We sang hymns, and we broke bread through sharing the Lords Supper and Pizza.

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Service: We did a variety of acts of service, not just to feel good about ourselves, but as an active element of our worship living out a re-imagined story about Calvary as a church in mission. We applied ourselves to a variety of projects...some were tangible.... you could see the immediate impact of things you did or made.... other projects we'll never see the final outcome.... we'll never meet the people who will benefit from our labor. But perhaps we caught glimpses of God for a fleeting moment in the companionship of walking together in service. Be the Kingdom Sundays are now part of our communal Emmaus story as Easter people reaching out in mission with the risen Lord among us.

A few Saturdays ago, I had breakfast with the executive director of the Good Shepherd Housing Corporation, David Levine. Some of you met him last Sunday at the apartment that we cleaned. Good Shepherd Housing is a non-profit that helps to provide housing for low income families in the Route 1 corridor in FFX county. I asked to meet with him because I wanted to hear more about what Good Shepherd Housing does, but more importantly because I wanted to explore a possible partnership opportunity between this church and Good Shepherd housing as a path of service. Good Shepherd housing owns or leases 110 apartments or condominiums that it rents to low-income families. Six of us cleaned one of those units last week in preparation for its next family of occupants. During a previous Be the Kingdom Sunday, some of you painted one of those units.

I mention it this morning because of I sense an opportunity for us as a congregation to put on our Resurrection imaginations. The demand for low income housing in FFX county way outstrips the availability of that housing. How could we as a community make a difference, even a little bit? I am sure there are other service possibilities hiding in plain sight, but this is one that interests me. What could a resurrection imagination look like for this church if were to really apply ourselves? Something to ponder for our next Be the Kingdom Sunday as think about who we are as a church in mission...and other mission opportunities in our own back yard.

Jesus Hiding in Plain Sight. Goggles that prevent us from seeing possibilities right in front of us. Looking through telescopes through the wrong end. From broken hearts to burning hearts. All elements of the road to Emmaus experience. Let us pray for a resurrection imagination as we seek to live into the story of Emmaus. Amen.