

I'm Usually Good with Faces....

[Text - Luke 24:13-35]

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April 19, 2015

This morning's New Testament reading starts somewhat strangely, as two of Jesus disciples who are discussing Jesus' life and death, somehow manage to miss the fact that he has joined them on their journey. Maybe the setting sun obscures 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 thinking and talking about him, the moment he appears. Yet when Jesus encounters them on the road, all they see is this intrusive *stranger*....

So, what about you and me today? As we travel the road of Life, do we recognize Christ's Presence among us, or do we simply dismiss him as an annoying stranger? We may not know what kept those two travelers from recognizing Jesus; however, I think that we can gain some insight from their encounter, to help us recognize the Christ who engages us on our Life's journey. First, we'll look at some things that can hinder our vision; 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, as he walks and talks with them, does seem pretty weird. Even after a direct interpretation of the Scriptures about the Christ, *from* the Christ, they still don't get it. One thing this might say to us, is that it can be extremely difficult to open someone's eyes - or heart - with a theological discussion. Now, as one of those pesky preachers, I'm reluctant to admit this: but there are times when some of us can be so busy talking about "Sacred Things," that we completely miss-out on Life's "Sacred Moments." Like Cleopas and his companion, we're 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 among us. Rather than appreciating the reality of Christ's Presence, those two

travelers are irritated, because some “stranger” is interrupting their private pity-party. When he asks what they’re talking about, they’re annoyed that he’s not up to speed with current events. “Where have you been, stranger? Are you the only person around here who doesn’t know what’s happened in these past few days? Come on, buddy, check your Jerusalem news app!”

Now maybe, if those two had been able to calm their anxiety about what had happened, what it all meant, and what might happen *next* - they could have appreciated what was happening at that very moment. And maybe, these same things 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 thoughts, and concerns 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 that Holy Presence because it comes to us in ways, or through people, that we consider too annoying, intrusive, or insignificant! We forget Christ’s essential 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 connecting with him - and with our One Divine Source!]

Unfortunately, those two travelers are so focused on their own concerns, that they can't even begin to comprehend what Christ is trying to tell them. Fortunately however, the message of Jesus Christ isn't limited to *words*. In fact, it is an *action* that finally opens the eyes and hearts of those travelers - which probably shouldn't surprise us. Jesus Christ comes to convey the mind-blowing message of God's unfailing love for all people. Yet he realizes that *words* simply will not suffice; therefore, Jesus takes action! He lovingly reaches-out to prostitutes and tax-collectors. He embraces the outcast and the oppressed. He warmly welcomes sinners, saints, and strangers. He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, and breaks bread with those who society and religion 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 life - trusting that from that selfless action, the undying nature of Divine Compassion and Grace, will be fully revealed and finally 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! Basically, it comes down to a Holy *Action* - a *Sacra-ment* - of blessing and breaking, giving and sharing. Strangely, however, once those followers finally recognize who is with them, Jesus simply vanishes from their sight! [Seriously?] So *now* what are they supposed to do? What *can* they do, but to take action themselves. They rise-up, hurry back to Jerusalem, and joyfully tell their friends what has happened. Once they realize that the Risen Christ really was with them, they couldn't wait to go and share that Good News. Because once the reality of Christ's Loving Presence truly touches someone, 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 actually love, and actively serve, our neighbors in need - regardless of who they are or how they may appear to us. As this story reminds us, it often takes a Holy *Action*, in order to comprehend - and authentically communicate - Christ's Presence among us.

This morning, you and I come together to participate in a Holy Action: to bless and break bread, and to share a simple - yet powerful - Meal of Love and Grace. In doing so, you and I 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. And the Good News doesn't stop here! This afternoon, members and friends of this Family of Faith will help provide, prepare, bless and serve *another* meal of Love and Grace, to hungry people in Cleveland. And tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, you and I will continue to have countless opportunities to recognize and respond to the Christ who lives among us. He really isn't that hard to spot! He, or She, may well be found in the very next person who passes our way.