

LOOKING FOR JESUS
Luke 24:13-48
Third Sunday in Easter, 2017
Sunrise Presbyterian Church
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Lewis Donelson is one of the Greek professors at Austin Seminary. He's known for asking pithy and probing exam questions. I have never forgotten the question he asked the seniors during my first year, "Where is Jesus Christ and what is he doing now?" I have also never forgotten the cheeky response with which one student began her essay, "As the song goes, he's somewhere over Plainview. . . ." Her answer was the talk of the seminary for weeks.

And is Jesus somewhere out there - over Plainview, Texas? Is Jesus hovering over us watching or deciding whether to send some grace our way this week? Perhaps Jesus kept flying on over Plainview and is in the outer reaches of space . . . Perhaps. The question remains: Where is Jesus Christ - and what is he doing now?

We seem to look for him where we suppose he might be - in church - among people like us - doing things we imagine he might be doing - helping us get through a stressful day - being kind to a stranger - comforting us in our grief. Sometimes we wonder where he is in this broken world of ours. We look for him particularly when we need him.

Our morning reading from Luke tells a different story. The disciples are on the road to Emmaus - but they have stopped looking for him. Jesus is dead - their hope is crushed. They walk home from Jerusalem and talk for a long while with a stranger they have encountered on the road. They tell him about the events of the past three days - Jesus' entry to the city, the trial before Pilate, the horrible crucifixion - and the frightening empty tomb. The disciples are numb with grief, and they easily tell this to their traveling companion. They are not looking for Jesus. They are upset, grieving and hopeless- for them, Jesus is gone, and thus, when they meet him on the road, they don't recognize him. They share their inmost grief with this man - but they don't recognize him. They had been talking with Jesus the entire trip.

"Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face."ⁱ Phillip Newell prays. Let's look around us for a moment and take in the faces we see. Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face. What if we see God in the face of a stranger in our pew? What if we see God's face in the face of someone we've long known in

church - but never really liked or gotten to know? What if we see God in every face in this congregation? What if?

We rarely ask - what if the stranger talking to us on the sidewalk is Jesus - instead, we more than likely demand of God - of Jesus - "Where are you when we need you?" "When will you rend open the heavens and come down to save us?" When will you get us out of our messes, dear God? When will you heal *us*? - instead of healing *that* woman at the well? When will you make *our* blind eyes see? We read about healings in the Bible - we recount stories of miracles from the gospels - we hear about deeds done in the early church - and in the meantime, we drive the kids to school and soccer and music lessons day in and day out - and our weeks go on and on. We keep hoping for something more. We keep wishing - hoping - for Jesus to be walking beside us.

And yet, if we return to the story of the Emmaus Road, just as Jesus walked with the disciples that day, Jesus *is* walking beside us - think about this. Jesus is talking to us - helping us understand life - he is here in our lives. Think again on Newell's prayer "Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face." Whichever way we turn in life - we have the opportunity to see Jesus, and Newell's prayer continues, "[we see] [Jesus'] face in the light of the eyes we love - in the salt of the tears we have tasted - in weathered countenances east and west." We find Jesus in the faces of those we don't know - in the faces of our enemies - of those who hate us - of those who are different from us - in *their* faces, most of all, we find Jesus.

How might our lives change if we realized this truth? What might be different for us if we began to treat EVERYONE we meet as if they were Jesus? How might our expectations of other people shift if we imagined that each person had great love and forgiveness to offer *us*? What if instead of expecting the worst in people we meet - we began to expect the best? What if?

The resurrection stories can seem rather other-worldly. We focus on how amazing it would have been to touch Jesus - to eat fish with him - to listen to him teach. We tell those stories and marvel at the disciples' reactions to Jesus. And yet, once we get past Easter - we invariably have no expectation that we will encounter Jesus in our daily lives.

Yet - even so - whichever way we turn, there is the face of Jesus - the face of God. If we can liberate stop ourselves from our fear and misfortune - constrain ourselves in our worries - and look at ourselves and other people for the spark of God's glory, then we can see God's face in others. The apostle Paul saw it - he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And then he began to see God's face on the face of the Gentiles he had been persecuting. Paul slowly realized that

others saw the face of Jesus in his actions - and that he saw Jesus in other people. What if we began to search for the contours of Jesus' face in the harried mother at the grocery store - the sullen teen we see at the mall - the neighbors we simply cannot stand. What if - we began to look for Jesus in the face of the most deplorable people we can imagine?

And what if - we might come to recognize that same face in our lives. What if we could see Jesus' face on our own face? What if we could understand that our hands could offer his caring - our words could carry his grace.

The disciples were so full of grief on the road to Emmaus that they did not even realize they were talking with Jesus. As we travel the roads of our lives - let us pray that we open our eyes. Let us pray that we might look beyond our own pain and worries to find Jesus walking beside us - loving those he meets - especially and including - ourselves. Alleluia! Amen.

ⁱ Phillip Newell, Praying with the Earth, p.31.