

BEING FOUND
Sermon for Easter 3A-Lk 24:13-35
LPC, 4/30/17

In the novel *Father Melancholy's Daughter* by Gail Godwin, an evangelical Christian asks a Virginia Episcopalian lady if she's found Jesus. That dignified dowager dryly replies, "I didn't know he was lost."

"Finding Jesus" has become synonymous with having a dramatic conversion experience resulting in amendment of life. Reportedly so many convicts claim to have found Jesus in prison that parole boards have become quite cynical about such testimony.

I have no quarrel with people who use the phrase "finding Jesus," but I may have some comforting words for those who don't quite identify with that phrase, and who feel vaguely inadequate when they hear it. These are people like myself, who call themselves followers of Jesus but aren't sure they can say that they've met Jesus in the sense of having "found" him.

My comforting words are inspired by scripture lessons like the one we heard today of people encountering Jesus after he was known to have died on the cross and buried in the tomb.

Today's story is about Cleopas and his unnamed companion, who are identified as "disciples" but were obviously not part of Jesus' inner circle of twelve. They are travelling by foot to Emmaus, on the Sunday after the crucifixion (in other words, on the day we have come to call Easter.) They have heard about the empty tomb, and have heard the testimony of the women who claim to have seen angels there who said that Jesus was risen. However, like the other disciples they have considered this testimony "an idle tale."

The women's words have not dispelled the grief the two travelers feel at Jesus' death, nor their deep disappointment that Jesus has not redeemed Israel the way they had hoped. But they still seem unable to entirely dismiss the women's story.

Walking along, they fall in with a fellow traveler, as foot travelers will in dangerous times, for safety and conversation, and the stranger asks the nature of their obvious preoccupation. So they tell him.

They must have been startled at his reaction. The stranger challenges their underlying assumptions, telling them the tragedy they are regretting so profoundly was in fact a "necessary" part of the Messiah's progress to glory, as foretold by Moses and the prophets.

Put yourself in the disciples' place. Call to mind some deep sadness, some deep abiding regret in your life: perhaps something you have resigned yourself to but still wish had never happened. Now imagine someone telling you that that thing was necessary in order for your dearest hope to be realized.

Now I do not mean to suggest that your personal deepest regret was necessary in order for your personal dearest hope to be realized. That may not be true in your case. Then again it might. In any event my point here is simply to identify with the disciples in this story. They must have been really challenged and confused.

Incidentally, when you are reading your Bible (and I certainly hope you do!) and find stories about people being challenged and confused, you might want to highlight them for future reference: for when you are being challenged and confused. Just a serving suggestion!

In any event, the Emmaus travelers arrive at their destination and press their companion to dine and stay with them. So he does. And as he breaks the bread at their table, after having said the blessing, they recognize that it is Jesus and has been Jesus all along.

Here is the most important part of this story: the disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread. For us Christians today this is still true. We know the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread... in Communion... in the Eucharist. There are perhaps other ways of knowing Jesus, but we know this at least – Christ is known in the Eucharist.

This is an awfully good reason to come to church, rather than assuming that it's enough to be spiritual on your own time. The Lord Jesus is known, in some very real way, when we come together, as the Body of Christ, to make Eucharist. We know this much is true.

In other words, we don't have to *find* Jesus. Jesus is not hidden away somewhere. Jesus, in the words of that Virginia lady, is not lost. Jesus is not the one who wanders off on his own and needs to be sought and found. Guess who is?

We don't have to find Jesus. Jesus finds us, the way he found Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus. And what did Cleopas and friend then do? They ran back to the community of disciples to share knowledge of Jesus. We too share knowledge of Jesus in community.

In community, in communion, is Jesus known. Known, though never completely comprehended. Jesus, the Son of God, cannot be contained by the knowledge of the human brain. Jesus is known the way we know other people we love: we are well acquainted, we recognize each other, we can understand each other, at least most of the time, but we cannot know another comprehensively. Our loved ones can still surprise us. Thus may we know Jesus.

But we don't *find* Jesus. Jesus finds us. And Jesus is always looking for us in the breaking of the bread. What a wonderful way to think of communion: as Jesus drawing us close and saying, "There you are. I've missed you."

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and so do we. In that spirit, I'd like to close this sermon by teaching you a new fraction anthem. You know what the fraction is in the Eucharist service? It's when the priest breaks the bread. To fract something means to break it. The fraction anthem we've been using is "Alleluia! Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia."

To remember today's lesson, I want to teach you a new fraction anthem, which we will begin using next week. Here's how it works. I sing the refrain alone, and then you sing it back to me. Then I sing a verse, and we all sing the refrain again. The words are "The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread." Let's give it a try.