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On the Road Again  
Martin Grove United Church  
April 30, 2017  
by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

Based on Luke 24:13-35

Well - what do you think of that gospel story. What do you think of the idea that two of the disciples were walking down the road - with Jesus - and they were so wrapped up in their own issues that they did not recognize Jesus. Is that even remotely believable? Can you imagine being so self-absorbed that you don't see Christ in your midst? Well, let's start with a simple test.

[show “distraction test” clip] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4>

If you failed to see the moonwalking bear, I can at least reassure you that videos like this are all over The Internet, which means that you are not alone. Many many of us fail to see something unexpected, particularly when we are focused on a particular task at hand. It is astounding just how much we can miss when we are too self-absorbed, or when we are strongly focused on a particular thing that we can miss other interesting things. Perhaps the story of the disciples walking down the road with Jesus and them *not* recognizing Jesus is not so amazing after all.

After all, how many of us regularly fail to appreciate God in our own midst? How many of us regularly fail to appreciate that we ourselves are children of God? How many of us regularly fail to appreciate that this time - this place - the people we are sitting with right here - are all gifts from God? How many of us regularly fail to appreciate - well - anything at all as we grumble and complain our way through life? I don't think we should be too surprised that after the drama of crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples were a bit distracted, a bit pre-occupied, and perhaps even a bit nervous of strangers on the road.

To quote from Father Errol Fernandes, “This story of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, which is found only in the Gospel of Luke, speaks

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about the failure of two disciples to recognize their fellow traveler. The moment they recognize the Lord, he disappears from their sight. The story is for the sake of those who will believe without seeing. It tells us that the presence of the Lord can be known in experiences that transcend the events of the resurrection appearances. It tells us that, even in the darkest moments of our lives, when we are tempted to throw up our hands in despair, when we are tempted to give up, the Lord is walking by our side. We have only to ‘open’ our eyes to see.

Emmaus is not simply a geographical location. It is a place to which we go to escape from the realities of life when we find them too hard or harsh to bear. This may be an external place (a movie theatre, out of the home, somewhere on the road) or a habit (excessive drinking) or even an internal disposition that we may adopt (giving into frustration, despair, despondency, depression, etc). Emmaus may be a feeling that life is not worth living; that everything is in vain, that it is of no use to anyone whatsoever.

Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die, that even noble and pure ideals like love, fellowship, and freedom, have been twisted by people for selfish ends. The risen Lord meets us on this, our road to Emmaus, and assures us of his presence. He invites us not to give up or give in. He tells us that we must continue despite all evidence to the contrary, and that we must keep on keeping on. The story also warns us that the Lord will not always come in the manner in which we expect him to come and, that he may come when we least expect him.”

The failure of the disciples to recognize Jesus in their midst is therefore not an occasion for us to look down on the disciples. It is rather an opportunity for us to consider when - in our own lives - do we let ourselves get too distracted and preoccupied to see God in our own midst. We regularly say “God be with you” to each other. We say that God is with us - always. So when we don’t see God in our midst, is it because God is absent, or is it because we are not looking? Is it because we are too busy doing our own thing to really look? We don't even need a show of hands on this one. We all let ourselves get distracted and fail to look for - and therefore fail to see - Christ in our midst.

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What is it that *you* get preoccupied with that prevents you from seeing God in your midst? Common barriers include: staying perpetually busy so you never have time to reflect on anything, fear (or it's friend anger), unrealistic expectations about life, unhealthy grief, lack of gratitude, addiction, lack of willingness to offer forgiveness, lack of willingness to receive forgiveness, lack of empathy, and perhaps surprisingly, lack of the ability to love yourself. These - and other - barriers allow us to put ourselves where we cannot see God in our midst. But God is always present. It is our own ability to see that changes. We are all very well-equipped to be blind to the grace of God whenever we like. As children of God, we are also equipped to see the grace of God in our midst too. We just might need a little help from time to time. And if you suffer from those barriers - or any other ones - then you've come to the right place. Because this church is a place where we try to help each other recognize and overcome our own barriers and to find God in our midst in real ways. And we do all need a little help from time to time.

We might also wonder what the disciples saw when they finally recognized Jesus. I am actually prepared to argue that the disciples never really recognized Jesus, because the moment they did, Jesus disappeared. The story is a great example of the principle that "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone". I believe that the disciples didn't recognize Jesus so much as they recognized the effect of Jesus - through the action of breaking bread.

And for many of us here, how often have we recognized presence of God through an action. An action like when someone goes well out of there way to help someone. An action like when someone spends time to really relate with a troubled soul. An action like when someone doesn't just provide lip service but gets down and dirty with a person in need. An action where we don't calculate the costs before we decide to dig in and help someone in need. An action where - for a moment at least - we participate in bringing the kingdom of God to this time and place right now.

Seeing God in our midst sounds like a passive activity. Seeing God in our midst sounds like a passive activity where we just have to sit around and hope that we get lucky. But really - that's not seeing God in our midst. That's fishing! Seeing God in our midst is actually an active process where we can find God in our midst through action.

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The action does not necessarily have to be large, or newsworthy. Sometimes, those actions happen almost by accident. But we all know what it feels like when we participate in that sort of action - when we participate in an act that brings the kingdom of God to this time and this place. Here. Now.

The risen Jesus meets us on our own road to Emmaus. May we have the ability to see. May we have the ability to be.

Thanks be to God.

*Amen.*