

“*IS Seeing Believing?*”

Haven't you ever walked around in a daze? Your mind is somewhere else? You don't even notice the person in front of you? Or you see someone you work with at a Movie Theater or the Grocery Store or someplace *else* other than work, and it just doesn't register who they are?

The people on the Road to Emmaus from today's Gospel lesson were no different than we are. He saw these people who probably looked depressed and he asked them: “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They can't believe what they are hearing. They ask, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there these days?” Of course Jesus knows, but he still asks, What things?”

They reply: "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."

Here is Jesus standing right next to them but they didn't see him because they didn't expect to see him! It was getting late and it was dark so out of politeness no doubt they invited him to stay with them for dinner. Then, kinda like us with that coworker who *finally* says something that helps us place them: Jesus took bread, blessed it, and gave it to them.

THAT'S IT! On the night in which he was betrayed he took bread, blessed it, and gave it to them. It's Jesus! He is Alive! They recognized him! And then he vanished from their sight.

But now they were changed. They were no longer the people who's hopes were shattered and their faith dead. They have been resurrected. They now had New Life after seeing Jesus. Resurrection! New Life! That's what Jesus is about! But like these disciples, we don't always recognize a resurrection when we see one.

There once was a preacher in a parish mission who was studying a Resurrection scripture with a large group. Someone from the back of the room called out harshly, 'Have *you* ever brought someone back from the dead?' He had been saying that life happens when we are

interrupted, and that some of the most powerful acts of resurrection happen to the least likely people; that we are the people of resurrection and hope, called to live passionately and compassionately with others, to defy death, to forgive, and to bring others back into the community, to do something that is life-giving, that fights death and needless suffering. And then this challenge from the back of the church. "His response was 'Yes.' 'Every time I bring hope into a situation, every time I bring joy that shatters despair, every time I forgive others and give them back dignity and the possibility of a future with me and others in the community, every time I listen to others and affirm them and their life, every time I speak the truth in public, every time I confront injustice, yes, I bring people back from the dead.' "

We have the ability to bring people back from the dead. Maybe not physical death, but many other kinds of death. The death of a relationship can be Resurrected through Forgiveness. There are three kinds of forgiveness, all interrelated. There is self-forgiveness, which enables us to release our guilt and perfectionism. There is the forgiveness we extend to others and receive from them, friends and enemies alike. And there is the forgiveness of God that assures us of our worth and strengthens us. But we can easily kill a Relationship if we refuse to give or get Forgiveness.

I had a conversation before Christmas with a person who had an argument with her next door neighbor. To her own admission, it was over something stupid, but this person said they didn't care if they ever spoke with their neighbor again. Well, when I saw her a couple of weeks later, I could tell she was upset by the death of this friendship. I pointed out that Christmas was a time of "Peace and Goodwill to all," and maybe they should at least send her neighbor a Christmas Card. Open the door of communication and forgiveness. She said she would think about it.

Well I saw her about a month later, and in our conversation she was telling me about the different things she and her neighbor had done and talked about. I simply said, "You sent the Christmas Card?" No answer came, just a sheepish smile. Forgiveness was given. Forgiveness was received. A dead friendship was Resurrected!

There are so many ways we can provide Resurrections to places of Death. The Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood's sermon at the Saint Paul Community Baptist Church said: "The reason we're here this morning is not just because a resurrection happened, but because there's one goin' on. Every time I see a brother come to Christ, there's a resurrection goin' on. Every time I see a man put down his bottle, there's a resurrection goin' on. Every time I see a man go back to school, there's a resurrection goin' on. Every time I see a man hug his son, there's a resurrection goin' on. Brother Youngblood knew what a resurrection was about. Any time there is new life, whether it be through forgiveness, grace, love, hospitality, nurture, kindness, gratitude, compassion, generosity, caring . . . any time you are able to bring life back to something that was dead, you have brought about a Resurrection.

This afternoon we will be gathering to celebrate a resurrection. When this congregation voted to move forward with a building program, it was an act that said “We will not die!” We were getting more and more people in our congregation who were watching their activity in their church die. They could no longer attend activities, because they were unable to go up or down stairs. Our vote to become handicapped accessible has resurrected the church life of these people. Our Mission of Hospitality to the Community was beginning to die. Various groups and organizations would call the office asking if we have a place where they could meet. We often had to say, “No. There was no room at the Inn.” But with our completed Building program, we now have the Chapel, Conference Meeting Room, Music Room, Conference Library Room, four new areas for ministry to happen.

Our ministry of Hospitality has been Resurrected! Our new facilities will make it possible for some New Ministries to be born. If we did not move forward it is very likely we would have began a slow death, as many of us have seen in other congregations. Many of us have experienced the death of our home congregations. My home Congregation of Peace Lutheran Church in Kensington closed. Bethel Lutheran Church at 5th & Sedgely was where I had my first Church Organist position. It closed about 9 years ago. Many of you here came from Congrega-tions that have died or have a terminal illness. St. Peter’s has given us a Resurrected Worship life! Today’s Gospel lesson is a story of Resurrection! The Resurrection of Jesus Christ! The Resurrection of hope of the Disciples on the road to Emmaus. And today, as with every time we gather around the Lord’s Table, there is a Resurrection to new Life as we receive forgiveness for our sins.

IS Seeing Believing? Here was Jesus standing right next to the disciples but they didn’t see him because they didn’t expect to see him. Do we expect Jesus to be present in our lives? Do we see Jesus? We do when we expect to. Especially in the breaking of the bread. Amen