

Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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.”

²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

“Recognizing Jesus”

There was a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Less and less people visited, and fewer monks joined. The day came when only five monks called the monastery home. The abbot and four others, all of them were over seventy years old. The building had aged, and the monks had aged, too. Clearly, it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery, there was a little hut that a Jewish rabbi occasionally used for a hermitage. The old monks could sense when the rabbi was there. "The rabbi is in the woods, the rabbi is in the woods" they would whisper. One day when the rabbi was in his hut, the abbot had an idea. Maybe a visit to the wise rabbi would help him save his monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot into his hut. They read parts of the Torah together and shared great mystical insight. When the abbot had to leave, they embraced each other. "It has been wonderful that we should meet after all these years," the abbot said, "but I have failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there something that I can do to save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded. "I have no advice. But, let me tell you a secret: one of you is the Messiah."

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "What did the rabbi say?" "The rabbi said something very mysterious. He said that the Messiah is one of us." The monks were startled by this revelation.

'What could it mean?' they thought. 'Is dirty and sloppy Brother John the Messiah?' 'Is moody Brother Matthew or grumpy Brother Thomas the Messiah?' 'What could this mean?' They were deeply puzzled by the rabbi's teaching. However, as they contemplated on its meaning, the old monks

began to treat each other with extraordinary respect, on the chance that one of them might be the Messiah.

People occasionally came to visit the monastery in its beautiful forest to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, and even to meditate in the dilapidated chapel. As they did, they could sense an aura of extraordinary respect and love, that began to surround the five old monks. It also seemed to radiate out from them, and permeate the atmosphere of the place. Love and Respect. There was something strangely compelling about it. Hardly knowing why, many ordinary people began to come back to the monastery to picnic, to play, and to pray. Year after year, they brought their friends to this special place. And their friends brought their friends.¹

All of their lives were transformed by the sacred aura of love and respect. Then some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while, one asked if he could join them. Then another, and another. Within a few years, the monastery had once again become a thriving place and, thanks to the wise rabbi, a vibrant center of light and spirituality.

I love this short story, because it helps us be aware of that “divine spark” that is in all of our souls. It’s also very timely, because I think we will be more appreciative and loving toward each other after the Coronavirus stops killing us. If nothing else, even if we have to keep social distancing for a while, we will miss each other so much that we will appreciate every single moment that we will spend together.

Recognizing the “Messiah” in each other, or in Christian words recognizing that we are all God’s beloved children, helps us be more compassionate and caring. These times, we painfully need more patience and love toward our leaders, health workers, and everyone who is trying to work for the common good. All these essential workers, our first responders, the trash removers, the restaurant workers, and guardians of the supermarket, all these workers need God’s protection.

Knowingly or unknowingly, right now these souls are Christ’s hands and feet in this world. The scientist and doctors working on vaccines and cures for

1 Shortened from the story by Dr. M. Scott Peck: [The Different Drum](http://www.community4me.com/rabbi_gift_short.html) Version;
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this pandemic are God's anonymous agents working for all of us. Even if they are atheists, their hard work and love of others comes from source of all love, from God. Recognizing the beloved child of God in everyone helps us become better neighbors to all.

However, recognizing the Messiah is not always easy. Sometimes, there is a veil over our eyes. Like the disciples in our story, we can't see Jesus, because we don't believe he is there.

Still Easter day, not knowing for sure what happened, the two disciples are walking toward Emmaus disappointed. Even though Jesus is walking with them, they cannot recognize him. They also treat Jesus a bit harshly. They seem to be so immersed in their conversation that they snap at Jesus when he asks a question. They almost say to him, "Everyone knows what happened three days ago. Are you the only one who doesn't know?"

Jesus, remains polite and kind with them. He asks, "What things? What happened?"

The disciples tell him the sad story about their teacher who was executed on the cross. They mention that some women - whose words they didn't trust too much - saw angels who said that Jesus was alive. While they are walking and talking, Jesus is patiently listening to them. Then, like the wise rabbi in the monk story, Jesus goes over the Torah and the prophets, basically the whole Old Testament, teaching them about the Messiah. They get a good sermon, but they still do not recognize who he is.

In the evening, the two disciples invite Jesus to stay overnight. When Jesus blesses and breaks the bread, their spiritual eyes finally open. Finally, they see Jesus in his glory and know that the resurrection is true. But then Jesus' job is done. He disappears from their sight.

Just like the disciples in Luke, we are not always kind and respectful with others. It's especially hard to be nice and patient with the people who are closest to us, our spouses, our children, our parents, or anyone you are locked up with during this awful epidemic. We get on each other's nerves, no matter how pretty and cute we are, no matter how much we love and care about each other. We have cabin fever from being locked up. And so we must be patient with our loved ones.

