

Hidden in Plain Sight

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Last week we had the appearance of Jesus Christ to the disciples who were behind locked doors for fear of their lives. We recounted the comments of Thomas and Jesus's response to him. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe". Today we have yet another appearance of Jesus to these same disciples. It's described in the 24th chapter of Luke. This chapter in Luke has two appearances - one on the road to Emmaus and the other, our Gospel for today, where Jesus appears at a fish fry. In both accounts Jesus appears to be hidden in plain sight.

A Story:

In the late 1980s, when the Cold War still prevailed, the main gate between East and West Berlin was called Checkpoint Charlie. Travelers had to show papers when they passed through, and their vehicles were subject to a search whichever direction they were traveling. One particular vehicle passed through the gate with regularity, and the same scene was repeated almost every day. It was a pickup truck, driven by a West Berliner, carrying a load, covered by a tarp, and the tarp secured and held down with a bicycle. Every day, that truck was stopped and searched. One day it was bricks, and every brick was unloaded; first the bike, then the tarp, then all the bricks, looking for contraband. The next day, it was a truckload of sand that was unloaded in the search; first the bicycle, then the tarp, then all the sand, and nothing was found. Another day it might have been lawn clippings, or garbage bags, or aluminum cans. Same process every day. First the bike, then the tarp, then a search through the materials. Yet no illegal contraband was ever found.

In 1989, after the Berlin Wall came down, one of the Checkpoint Charlie guards was having a beer in a tavern and he sees the truck driver come in the pub. He sits down with him at his table. He says "Comrade, we knew you were smuggling something into East Berlin but we never could find it. Now that the wall is down, the truth can be told. What were you smuggling, Comrade?" The man looked at the East Berliner, smiled and said, "Bicycles. I was smuggling bicycles." It's funny, isn't it, how something can be hidden in such plain sight?

In Luke 24 we have these two appearances. First the road to Emmaus. The disciples are walking on a road, they are grieving and saddened by the events of the crucifixion. They are a broken, desperate group of disciples. A stranger appears and they hardly notice him. He asks them what's new! They wonder if he has been on a vacation not to know what has happened in Jerusalem this past weekend. And so the disciples recount the whole story of Good Friday. The disciples didn't know that the stranger was Jesus. He was standing in plain sight but they couldn't see him or recognize him. Finally Jesus explained why he had to die, had some dinner with them, and yet they failed to wonder, "maybe it's Jesus?" Only when they broke the bread did they get it.

The same thing happens in our Gospel today. Jesus again appears with the disciples, they fail to see him, hidden in plain sight. Only when he explains why he had to die and rise again do they see him. Then they have a fish fry and maybe they were thinking "maybe it's Jesus." Probably got our Wisconsin Fish Fry nights from this Gospel lesson.

But the two accounts beg the question, doesn't it? Can we see Jesus on our roads of life? Is he there, sometimes hidden in plain sight?

Because truth be told, we are all on the road somewhere. On the road to Appleton, or the road to graduation, or the road to a hospital, a doctor's appointment, or on the road to a wedding, or a road to hospice. We are all on the road to somewhere. Can we see Jesus?

I shared this story during our Wednesdays in Lent. If you were present you will hear it again. Puts in focus the issue of seeing Jesus.

It was years ago. I was in the Big Apple visiting my son, a lawyer at a big firm in NY. Found myself on the subway. Very crowded, all packed in like sardines in a can. I'm holding on to the middle pole and next to me is a very pregnant woman. She looked exhausted and looked like she could deliver the baby any moment. All the seats were taken by Wall Street kind of people, all looking at their reading devices, a way to avoid looking at the people who were standing. Giving up a seat for someone else is almost unheard of in the Big Apple. Fights have broken out when people scramble for the coveted seats. In one of the coveted seats was a teenager. He was dressed all in black, had a strange color hair and he had about

30 types of rings covering his face and arms. Might have had more on his body but he had multiple layers of clothes. In short, he looked scary and ominous.

All of a sudden, this kid looks up at the pregnant woman standing next to me and says " ma'am, here take my seat." Relief covered the face of the woman and she sat down where she could rest. The kid now stood next to me and I said "nice job." He just smiled through his earrings and rings. I thought to myself, maybe that was Jesus in the kids heart.

Can we see Jesus?

When we are overwhelmed by some circumstance of life, and we say a prayer, and when we feel a sense of peace - maybe it's Jesus.

When we face some disaster, disease, or a fractured relationship, or tough times at home or work, or some fear, and then we see a path forward – maybe it's Jesus.

When a loved one dies, and we can't make any sense of it, and we see no reason to wake up tomorrow yet we find the courage - maybe it's Jesus.

When your life is filled with depression and you cry out to God, and all of a sudden someone from Our Savior's shows up with Communion, a meal, a prayer shawl, or a smile - maybe it's Jesus.

You see, Jesus is present - sometimes hidden in plain sight, but always there. Yes we are on a road somewhere but Jesus journeys with us. He gives us hope when we think there is none. Just like he did with the disciples.

What were you smuggling? Bicycles?

Is Jesus with us? Sometimes hidden in plain sight? You betcha!

Amen- Let it be so.