

“Recognizing Christ”

Date: April 26, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Occasion: Easter 3, Year A

Themes: Resurrection; Word and Sacrament; Ordinary Moments

I recently read the legend of the king who decided to set aside a special day to honor his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward, and from these four the king would select a winner.

The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told this man was highly deserving of the honor, because of his humanitarian efforts. He had given much of his wealth to the poor.

The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honor because he had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years.

The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that he was deserving of the honor because he was noted for his wisdom, his fairness and his brilliant decisions.

The fourth person presented was an elderly woman. Everyone was quite surprised to see her there, because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honored as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What had she done, in comparison to the other three, which was so deserving of this recognition?

The king was intrigued, to say the least, and somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The answer came: “You see before you three distinguished finalists, the philanthropist, the doctor and the judge? Well, she was their teacher!”

That woman had no wealth, no fortune and no title, but she had unselfishly given of her life to produce great people. The king missed seeing the value of the humble lady. He missed the significance of the teacher. And too often, we miss the value of those around us, even in ordinary moments.

I think it would surprise us to know how often we miss the presence of Christ, just as Cleopas and his brother missed the significance of the stranger on the road to Emmaus.

Kirk Byron Jones is senior pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Massachusetts. In an online blog he shared this that got my attention. He said,

“Super Bowl champions are known for following up their victories with a TV commercial announcing that their next stop is Disney World. Such an amazing victory deserves an amazing experience. This is strikingly different from what Jesus does after his victory over death. He takes a walk. How anticlimactic. How mundane. And yet, how so like Jesus.

In the gospels Jesus is as interested in savoring ordinary life as he is in passing out extraordinary life. He enjoys people’s company at a wedding feast, at the beginning of his ministry. He enjoys nature, and uses lilies of the field to illustrate how God cares for us. Going for a walk, how ordinary is that? And yet, that is when he reveals himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And Jesus loves our company so much, that he offers us a lasting memorial to his body and blood. Jesus so appreciates the ordinary gift of life, that he refuses to remain dead. Yes, Jesus the Christ is revealed in the ordinariness of life.

During this pandemic many of us have begun to realize how special certain things are to us. Things that were simply ordinary a month ago now

seem very special. Getting a hair cut. Going outside or to the grocery store without having to wear a mask. Coming to worship and seeing our church family. So ordinary, and yet now those things seem sacred and holy.

Have we missed seeing the Christ in the ordinariness of life? Maybe. But Jesus didn't. Jesus chose to reveal himself to Cleopas and his brother while taking a walk. On the day of his resurrection, Jesus chooses to take a slow walk with two disciples and simply enjoy the conversation.

It seems like Jesus is just happy to be breathing and moving again. Preaching and doing miracles are not at the top of his agenda. The sensational gives way to simply seeing, smelling, hearing and touching. Doing gives way to being. He simply wants to savor the gift of life.

Perhaps if the coronavirus has taught us anything, it is to slow down and savor life, taking time to smell the roses, so to speak. When we get caught up in our things to do list, when we rush from this thing to the next, we lose sight of the sacred that is right in front of us, right now.

Jesus the Christ is revealed in ordinariness of life. So often we look for miracles, the really big attention-getting things, to help us believe. But here, in this incident with the two disciples, Jesus tells us it's ok to slow down. Enjoy the walk, and let him reveal the sacred and the holy to you, in that moment.

Two of you have written poems about the Coronavirus, sharing where you've seen God at work. With permission, I'd like to share them with you.

The first is by Patty Rhone. Her poem goes like this:

They say look for God in the midst of daily challenges.
But this is in the midst of a global pandemic. Can we find him?
There he is! I see him -
In the 7:00 moments every night
when the New Yorkers come out

to clap for their hospital heroes.
I see him –
in the mothers and fathers who stay home
to protect and teach their children.
I see him –
in the brave faces with masks covering their fears,
out to shop so they can feed their families.
I see him in neighbors who leave a note saying,
“If you need anything, I’m here for you.”
I see him, in the national guard who come to fight
a different kind of battle,
one they had never been prepared for.
I see him – in the exhausted nurses and doctors
who return each day, to care, to lift up, and to save
those who need them so.
I see him – in the face and words of our Lakewood pastor
who shares his love, his words and his hope,
and who reminds us through his words –
“Resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing.”
So, now I see him –
In the midst of a global pandemic.”

Isn't that beautiful? Thank you for writing and sharing it with us, Patty.

Carol Overbeck also wrote a poem. Hers goes like this:

Coronavirus, corona, corona;
That is all we hear.
Causing worry and stress,
Insecurity and fear.
Change it up - just look outside
See the wonder
of new buds popping thru,
A great sense of pride.
Birds don't know corona;
They continue to sing.
Their music fills the air.
Oh, what joy that brings.
Focus on a smile; a phone call to a friend.
Relief is coming - stay healthy.
This enemy will end.

Rev. Jones in his online blog continued. He said, “I grew up in the African American Baptist tradition in New Orleans. One of the historic and beloved features of my spiritual home is the talkback between minister and congregation during the sermon. Some liturgical-dialogical expressions are more common than others. One of the most familiar pew- to-pulpit expressions is “Take your time!”

“Take your time” has multiple meanings, depending on the state of the sermon. A parishioner seeking a deeper understanding may be urging the preacher to elaborate, to give more information. It is also possible that the preacher is talking too fast; then the expression means, “slow down.”

But there is a third possibility. Sometimes preachers find just the right words at just the right time. “Take your time” in this instance means that what the preacher is saying is hitting home, is meeting a genuine need.

“Take your time” is a request for time to savor the portion that’s been given. It could be a signal that a second helping would be deeply appreciated. “Repeat that thought; repeat that phrase. Oh, that was so good, let’s hear it again. Let’s just savor the moment.”

Jesus, risen from the dead, takes his time with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He takes his time at dinner, in the breaking of the bread. And he invites the disciples, then and now, to savor the moment. And in that moment, Christ is revealed. The holy is made known. The present moment becomes sacred. May we do the same, knowing that Christ is made known in the ordinary. Amen.

This sermon relies heavily upon an article found in *The Christian Century magazine, online*. The Lectionary Column for April 26, 2020, Easter 3A. “Living by the Word,” by Kirk Byron Jones.