

Luke 24:13-35
The Stranger
WRCoB 4.11.21

John Ross tells the story of the famous
Swiss theologian, Karl Barth
Riding a streetcar in Basel, Switzerland.

A tourist got on and sat next to Barth.
They struck up a conversation.

Barth asked him if there was anything in particular
He would like to do while in Basel?

The tourist answered
“Yes, I’d love to meet the famous theologian
Karl Barth, do you know him?”

“Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I do,” Barth replied wittingly
“I shave his face every morning.”

The tourist left marveling at what good fortune he had
Having just met Karl Barth’s barber!

It’s sort of like that in our story today.

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The Risen Lord made 3 appearances on that Easter Sunday.

According to Gospel of John
Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb.

But she did not recognize him at first
Thought he was a gardener.

He appeared later to the two on the Emmaus road
They, too, did not initially recognize him.

And he appeared to the disciples that evening
Locked in the upper room.

Again, initially, they did not recognize him.

All were Easter Sunday appearances.

We can surmise, then
Two common elements in his appearances.

1. Jesus was not recognizable at first
2. He appeared only to his followers.

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In regards to Jesus' appearances
The late, great, Rev. Fred Craddock writes

If he would have been in charge of the resurrection event
He would have done things quite differently.

He would have had Jesus go back to Pilate's Hall
And say, "Hey, you want to give it another shot?"

And those who doubted Jesus
He would've had Jesus appear
And scare them all to death!

As Craddock suggests

Jesus could have made a spectacular resurrection entry.

But he didn't!

The only ones who witnessed

His post-resurrection appearances were his followers.

You wonder why!

It may relate to a comment made

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

We discussed several weeks ago.

When the rich man realized

He couldn't escape the fires of hell

He asked to send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers.

But Abraham stated that even if someone

Back from the dead would warn them

They still wouldn't believe!

It seems, then, the Easter appearances were meant

For only those who loved and followed Jesus.

It was the blessed assurance they needed.

But even having said that, Jesus came incognito!

To the two on the Emmaus road

Christ came to them as a stranger.

In Greek, the word for stranger is *paroikos*.

Oikos means “house.”

Literally, *par-oikos* means “outside the house.”

This is the same Greek word used in the Bible

For a foreigner or immigrant.

Interesting isn't it

That Jesus would come to them as an immigrant?

It reminds me of Jesus' own words, when he said

Matthew 25:35b I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

Something to ponder.

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Easter scripture readings generally focus on the empty tomb.

We assume that is where Jesus made his first appearance.

But according to the Gospel of Luke

Peter nor the women saw Jesus at the tomb.

Luke claims the Emmaus road event

Is Jesus' first appearance.

He tells the story this way.

On that same day two men traveled the road to Emmaus.

They discussed the events of that morning.

A Stranger came alongside them.

Luke informs his readers, it was Jesus.

But the disciples didn't recognize him.

The Stranger walked along with them
And asked what they were talking about.

And they stared at him in disbelief.

“Do you mean to tell us
You're the only one in all of Jerusalem
That hasn't heard the things that happened?”

“What things?” the Stranger asked.

“The things about Jesus, whom we thought the Messiah!”

“That he was arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced
And executed to death by crucifixion?”

“You mean to tell me you don't know the news
That this morning some of the women went to the tomb
To see the grave and he wasn't there?”

“You mean to say you don't know there they saw angels?”

“And what is more, these angels told the women
That this Jesus who was very much dead
Is now very much alive?”

With that, the Stranger said

“And what, you mean to tell me you still don’t believe?”

~~

The two had reached their destination

And not wanting the Stranger to leave

Pleaded with him to stay.

At the evening meal, the Stranger took bread

Blessed it, broke it and gave it to them.

And in this act their eyes were opened

And they recognized the Stranger as Jesus

³² Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he opening the scriptures to us?

In these Easter Sunday appearances

Jesus shows up incognito.

Not on a blazing white, winged horse named Pegasus

Descending down from the heavens

With the sword of justice in hand!

But as a gardener, or as a stranger

At early morn, or at suppertime

Or walking along a road.

Jesus came to them as a person they did not know

Ministered to them bringing faith, hope and love.

And only later did they identify him as Jesus.

And that is the way Jesus often comes to us
In the form of a person
We don't recognize until later as Jesus.

~~

A Stranger drove a Uber cab for a living.

He was called to a house early in his shift.

He walked to the door and knocked.

"Just a minute,"
Answered a frail, elderly voice.

After a long pause, the door opened.

A small woman in her late eighties stood before him.

She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat
With a veil pinned to it.

By her side was a suitcase.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years.

All the furniture was covered with sheets
There were no clocks on the walls
No knickknacks or utensils on the counters.

In a corner a cardboard box was filled with photos.

"Would you carry my bag to the car?"
She asked.

He took her suitcase to the cab
And returned to help the woman.

She took his arm and they walked slowly toward the curb.

She kept thanking him for his kindness.

When they got into the cab
She gave him the address and then asked,
“Could you drive through town first?”

“It’s not the shortest way,” he answered.

“Oh, I don’t mind,” she said
“I’m in no hurry.
I’m on my way to the nursing home.”

“I don’t have any family left,” she continued
“And the doctor says I don’t have long.”

The Stranger reached over and shut off the meter.

For the next couple of hours
He drove her through the streets
Of the town she lived in.

By the house where she and her husband lived.

By the place where she worked
The places she shopped
The church she attended.

They drove through the cemetery
Where her husband was buried.

As the sun climbed higher in the sky
She turned and said, "I'm tired, let's go."

They drove in silence to the address she had given him.

Two attendants came out to the cab as they pulled up.

They were courteous but distant.
They had been waiting for hours.

The Stranger opened the trunk
And took the small suitcase to the door.

The woman already seated in a wheelchair asked
"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," the Stranger said.
"But you have to make a living?" she answered.

"There're other passengers," he responded.

And then, the Stranger leaned over
And kissed the old woman.

She held on tightly for a moment.

"You gave an old woman a moment of joy,"
She said, "Thank you."

Frederick Buechner says it this way:

JESUS IS APT TO COME, into the very midst of life at its most real and inescapable. Not in a blaze of unearthly light, not in the midst of a sermon, not in the throes of some kind of religious daydream, but . . . at supper time, or walking along a road.

[Jesus] never approached from on high, but always in the midst, in the midst of people, in the midst of real life and the questions that real life asks.

~~

Two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

One was named Cleopas

The other is not named.

Which could mean the other was his wife.

They were filled with grief and anguish.

A Stranger came to them.

Walked with them

Talked with them

Later they recognized the Stranger as Jesus

And their hearts burned within them.

And their hope grew once again!

~~

There are moments in each of our lives

When Jesus comes as a Stranger.

And we have this brief encounter
That leaves us burning
With the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Moments that seem spontaneous and serendipitous.

But events that end up shaping and forming who we are.

This is the way of Jesus.

My prayer is that as you travel your own road to Emmaus,
You recognize the Stranger walking in your midst

For you never know when the Risen Lord will show up!