

Easter 3 A Sermon
April 23, 23
Luke 24:13-35

“To Be Known”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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Bill was feeling like a bit of a mess. He was losing his hair and several years of office work had contributed to an increasing mass around his waist. The last straw came when he asked a co-worker out and she, less-than-politely declined. "That does it!" he exclaimed to himself, "I'm going to start a whole new regimen." And you know, he did. He began attending aerobics classes. He started working out with weights. He changed his diet. And he got an expensive hair transplant. In six months, he was a different man. Once again, he asked his co-worker out, and this time she accepted.

There he was, all dressed up for the date, feeling great and looking better than he ever had. He stood poised to ring the woman's doorbell, when a bolt of lightning struck him and knocked him off his feet. As he lay on the ground, eyes to the heavens he asked, "Why, God, why now? After all I've been through, how could you do this to me?"

From above, there came a penitent voice, "Sorry. I didn't recognize you."¹

¹ "Lightning Just Struck," Jokesoftheday.net, November 28, 2017: <https://jokesoftheday.net/jokes-archive/2017/11/28/>.

Have you ever been mistaken for someone else? I sure have. People often tell me that they recognize me and then try to figure out where our paths might have crossed. Eventually, they give up and say, “but you just look so familiar!” I’ve been told that I look like an accordion player from the Twin Cities, someone’s son-in-law, and revered German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis during World War II! I guess I just have one of those faces...

In the story we heard moments ago from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus learned again what it felt like not to be recognized. That, apparently, happened quite a bit. In the garden near the tomb on that long-ago Easter, Mary Magdalene mistook Jesus for the gardener. Another time, while the disciples were out on the lake for an unsuccessful fishing trip, they saw a strange man on the shore. The man told them to drop their nets on the other side of the boat and they could barely haul in their catch! Only then, did they realize it was Jesus. And then there was the instance we heard about last week with Thomas who would only believe that it was Jesus after he had touched the wounds in his hands and in his side. Even the people who actually recognized him, didn’t always seem to really *know* Jesus—who he was and what he was about.

The two men on the road to Emmaus weren’t so unusual. They were followers of Jesus, sure, even companions of Mary Magdalene and the other disciples, but they were grief stricken and not seeing clearly as they walked away from Jerusalem and the tragedy and disappointment it had held for them. It was only when the stranger they’d met on the road broke the bread for their supper, that they finally recognized him as Jesus of Nazareth.

It’s important to feel seen, though, isn’t it? To feel known? When we’re ignored, or mistaken for someone else, or simply not recognized at all it hurts, doesn’t it? It’s like the other person is tacitly telling us that we don’t matter to them. And yet, experts in multiple fields tell us that feeling seen and known is essential for human thriving. That’s probably why the people we’re drawn to, our closest friends, just seem to ‘get us.’ It’s also

why, in the absence of such “knowing relationships,” we feel lonely, disenfranchised, depressed, and even angry. At a fundamental level, we all need to feel seen and known. Jesus seems to have understood this.

Jesus saw the blind man sitting by the road to Jericho, longing for wholeness; saw the lepers outside a Palestinian village wanting desperately to rejoin their community; saw the short tax collector who needed a friend. Jesus understood the woman with the flow of blood; saw the rejected woman drawing water at a Samaritan well; knew the woman who poured expensive ointment on his feet and wiped them with her hair. Jesus got the hungry masses; got their struggle against oppression; got their longing for freedom. Jesus saw, knew, got, understood people. They were seen—they were known by him—even when everyone else looked the other way, kept them at arm’s length, or ignored their pleas. He got them.

While most of us won’t be able to respond the way Jesus does in the gospels, the importance of seeing, knowing, and understanding one another has never been greater. It’s the lack of it that seems to be driving everything from the prevailing political frenzy, to ongoing racial tension, to the battle over a living wage, to the ongoing epidemic of loneliness. People need to be seen and known and understood and when we’re not, we won’t be healthy—not as individuals, not as a nation, and not as a global human family.

So, what can we do about it? What can you and I really do about it? We can start by seeing and acknowledging one another—making space for one another simply to be. We can listen, not just passively hearing the sounds produced by another’s larynx, but actively listening with an ear toward understanding. We can ask questions to clarify what’s being said. We can affirm the feelings shared—whether or not we agree with them. And we can act on what we’ve learned. Human beings need to be seen, need to be known, need to be understood and we are capable of seeing, knowing, and understanding—even if we don’t agree on everything.

None of us wants to feel the way Jesus must have on the road to Emmaus and so many other times—unseen and unknown. And I know that none of us here want to be the reason another person feels that way either. As we seek to be seen and known ourselves, may we be the reason someone else feels seen and known and understood. May it be so. Amen.