

Sermon: Where Do We Find the Risen Christ?

Christ is Risen! Good Morning! We are in the great Fifty Days of Easter. In the church, we don't just stop celebrating Easter after the peeps are all eaten and all the foil on the chocolate has been unwrapped. Lol We keep going for 50 days!

Partly that's because the resurrected Jesus Christ walked on this earth for 50 days - before he ascended into heaven. Partly it's because Easter is such a momentous joy that it takes us 50 days - to unwrap - and enjoy its gift.

And partly it because we need to have 50 days to figure out what this whole Easter life means. So, what we do is we look to the Gospel accounts where the resurrected Christ appeared to the first disciples - in locked rooms, in a garden, on the road, at a meal like any other meal. And the question we ask ourselves is: Where is it that we meet the risen Christ in our lives?

Craig Barnes says: "The question that Easter asks of us - is not 'Do you believe in the doctrine of the resurrection? ...What the Gospels ask is not 'Do you believe' but 'Have you encountered the risen Christ?'"

So, today as we look at Luke's gospel account, we're asking that question. The story is about two followers of Jesus who meet him on the road to Emmaus, and we're asking ourselves: Where have we met him? And where can we be looking to find him in our lives today? And this story gives us some of clues, as to where we might find Christ.

So, the story goes: It's Easter day, sometime in the late afternoon and two of Jesus' friends are traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. One is named Cleopas and we don't know the other one's name, but they're walking along, shattered, grieving. They'd had such high hopes: Jesus was going to be the one - their Messiah, their liberator, their dream come true. "We had hoped," they said, "that he was the one to redeem Israel." Their heads hang low as they walk down the road, talking about everything that had happened, the traumatic events of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, the crucifixion and his death - and then talking about something they heard earlier that morning. Some of the women of their group had gone to the tomb early in the morning and Jesus' body wasn't there. And they said there were angels there that told them that Jesus was alive.

As they're talking about all this, Jesus comes up beside them and starts walking with them, but they don't know its Jesus. He asks what they're talking about and they tell him and then Jesus talks to them. He gives them probably the best and briefest total overview of the OT scripture in history, starting in Genesis and going all the way to the present day, about why and how - what happened to the Messiah - needed to happen. And the two friends, said their hearts started to burn with amazement when he opened the scriptures to them.

So, one of the things this story suggests, is that if you want more of this Easter life, if you want to meet the resurrected Christ in your life, one place to go is to the scripture. It's said that Protestants are the people of one book. We're to daily live in the Bible, we're to develop a working and thorough knowledge of the Bible - we're to know the mind and spirit of it because it leads us to the mind and spirit of God.

But research shows that the majority of us don't read the Bible daily or even once a week. And I understand that there are good reasons why. The Bible can be confusing, understanding the Bible takes work, but it's worth it. The scriptures have so much to give, and what it has to give can only be found in the scriptures. Those two followers' eyes were opened to the resurrected Christ through the promises of scripture. Christ comes to us most clearly in the Word.

So, let me suggest that if you haven't been reading the Bible daily, why not try it out during this time of sheltering in place? You don't need to dive into the deep end. You could start by reading the Gospels, a chapter or two a day. It's a good place to start because the Gospels are easy to understand because they read like a story. So does the book of Acts.

Or you could read a Psalm a day. The Psalms are the church's original hymnbook and everything's in there. Our ancestors in the faith had no problem expressing themselves fully and authentically before God. No holds barred whether it's in praise and adoration or in lament or even in anger or rage, they brought themselves fully to God and the Psalms give us the language to do the same.

We find the resurrected Christ in the Bible.

Well, as our story in Luke continues, the 3 of them now get to Emmaus and the stranger acts like he's just going to keep on going down the road. But the two disciples say, "No, no, come with us, let's have dinner together."

So, they sit down at a table, and our scripture says, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."

Another place where we meet the risen Christ is in the sacrament of holy communion. We receive Christ. We receive his presence, his forgiveness, we receive a foretaste of eternity. The Eucharist is soul food, the bread of life, to feed our spirit and our spiritual needs.

At the sacrament of holy communion, we believe there is a thin veil between heaven and earth, that those of us on this side of the grave join with those on the other at the table of our Lord. In this meal, we are in communion with Jesus Christ but also with those who have gone before us. This is called the communion of the saints.

I know a woman, holy communion is so intimately important to her. I think it's what keeps her going. She's a mother whose son has died and there's no greater grief than

that. But every Sunday, whenever she takes communion, she walks down the center aisle and her face is filled with joy. And as she approaches the table, she pauses and looks up at the beautiful stained-glass window behind me. She's told me that when she does that, she's telling her son how much she loves him. And then she steps forward to receive. She communes with our risen Lord, who revealed himself in the breaking of bread. And because of that thin veil, at that moment, she knows she's sitting at that banquet table beside her son.

Where do we find the risen Christ? We find him in the scripture, and we find him in the sacrament.

She's told me how hard this has been - these weeks of not being able to worship in church together. Not being able to receive holy communion because we're all sheltering in place. And there will be a day when we'll be together again, worshipping together, reading scripture together, receiving Christ at the table together.

But I say to you, that today, Christ is present when you sit at your table with your loved ones and family who are sheltering in place with you. And the risen Christ is present, particularly, I think, if you will be eating alone today, to remind you that you are never alone.

Sometimes we think that if the resurrected Christ comes to us, it has to be a lightning-bolt experience or we think that meeting Christ means going to church.

But this story of two people walking on the road to Emmaus and a stranger who turns out to be Jesus coming to them, is also telling us that the resurrected Christ comes to those who are trying to follow him, trying to love him, trying to be his people. He comes to his friends, to those who know him, and it is his gift to them.

Beloved, this Easter gift is yours to unwrap. To paraphrase Frederick Buecher, the risen Christ comes to us in everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes, or listen with more than our ears, they reveal only a stranger coming down the road, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all our being and imagination, what we may see - is Jesus himself."

Dear friends, in these bewildering days, you are not alone. The resurrected Christ is with you. May you look around you, with more than your eyes and listen with more than your ears and in doing so, may you meet the risen Christ in these days. Amen.