

I Thought He Looked Familiar!

[Text - Luke 24:13-35]

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This morning's New Testament reading starts rather strangely, as two of Jesus disciples who are discussing the life and death of Jesus, somehow manage to miss the fact that he has joined them on their journey. Maybe the setting sun or lengthening shadows obscure their vision. Perhaps they're tired, or depressed, or under some mysterious spell; but for some reason "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." They knew Jesus; they had followed him; they were even engaged in thinking and talking about him, the moment he appears. Yet when Jesus encounters them on the road, all they see is this intursive *stranger*....

So, what about you and me today? As we travel the road of Life, do we recognize the Christ who walks among us, or do we simply dismiss him as an annoying stranger? We may never know what kept those two travelers from recognizing Jesus; however, I hope that we might gain some insights from their encounter, to help us recognize the Christ who continues to engage us on the journey. First, we'll look at some things that may hinder our vision; and then we'll consider some things that can help us see the Risen Christ who lives and moves among us today.

The inability of those two travelers to recognize Jesus Christ, who walks and talks with them, does seem pretty bizarre. Even after a direct interpretation of the Scriptures about the Christ, *from the Christ*, these two still don't get it. One thing this might say to you and me, is that it may be difficult to open someone's eyes - or heart - merely through theological discussion. Now, as one who preaches the Word, I'm a bit reluctant to admit this: but there are times when some of us can be so busy talking about "Sacred Things," that we completely miss Life's "Sacred Moments." Like Cleopas and his companion, we can be so concerned about our own interpretation of who the Christ is, what Christ's life and death might mean, or who Christ truly welcomes,

that we miss the opportunity to welcome the Christ who walks right beside us.

Those two Emmaus travelers, rather than appreciating the fact that Jesus Christ is walking with them, initially seem irritated, because this “stranger” has interrupted their gloomy mood. When this newcomer asks them what they’re talking about, they’re annoyed that he’s not up to speed with the current religious events. “Where have you been, stranger? Are you the only person around here who doesn’t know what’s happened in the past few days? Come on, buddy, get with the program!”

Maybe if those two had been able to calm their anxious preoccupation about what had happened, what it all meant, and what was going to happen *next* - they may have been able to appreciate what was happening at that very moment. And maybe, those are some of the things that can hinder *our* perceiving the Christ among us: when we lose patience with those who disrupt our routines; or when we’re so preoccupied with our own personal thoughts and agendas, that we fail to take time - or make room - for those special people God sends our way. Sometimes you and I can miss the Holy Presence, because it comes to us in ways, or through people, that we consider too mundane, or too intrusive. We forget Christ’s critical teaching, that “Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do unto me!” [Apparently Jesus is under the impression that whenever you or I reach out to others with compassion and care, we greatly increase our chances of actually encountering and knowing him!]

Those Emmaus travelers were so focused on their own personal concerns, that they couldn’t even begin to comprehend what Christ was trying to say to them. Fortunately however, the message of Jesus Christ isn’t limited to mere words. In fact, it is an *action* that finally opens the eyes and hearts of those travelers - which really shouldn’t surprise us. Jesus Christ came to teach us the mind-blowing message of God’s unfailing love for all people. Yet he realizes that mere words simply will not suffice; therefore, Jesus takes action! He reaches-out to the prostitutes and tax-collectors. He embraces the outcast and the

downcast. He warmly welcomes sinners and strangers. He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, and breaks bread with those who religion and society routinely push aside. Jesus makes it his life's mission to assure that every person understands that he or she is a loved and accepted child of God. And when the religious and political power brokers try to stop him, Jesus willingly gives-up his own body to be broken upon a Cross - trusting that from that selfless action, the undying nature of Divine Compassion and Grace, will finally be fully recognized.

On that first Easter evening in Emmaus, Jesus Christ once again takes action! He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his friends. And *then*, their eyes are opened! Then they remember; then they recognize that Christ is right there with them! After all the words are spoken, it essentially comes down to a Holy Action - a *Sacra-ment* - of blessing and breaking, giving and sharing. Surprisingly though, once those followers finally recognize who Jesus is, he suddenly vanishes from their sight! So what are they supposed to do now? What *can* they do, but to take action themselves. They arise, hurry back to Jerusalem, and eagerly tell their friends what has happened. Once they realize that the Risen Christ was truly with them, they couldn't wait to go-forth and share that Good News. Because once the reality of Christ's Loving Presence touches anyone, that person will be moved to take action.

So, what might this mean for you and me today? It means that if we genuinely desire to recognize and welcome the Christ among us, then we must graciously acknowledge and warmly welcome the strangers in our midst. If we truly want to love and serve Christ in this world, then we must truly love and actively serve our neighbors in need. For as this story reminds us, it sometimes takes a Holy Action, in order for us to clearly comprehend and show Christ's Presence among us. This morning, you and I come together as One Family, to participate in a Holy Action: to bless and break bread, and to share a simple - yet bountiful - Meal of Love and Grace. In doing so, we are once again fed and strengthened for Life's journey, and our eyes are opened anew -

so that we may truly see the Living Christ in all those “others” who walk among us. Now, I warn you: like Cleopas and his companion, you and I might get a little “heart-burn” from this meal - the *good* kind of heart-burn! The kind that fires our souls and inspires our spirits to arise and to take action - to joyfully share the Good News with all those people God sends our way, whoever they may be.