

SHARING, CARING...
Sermon for Easter 3A—Lk 24:13-35
LPC, 5/4/14

What are the sensory clues that you use to recognize someone? I was at a gathering a week ago and ran into someone whom I knew in a different context. She didn't recognize me with my hair down around my shoulders. It seems my discreet French knowt was a primary visual clue for her in recognizing me.

Probably we instinctively glom onto a person's most distinguishing characteristic, or whatever was the first thing we noticed about a person. This often can't be contained in the basics of height, weight, hair and eye color. If the person's laugh is what's memorable, we may not recognize that person with his or her mouth closed. If we meet a person who is sitting, we may not recognize that person immediately if what we associate with that person is an individual way of walking.

Often the distinguishing characteristics may be hard to describe, but when you see them you get a real jolt of recognition. For example, several years ago I noticed that my elder son has a way of setting his mouth in a line and nodding once that instantly reminds me of my late father.

One of the interesting things about Jesus is that people who run into him after his resurrection tend not to recognize him at first. Remember that according to the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene at Jesus' tomb thought Jesus was the groundskeeper at first. The two people in today's story from Luke just see Jesus as a fellow traveler. Later on, in the last chapter of John, Jesus's disciples, the people who know him best, will fail to recognize him when they are fishing and Jesus beckons to them from the shore.

There are two possible reasons for this widespread failure to recognize Jesus. First, Jesus' friends have seen Jesus' dead body and are therefore so convinced that the person in front of them can't be Jesus that they don't even admit the possibility to themselves, despite the evidence of their eyes and ears.

Another possibility is that Jesus' experience of death and resurrection has changed him somehow. He still has a physical body, which he makes clear by eating with his disciples. In other words he is clearly not an apparition or ghost. And he still bears the marks of his distinguishing wounds, so he can't be anybody but Jesus. But still, it takes a while for the light to dawn.

The implication of the disciples' failure to recognize Jesus is that we modern Christians don't see Jesus in the world around us either because we too assume we're not going to see Jesus in the world around us. We're so convinced of this we don't even entertain the possibility that Jesus could be in our midst. Here we have biblical testimony that Jesus is present in the world in solid form and people don't recognize him even when he's right in front of them.

The Old Testament tells us that sometimes people entertain angels unawares. The New Testament suggests that we sometimes entertain Jesus himself (and that means God

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himself) unawares. That is if we ever get to the point of actually entertaining, instead of ignoring.

There are orders of monks and nuns who self-consciously treat every guest with the deference they owe Jesus, because they never know who's coming through the door. Because they cultivate the certainty that Jesus is present in solid form in the world, the possibility always exists for them that Jesus himself may visit. This is surely one way to put into practice Jesus's Maundy Thursday Commandment to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Treating everyone like Jesus is definitely one way to be sure that we don't miss Jesus should we run into him. Treating everyone like Jesus is, however, not the way our world works. It's something that most of us will have to work toward. We can do that by cultivating awareness of Jesus' presence in the world around us. How can we do that?

Even if we accept that Jesus is on the move in the world today, we know that he's easy to miss. He obviously doesn't go around wearing one of those stickers that says, "Hello! My name is Jesus Christ!" How then do we recognize him?

The men in today's story recognize Jesus in a shared journey, a shared conversation and a shared meal. In other words, sharing with him is the foundation of their recognition. And what is true for them is also true for us. Some kind of sharing seems to be what makes it possible to see Jesus in the world around us.

Christianity is not a religion where understanding, or righteousness, or enlightenment or salvation itself is possible in private contemplation or individual acts of virtue. In Christianity, salvation takes place in the act of sharing. In order to see Jesus, we have to share something with somebody.

Today's a start. Today we will share a common meal at this altar rail. One of the things that the most recent Prayer Book makes clear is that taking communion is not an act of individual devotion. Communion by definition is an act of sharing. Christ shares himself with us in the body and bread, and we share him with each other, and we share ourselves with each other. This is the foundational ritual of our faith, and it's foundational for a reason. We see Christ in the act of sharing.

From this ritual we can move on to more spontaneous acts of sharing when we leave this place this morning. Having here learned that sharing makes it possible to see God, we take and make more opportunities to share as we go through our daily life and work. And in so doing we see Christ more and more in the world around us.

It's not just a matter of our perception either. As we share more and more, Christ really does +become more and more present in the world around us.

Today, when you leave here, make a point of sharing something with someone. And the day after that, and the day after that...