

You Are Not Alone
Luke 24:13-35
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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The day was long and full of surprises. After a weekend filled with fear and grief, a weekend containing the worst outcome they could imagine, hours spent with questions and wondering and doubt, after all that the morning had started early with the unbelievable announcement that the tomb was empty. Not only was it empty, but two men - or were they angels? - in dazzling clothes had told the women that Jesus had risen.

Those closest to him, not just the eleven, but some of the women who had been part of their group and some others from nearby villages, they had wrestled with this announcement all day. They had vacillated between doubt and hope, between fear and joy.

But as evening drew close, some of them knew they couldn't stay there forever. Their life couldn't be lived behind locked doors in a borrowed room.

So, the two from Emmaus, set out to return home. It was a seven-mile walk and they hoped to make it before sunset, after all the dangers of traveling in the dark were many, and frankly they were exhausted.

As they walked, they talked. There was, after all, plenty to discuss. They reviewed all that had happened, not just since the women's announcement, but over the last few days. Tears ran down their faces again and again as they remembered the injustice of his death, the pain on his face. Smiles occasionally made their way to the corners of their mouths as they remembered better times, as they realized that still the values for which Jesus stood were rooted deep in their hearts and lives.

As they walked, a stranger approached them. And there was nothing unusual about that. This was a well-traveled road, they would never have expected to be the only ones on it. They greeted each other, after all, that's what people do. They said hello. They inquired of one another's well-being. And, soon they found themselves, traveling at the same pace and in the same direction, walking and talking together.

Of course, it was still Jesus they were talking about...it would always be Jesus. But it seemed this new companion didn't know, somehow had missed all that had happened in Jerusalem that weekend. So they talked and they told him and they wondered and they shared their grief and their questions and their hope.

Soon the conversation took a different turn. This man, who seemed oblivious to it all, was suddenly talking to them about the scriptures and making meaningful connections.

Maybe he knew more than he first let on.

Before they knew it, that seven-mile walk was coming to an end. But so was the day. Their traveling companion was not a neighbor from Emmaus, he had farther to go. But the sun was setting, night was settling in, and they were all hungry.

“Stay with us,” they invited him. They offered a meal and a bed. He could set out again in the morning.

He accepted their offer. The table was set. As they reclined there at the table, grateful to be off their feet, their stomachs rumbling to be fed, their guest picked up the bread. He blessed it, offering thanks to God for all that sustained them, and as he tore pieces off and reached out to share them, these two followers of Jesus suddenly realized *it was him*...Jesus was with them. He had been with them all along.

And of course we know the rest of the story. We know that the excitement of this event meant that regardless of the risks and the dangers, they could do nothing but make their way back to Jerusalem, traveling in the dark, running as fast as their legs would carry them to gather again with the community, to share their story of Jesus’ presence with them.

And, this is more than a story of Jesus’ presence with two followers so many generations ago.

This is a reminder that Jesus shows up...even for us.

Because while we often speak the truth of God’s interest in all of humanity, God’s intention for wholeness and justice and compassion for all, God’s call in our lives to let our faith carry us into the world to make a difference for other people, there is another truth that lives alongside that. It is the truth of a personal God, known best to those of us who call ourselves Christians through Jesus, a divine one who keeps showing up in our lives and who lives right beside us.

This, too, is the proclamation of the Christian faith. Perhaps John says it best in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John writing, “And the word became flesh and lived among us...” (John 1:14, NRSV), or as Eugene Peterson translates it in *The Message*, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”

This, too, is our God. One who we know through the full humanity of Jesus, one who honors the joys and struggles of living this human life, and one who, as the followers from Emmaus learned on that first Easter Sunday, keeps showing up in mysterious ways right in the middle of our lives.

And sometimes, like those disciples, we miss it. Sometimes we are consumed with our own lives, with our own focus, with our own busyness. Sometimes we can’t see beyond

our grief and fear, even our joy and celebration, and those things might sometimes keep us from recognizing that God is with us, that Jesus is walking beside us.

But, the gift is that the Holy One is persistent.

Just as Jesus stayed with those two followers, continued walking and talking, remained with them even when it would have been easy to walk on, Jesus stays with us. Whether we recognize him or not, he is here.

And sometimes, in those beautiful moments of clarity, in those moments when our hearts are ready to see something more, we, too, realize that he has been with us all along.

I often find myself praying with others, sometimes prayers in moments of challenge, sometimes in times of grief, sometimes in overwhelming joy. But more and more I find that part of my prayer is that God's presence will be made known to them, to you, to each of us, in just the ways that we need.

Because it is easy in this world to feel like you are alone, sometimes even when you are surrounded by other people. It is easy to get overwhelmed by all that is worrisome, and there is plenty of that. It is easy to get caught up in temptation and in self-centeredness. It is easy to feel like no one else is looking out for you, that you are an island.

But the promise of our faith is that we are never alone. God is always with us. Jesus is walking beside us.

Friends, we talk a lot about God's love for each and everyone of us. This is not some abstract reality. This is not some Mainline Protestant theory of a nice-guy god. This is a claim, central to our faith, that you are valued and that you are worthy of God's attention. This is an invitation, not just to worship on Sundays, but to live in relationship with one who walks beside you, who knows you, and who wants to be known by you.

And the joy is that sometimes...in the breaking of bread, in the colors of the morning sky, in a moment of comfort, even in a harrowing experience that changes our lives...sometimes, in different ways for different people, our eyes are opened and we see Jesus, and we realize that all along, we have never been alone. Amen.