

“Encountering Jesus”
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Luke 24: 13 - 35

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning ²³ and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, ²⁹ but they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, ³⁴ who said, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.
 “But their eyes were held from him so not to recognize him.”

The two of them, followers of Jesus, are walking along, having a vigorous conversation.
 They were “talking and discussing” is our translation-
 but they are speaking, evaluating,
 even “disputing” would be a viable translation of the greek word used.¹

So involved are they, that they don’t notice Jesus coming alongside them until he is there.

Or, as he has done before with walls and locked doors,
 maybe Jesus really does suddenly appear with them,
 and then IS suddenly journeying with them.

But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.
 “But their eyes were held from him so not to recognize him.”

But what happens next? What’s next?
 They don’t tell Jesus that they are having a private conversation,
 they welcome him. Include him.

They don’t ask who he voted for in the last election.
 They don’t ask about his nationality or immigration status.
 They don’t ask about his gender or sexuality.
 They don’t even ask which basketball team he rooted for in the last NCAA tournament.

When they realize that this stranger doesn’t have a place to go,
 and it will soon be night-
 both potentially unsafe and leaving him without a place to lay his head-
 they invite this stranger to stay with him.

Not only do they invite him, they encourage him.
 Jesus doesn’t ask to stay with them,
 they pay enough attention to notice that he is going further and it is close to night-
 their eyes are held from recognizing him,
 they invite a stranger to stay with them.

¹ D. Mark Davis, “Two Idiots and a Lord Walk Into an Inn”
<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2017/04/two-idiots-and-lord-walk-into-inn.html>

And then they are at table together,
 this community, those disciples, their Lord who they do not recognize.
 Who is given the honor of blessing the bread they will share?
 The stranger in their midst. The one they do not know.
 At their table, not only is the stranger tolerated, he is welcomed. Honored. Cared for.

Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them-
 It is then that their eyes are opened and they recognize him.
 They had been practicing hospitality to Jesus this whole time. They just didn't know it.

But why is it that they don't recognize him at the beginning?
 Did God keep these disciples from recognizing Jesus?
 Or was it something in their own eyes that prevented it?
 Was it, maybe, because they didn't believe they would see Jesus, that they didn't see him?

If that is the case, it would mean that they are very human,
 for apparently this is something that we all do, according to modern research,
 and it's called "myside bias."
 Myside bias, where we readily accept information that affirms our world view
 and find holes in information that challenges it.²
 Not just because we want to be right, scientists have determined,
 but because we get a rush of dopamine
 when we process information that supports what we already believe.

Two of the researchers of this phenomenon are a father and daughter team, Jack and Sara Gorman. In a recent article about their book "Why We Ignore the Facts That Will Save Us" the reporter writes that:

Their concern is with those persistent beliefs which are not just demonstrably false but also potentially deadly, like the conviction that vaccines are hazardous. Of course, what's hazardous is not being vaccinated; that's why vaccines were created in the first place. 'Immunization is one of the triumphs of modern medicine,' the Gormans note. But no matter how many scientific studies conclude that vaccines are safe, and that there's no link between immunizations and autism, anti-vaxxers remain unmoved.

² Elizabeth Kolbert, "Why Facts Don't Change our Minds: New Discoveries About the Human Mind Show the Limitations of Reason." *New Yorker Magazine*, February 27, 2017.
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds>

We see what we want to see.

“It feels good [the Gormans say] to ‘stick to our guns’ even if we are wrong.”

“When liberals, like some I’m related to, watch Rachel Maddow, and get a smug smile on their faces, they are not taking in information that challenges their worldview.

Or when conservatives, like some I’m related to, watch Fox News, and feel a surge of moral rectitude, it’s because of the dopamine racing around in their brains.”³

And can the same be said for us?

Do we trap ourselves in a bubble that closes our eyes?

Are we able to see Jesus?

How do we break out of this shell?

Where are our eyes held from recognizing the Jesus who is surely in our midst?

What keeps us from trusting God with all of our hearts?⁴

Writer and food activist Sarah Miles writes,⁵

I was hanging out in the food pantry one afternoon, while people were waiting in line to get food. Suddenly someone started yelling: a woman was collapsing. I ran over. She was a small white woman with long hair, and she was seizing. Her eyes were rolling back in her head, and her knees were buckling, and her big, scared boyfriend was shouting.

