

Recognizing Resurrection

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

April 23, 2023

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

An interesting question to ask ourselves as we read this passage, describing the journey of two grieving friends along the road to Emmaus: *At what point in the story might a light bulb have gone on for you?* So, when would it have occurred to me on that walk to Emmaus that I am encountering Christ?

It seems, for those two forlorn followers of Jesus, that they recognized their teacher and leader when he broke the bread. It makes sense, because it is remembering of the intimate meal Jesus shared with friends on the Eve of his crucifixion. Isn't it a daily challenge to recognize Christ, to make room in our busy, often stressful, lives for moments of recognition – so much information coming at us, facts and figures, even misinformation that requires us to filter fact from fiction?

It is easy to see the injustice, and hear those ranting, talking heads and loud-mouthed pundits, advertisements telling us that their product will beautify, improve, revive us or help us to sleep. We hear stories of devastation and death. Amidst that noise, how difficult it can be to recognize Resurrection, Christ in it all.

As a student minister, I was sent for an internship at a church that had been traumatized by arson. I cannot imagine a community suffering from intentional destruction of their building. Well, there I was, worshipping with them in a nearby college cafeteria. I thought it was great, arriving the first Sunday in that bright space. People were busily arranging chairs, and a table at the front. There was a baptism and I remember vividly the humour of people figuring out how they would do this without a baptismal font. They eventually resigned themselves to using an industrial sized salad bowl, placed ceremoniously on a dining hall table, serving now as a Communion Table.

There was an air of adaptability in that moment for me. But for so many leaders, the focus was on the countdown to being in their newly built church *building*. There was certainly joy in that space, as they celebrated God's gift of new life in that baby being baptized, but, that summer, looking back now, I was walking among grieving saints who saw resurrection symbolized solely in the stability of a space they could call their own. The new church was magnificent when we finally worshipped in the newly built sanctuary. I did notice, as an idealistic student minister, though, as one yearning to experiment, and try things, that there was a resistance there to new ways of looking at things. I was with people coping with grief.

That was a tough summer for me. I felt hurt, confined, yet I also learned a great deal about institutional church and myself. I learned how to walk alongside a community as they yearned to leave the wilderness of a college cafeteria to find the promise of new life.

It is hard to see resurrection, to recognize Christ beside us, when we are grieving, or angry, or preoccupied with projects, appointments, or unresolved issues that we face, demanding our energy. There are countless stories in the Bible, the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures, that seem to speak of God's surprising Grace. The Jewish and

Christian traditions tell us that we cannot contrive Grace using human ingenuity – like building a church sanctuary or putting on a meditation tape. We have to do our part to open ourselves to it, but Grace comes from God, like the Resurrection story itself, Jesus seemingly dead, suddenly, inexplicably, appearing to his friends. We cannot find Christ, in this life, but Christ always finds us. Resurrection sneaks up on us when we least expect it. It can't be explained or orchestrated. Grace just finds us.

Those Israelites escaping enslavement in Egypt, only to find themselves in the wilderness, afraid. All they had was their self-deprecating leader, Moses.

“Where is God?” They asked of the exasperated Moses, and, of course, I paraphrase. “Show us a sign!”

Perhaps the Creator offers signs all the time, but we are prevented from seeing them because we are pre-occupied by the grief, the loud noises of life – the stories of death and destruction mask the signs of resurrection.

Jesus offered a sign in the story as, after journeying on the road, he re-enacted the breaking of bread that he shared with disciples only days before. It is suggested that the pattern of breaking bread triggers recognition of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, from the meals he shared with his disciples, to Jesus feeding the 5,000.¹ For the Gospel storyteller Luke, “... Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”² Luke also writes the book of Acts in the Bible, and, there too, meals will shape Christian gatherings because believers recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Sharing of a meal together – how many among us have felt connectedness and sacredness at a meal with near and dear ones? Has there been a moment in your life when God or Resurrection snuck up on you, unawares, and gifted you with a holy moment?

This week, as I started to prepare this message, I thought I was going to explore how we can recognize Christ in the midst of a noisy world. As it turns out, for me, Christ more often nudges me, maybe even having to startle me into recognizing resurrection moments.

God is funny like that. Amen.

¹ Luke 9, verse 16

² Karris, Robert J. *Eating Your Way Through Luke's Gospel*. (Liturgical Press, 2006).