



Being known in us

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 30, 2017.

Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Luke 24:35

During these fifty days of Eastertide, we are looking at the disciples' post resurrection encounters with Christ. Last week, "doubting" Thomas had to see for himself the evidence that Christ was alive before he would believe.

The setting for today's gospel account takes place later in the day of resurrection. These unnamed disciples are not part of Jesus' inner circle and don't understand the significance of the empty tomb. They had placed all their hopes in Jesus as the one who would redeem all of Israel. The stark memory of the crucifixion is still in their minds and they are feeling defeated and discouraged and are puzzled about what they have heard.

A stranger joins them as they walk along the road toward the village of Emmaus. He seems pleasant enough, but they have no idea who he is. When they tell him about their friend who had died whose body had disappeared from the tomb, the stranger explains to them how the scriptures are being fulfilled. As they listen, they are drawn to him and ask him to join them for dinner. It isn't until the stranger sits down at the table with them, blesses the bread and distributes it to them that their eyes are opened. Only then do they realize that the one whom they mistook for a stranger is none other than the risen Christ. It took something as familiar as the blessing and sharing of bread for them to recognize him. They recalled how their hearts burned within as they walked along the road with him.

Their experience recalls that of John Wesley whose own spiritual revival began with his heart being "strangely warmed" by his personal encounter with Christ. Wesley's experience sparked the evangelical revival that launched the Methodist movement in the 18th century Church of England. Though Wesley remained an Anglican priest, his followers formed the Methodist Church that is numbered among the largest of the Protestant denominations.

In any personal encounter with Christ, there is an awakening to his powerful presence. It may not be as stunning and dramatic as that of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus but it is just as real. It may be as simple as an increasing awareness of the presence of Christ in everyday tasks that are given new meaning and significance. Much of what we take for granted begins to make sense when the ongoing presence of Christ is making a profound difference in our lives. God has a way of entering our lives not in extraordinary ways, but as we go about our everyday tasks. It can be as simple as a smile or hug from someone we haven't seen in a long time. It is seen in the face a toddler who takes delight in discovering everything in their world.

What prevents us from recognizing Christ in our midst is when we are preoccupied with worry, anger or jealousy. Ask yourself what it takes for Christ to be real and present in your life? My own awakening to the reality of Christ's presence was as a student when I confessed to God

all that was wrong in my life. I unloaded my misgivings and uncertainties I had at the time. I felt as if the weight of self-concern had been lifted to reveal the need to get beyond myself. What I learned from that experience was the realization that God's forgiveness is not just a generalized theory; it continues to be a reality for me personally. The message of Easter assures us that God's grace and providence is ongoing.

While many experiences of Christ's presence are found in the familiar and the everyday, there is no more familiar way than this great sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the greatest act of worship in which Christ is really present. Each week as we gather at God's altar he is made known to us in the breaking of the bread. He is our host at this sacred meal as we share in his presence with us. Because the experience with Christ is so personal, we dare not keep it to ourselves, but share it with those who are looking for more meaning and substance in their lives. Christ is made known to others in our witness to him.

When we have the experience of not recognizing someone whom we haven't seen in a long time, we try to connect with something familiar. Most likely it begins with the sound of their voice or in their eyes. Gradually, we recall names, places and events we've shared that we hadn't thought about in years. It is the recollection of things familiar that brings recognition. In the same way, Christ is best known in the familiarity of this great sacrament of the Eucharist.

Christ is known in us when we are open and accepting and affirming of others. He is recognized in us when we take a strong stand for what we know and believe is right, especially in the face of opposition. He is seen in us when we make ourselves useful by getting beyond ourselves to focus on others. He is known in the faces of men and women who work among the poor and disabled to give them hope in the possibility of living a full life.

I am convinced more than ever that in a world of intense conflict that Christ's reconciling love is the hope for all humanity. Whether or not we think that the threat of mass destruction is serious, we can't afford to the risk of a false sense of security. We must remain on constant alert for the dangers of nationalistic and religious fanaticism in all forms, foreign and domestic.

Remain steadfast in being Christ's powerful presence wherever you are. Be an example of Christ to all every day, in all things, at all times, and in all places. That is our mission and to that, let the church say, "Amen."