I so did not want to be a part of this drama. I told someone to call 911 and went over and reached out my hand, and the woman grabbed me. She fell on me, clutching me..... she was terrified, and her body kept shaking as the seizures swept through her, “Oh year, I see her all the time on Capp Street,” a guy next to us said. “She must have got some bad dope.” Great, I thought, now she’s going to die right here.

Her eyes rolled back again, and I eased her down on the sidewalk and started stroking her forehead and calling her into being by name. As if she were giving me and the strangers around her the very Word of her being, the spark in the darkness of her hurting flesh....As if she were Jesus, the Word

³ The Rev. Meg Peery McLaughlin included these words in her sermon last week at The Well in Richmond, Virginia (2017), but they are true for me, too, so I have said them in the first person.

⁴ From Suzanne Bicksler’s Statement of Faith: “I believe we can trust God with all your heart”

⁵ Sara Miles, Jesus Freak: Feeding Healing Raising the Dead (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pages 146-147.

that speaks its own name and calls everyone else into being. Lydia, Jesus, Lydia: beloved child of God.

She sat up after a while, and one of our volunteers brought her a little cup of water. I went back inside when the kind, seen-it-all paramedics showed up, and later Lydia just lurched away on her own steam.

There are moments in each of our lives when we get to witness the truth. It doesn't always look beautiful. But it's so bright that you can stand there, with every little grungy detail lit up, and see the beating heart of the living God.

Sometimes, our eyes are opened and we see Jesus when we are in the act of helping, like those disciples were.

And sometimes, it's when we recognize that we are the ones who must be helped, and that is the recognition that allows us to see Jesus.

And maybe to be a little but more like Jesus.⁶

In an article for the *Christian Century* a few years ago, Jason Whit told the story of his six-year-old daughter, Camille, who is intellectually disabled and will never talk, walk, or eat on her own. The support of their church community has been present since her birth, and just one aspect of this can be seen on Sunday mornings. In his words:⁷

Our church has also recognized our needs during worship. The children's area is crowded during the worship hour, and my wife and I felt that it was a burden to leave Camille (with her large stroller) there during worship. So we either missed worship or sat with Camille in the narthex, trying to listen to the service through speakers.

To draw us out of our exile, our children's minister began a group known as Camille's Companions. Each Sunday a volunteer sits with Camille in the narthex so my wife and I can take our son into the service. Sometimes these companions bring their own children to sit with them.

After services we find a group of teenagers gathered around Camille talking to her and holding her hands. These are children of Camille's Companions who have come to know Camille and see themselves as her friends. Again, what was done as a means of meeting one of our needs has transformed how the teenagers and adults in our church perceive those with disabilities. By looking for ways to make a place for Camille and offer community to our family, our church is discovering that Camille offers gifts back to the body.

⁶ From Andrew McLaughlin's statement of faith, "I want to keep learning how to be more like Jesus."

⁷ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-12/place-camille> Retrieved April 25, 2015.

How would things have been different if they hadn't accepted this help?
 Would it have held their eyes from seeing Jesus?
 Are we willing to let God use us where we can be used?⁸

Friends, we live in a world of increasing "myside bias."
 And it's not easy.
 We're all on the road having these incredible important discussions that can be volatile, as they were for the disciples in Luke today, because they are about things that matter.

But today, there is Good News.
 The disciples eyes didn't stay closed. They were opened.
 They were reminded, even though they thought they had lost everything,
 "Jesus was still there for them. And Jesus knows what he is doing."⁹

Jesus listened then, and Jesus is still listening¹⁰.

Today, we welcome five new young people into this community of faith. They are making their own statements of faith, affirming their faith in God, something that is so profoundly counter cultural it cannot help but be a glimmer of God shining into this world.

And we are all invited to continue.
 To continue talking, walking, and sharing bread.
 Believing that we will see Jesus.
 I know that we will.
 Amen.

⁸ From Braham Kesterson's statement of faith, "He will use me if I am willing to be used."

⁹ From Sarah Allan Straight's statement of faith, "even when we think we've lost everything, Jesus is still there for us. And he knows what he is doing."

¹⁰ From Ryan Meadows' statement of faith, "I know that he is still listening."