

On the same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus. It was about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. While they were talking Jesus approached them and began walking with them. Although they saw him, they didn't recognize him.

A stranger.

You are walking along with a friend – with your parent – with your spouse – with your sister – just you two and a stranger falls into step with you.

How does your heart greet such a moment? With anticipation – the chance to meet someone new? With annoyance – irritation at the intrusion? With distrust – who is this person – what is he after ? With fear?

A stranger. This story might have ended before it began had this stranger not been received, for they did not expect Jesus in this one. But he walked with them – and they kept walking with him also.

It kind of makes me wonder about all the strangers in my life I have avoided – feared – ignored. What have I missed in them? Who have I missed in them?

This stranger asked them, “What are you discussing?”

They stopped and looked very sad. One of them, Cleopas, replied, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has happened recently?”

“What happened?” he asked.

They said to him, “We were discussing what happened to Jesus from Nazareth. He was a powerful prophet in what he did and said in the sight of God and all the people. Our chief priests and rulers had him condemned to death and crucified. We were hoping that he was the one who would free Israel. What's more, this is now the third day since everything happened. Some of the women from our group startled us. They went to the tomb early this morning and didn't find his body. They told us that they had seen angels

who said that he is alive. Some of our men went to the tomb and found it empty, as the women had , but they didn't see Jesus.

They were very sad. They had hoped in Jesus. They thought he was the one. Maybe when they heard the report of the women they thought the men would find the one the women could not see. But the men found the tomb empty.

They were very sad. Not even the message of angels gave them faith. They needed to see for themselves.

It is not enough to hear the story that Jesus is alive somewhere. In all the accounts of the resurrection that message does not sink in. Mary Magdalene heard the angel tell her Jesus was raised and moments later she is asking a stranger whom she thought to be the gardener where he put Jesus' body. Thomas hears the ten tell him that Jesus has come to them and he does not believe. And here these two have heard the report of the women but Luke tells us the apostles thought the story of the women did not make any sense and they didn't believe them. So these two remain very sad.

Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are! You are so slow to believe everything the prophets said! Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then he began with Moses' Teachings and the Prophets to explain to them what was said about him throughout the scriptures.

Jesus looked at these events through the window of the scriptures. His suffering, his dying, his glory he showed them in the scriptures. Maybe he spoke of Isaiah, of the one who has born our griefs and carried our sorrows. Maybe he reminded them of Psalm 22 that begins with the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. In that psalm we read, "they pierced my hands and feet. They throw dice for my clothing. In every day since Jesus died and was raised those who believe in him have opened the Old Testament to find deeper meaning there – words that teach them of Jesus. In a real sense Jesus is still walking the road with those who follow him explaining to us what is said about him throughout the scriptures.

When they came near the village where they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. They urged him, “Stay with us! It’s getting late, and the day is almost over.” So he went to stay with them.

We sing a hymn about this moment – not for these two but for ourselves. Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide.

You and I can know the story – you and I can know all the proofs from scripture that tell of Jesus. But there is more - more than Jesus as an idea in our head.

It is not enough to believe Jesus forgives. It is necessary to know that Jesus forgives you. It is not enough to declare God has created all things. It is essential to trust that your own life is in God’s hands. It is not enough to believe Jesus is alive and living somewhere. Jesus must be alive here – in you – for you.

That day they knew him as a stranger they invited in. They had no idea it was Jesus. Had they let him go on his way they might never have known him. But they invited him to stay with them. Now that inviting Jesus in did not open their eyes. Jesus himself would have to do that. But their invitation kept the door open for this stranger who turned out to be Jesus.

While he was at the table with them, he took bread and blessed it. He broke the bread and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. But he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Weren’t we excited when he talked with us on the road and opened up the meaning of the scriptures for us?”

Suddenly he is the host, they the guests. Suddenly they are back on the hillside where he took the five loaves blessed and broke and gave to them. Suddenly they are in the upper room where Jesus took the loaf and bless and broke it and gave it to them. In the meal they recognize Jesus and he vanishes.

Ever since that day of Jesus’ resurrection Christians have experienced their Lord in the opening of the scriptures and in the breaking of the bread and I might add in the waters of the font. Jesus comes to you in this gathering, you know your crucified and risen Lord as he opens your eyes here.

That same hour they went back to Jerusalem. They found the eleven apostles and those who were with them gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has really come back to life and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two disciples told what had happened on the road and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.

Our story ends with the going and telling. They rushed to tell their news – their good news. Surely that is the ending Jesus wants for your encounters with your Lord also. First here in the gathering of Christians we tell of Jesus in your lives. Then in your homes and schools and places of work you tell. You tell how Jesus has been your help and your strength and others come to believe.

There is a final word I would like to say this day. It is a word about walking with strangers “Don’t talk to strangers,” parents teach their children for not every stranger is safe. But every time I am walking and encounter a child who is afraid to say hello to me I am sad. I am sad for that child. A life that is guided by fear will miss Jesus most every time.

Jesus does not want you and I to be afraid, but to meet each new person expecting to encounter him in every one. Especially in those who are at the margins and fringes of life – the elderly, the poor, those whose minds are disturbed, those with little ability to reason, every one who is different from you, from me.

You will encounter Jesus in the scriptures and in the meal Christians share and in the fellowship of believers. But even more so Jesus comes in the stranger. Do not be afraid.