Our poor two-year-old daughter, Sophia, tells us every morning that the playgrounds are closed. Then in a separate sentence she mentions that the

swings are closed, too. We have a separate play area with some swings near the Rolling Hills Apartments, but, unfortunately for Sophia, and many other little children, you are not allowed to use them.

Why am I telling you all this? Because we are getting on each others nerves. No matter how cute Sophie is, I want you to imagine a healthy, energetic two-year-old locked up in a small space (usually on our first floor) not being able to go outside and do things.

You can only color, play the piano, and teach her numbers and the ABC's for so long. After a while she starts running from one end of the apartment to the other, trying to convince us that she is running from "scary pirates." Other times, it's "Jungle Pete" or "elephants" or other creatures... but the end results are usually the same: you have a screaming, running two-year-old, trying your patience.

Recognizing the Messiah in each other is not always easy. However, every single one of us carries a divine spark that makes us precious and beloved. God has created us carefully and with lots of love. We became a reality, because God wanted us to be here. We were chosen to be here and to express God's love toward all people. God has given us a spark, a little light to shine in the world.

What we often forget however, is that all of God's children have a divine spark. "This little light of mine" is also in my neighbor. I need to respect and recognize the Spark of Divinity in all souls that cross my path. I need to recognize Jesus in everyone.

Many times in our lives, we get impatient with each other, we snap at each other. It's hard work to love with our whole being, to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk. It's easy to talk about love, but we often fail at expressing it.

But don't be too hard on yourself. We are all imperfect people; even your minister. You can ask my husband. Tancrede will tell you. I can get impatient and grumpy, too. I can snap at people, too.

But our Gospel reading from Luke has a comforting message that can warm our hearts: no matter what we are going through, no matter how grumpy we are, God is with us. Jesus is walking by our side on this long pilgrimage

we call life. Jesus is walking by our side, even when we are locked up in our homes and drive each other crazy. Jesus is walking with us when the news gives us an anxiety attack. Even when we fall, even when we sin, God remains with us.

Sometimes, we like to play "hide and seek" with God. We try to hide, like Adam and Eve, especially when we do something bad. Sometimes, we pretend that we are too busy for God. But think about this: Christ can also play "hide and seek" with us, and sometimes through us.

It's not always easy to see Christ in a stranger's eyes. It's not easy to recognize Jesus in a slow driver in front of our car. It's not always easy to see God's light in our delivery driver or doctor. When Christ plays "hide and seek" with us, we don't know who Christ might be. The Messiah may be any one of us at Shiloh UCC. 😊

Therefore, if we cannot recognize Jesus, we must treat everyone with love and respect. If we do not know who the Messiah might be, we must be kind and compassionate with everyone. We need to work on ourselves. We need to change and grow spiritually, so that when Christ appears in disguise, we treat him with love and respect. Would you want to snap at Jesus? No. Would you want to be unkind to Jesus? No.

So, let me give you some homework for this upcoming week. As you live your life locked up or otherwise, imagine that the person you are talking to is Jesus. When someone drives in front of you too slowly, imagine, that Christ is sitting behind the wheel. When you have to wait in line at the grocery store, gas station, or post office, remember, Christ is waiting in the line with you. If someone gets on your nerves at home, because you are locked up together 24/7, try to be patient and kind with them, for they may be Jesus in disguise.

This upcoming week examine yourself. Try to grow spiritually and ask God to help you in this task. This upcoming week, as you encounter people that are good, bad, kind or annoying, try to see the Divine Spark of God in their eyes. As you see people who are family members or even strangers, be open to the possibility of recognizing Jesus. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Playful and mysterious God, we admire and love you. We want to recognize you in your creation. We especially want to see the face of Christ in each other.

Help us to treat everyone with respect and kindness, especially those who spend the most time with us these days. Help us to be patient and polite to all people, even those that are closest to us. Help us to recognize you in each soul that crosses our path.

Loving Messiah, Holy Christ, visit us in our homes. Change our hearts and minds that we may be your faithful disciples. Heal our bodies, minds, and spirits, that we may be healthy enough to serve you faithfully.

We pray for ourselves, but we pray also for our friends in Christ. We pray for our beloved in hospitals, nursing homes, and those pilgrims making their spiritual journey while physically confined to their own homes. Today we lift up all those people who are social distancing and staying home alone. We pray for single people and those who feel lonely and separated from their friends. We pray for all people that are suffering in the world.

During the Coronavirus, we pray for everyone who is selflessly sacrificing for others on the front lines. Be with our healthcare workers, the police, the fire fighters, our soldiers, and all people who are serving the common good.

We also pray for our congregation, Shiloh UCC. Keep us healthy. Keep us spiritually open, generous, and loving. May everyone who gets in contact with us see how much we love and respect each other. We pray all this in the name of our Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn #524 "This Little Light of Mine"

Benediction: And now may the Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

Thank you for watching! Happy Sunday everyone!