

A question for every Easter

Where do we recognize Christ?

We may go to Scripture for answers, but it's often the questions we find there that are more interesting. Or at least more productive. For those questions move us to wrestle with God's word and ask: "What does this mean for me today?"

Think of some of them. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Cain to God). "Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (God to Job). "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Paul to the universe).

The question that's held most meaning for me is one I first heard in Sunday school: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road ...?" You know the story, from Luke 24, and this year it's part of an alternate reading for Easter evening (verses 13-35). Two disciples leave Jerusalem for Emmaus, deeply dispirited over Jesus' crucifixion, thinking all is lost. But "where two or three are gathered together ..." there is Christ in their midst.

And, there is Christ, with Cleopas and a friend. (A few Bible scholars venture the friend could have been a woman, perhaps Cleopas' wife.) In the 7-mile walk, Jesus—ever the teacher—meets the disciples where they are, asks questions himself, even chides them as he interprets for them from Moses and the prophets the "things about himself in all the Scriptures."

They are rapt students, hanging on the "stranger's" every word. Yet not until they press Jesus to stay for the evening meal and he blesses and breaks the bread do they grasp who he really is. With truth dawning on them, they ask: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"

So much truth, so many lessons in this Easter encounter. For one, see what hospitality can bring. Ask a "stranger" to eat with you, and, as Hebrews 13:1-2 says, you may entertain "angels without knowing it." Also, some see in the account a hint of the church's liturgy. The people—two disciples—gather. The word is proclaimed as Jesus interprets Scripture. A meal is shared, with bread blessed and broken by Christ, the host. And the gathered are sent out, in this case back to Jerusalem to share their experience.

The story also reminds us how journeys can be as important as destinations. For it is often in our daily walks—on whatever Emmaus roads we find ourselves—that Christ comes and stays with us until we, too, can say, "Were not our hearts burning within us ...?"

Bless Luke for including the Emmaus account—the only Gospel

writer to do so. Luke's day job may have been as a physician, but we should be forever grateful that, prompted by the Spirit, he moonlighted as the writer of Luke-Acts. We're all richer for his careful crafting of story, his Spirit-led imagination, his attention to detail and truth.

And we are all richer for the gifts of other writers when they seek to weave the word into the fabric of our lives. When I think of God taking on human flesh—and for me the Emmaus story is incarnational—I hear Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson's rendering of John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh ... and moved into the neighborhood" (*The Message*).

Or singer Joan Osborne's "One of Us." Her refrain prompts each of us to answer the poignant question: "What if God was one of us?/Just a slob like one of us/Just a stranger on the bus/Trying to make his way home."

Or folk-singer Peter Mayer's "God Is a River," calling us to "let go" and see God less like a rock and more like a river, sustaining us in all life's waters—swirling or peaceful.

Thanks be to God for coming among us ... to walk with us and warm our hearts. □



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