

## “Surprised By God”

April 6, 2008

Luke 24:13-35

So do you feel God is close? I mean personally, if Christ has been raised, he could be anywhere and everywhere. Perhaps you have experienced God at work in your life, felt his presence? To many they just can't see it though some may feel it.

I read a sort story a few years ago called “God lives under my bed.” It was about a boy who was mentally handicapped. His older siblings looked out for him and helped him through life. Though almost a young adult the boy had the simple mind of a child. One night his older brother was walking by his room and heard him talking. He stopped and listened by the crack in his door. The Boy said, “God I know you are under my bed and I want you to come out and talk to me. I want to thank you for my day and for my trains. I want to thank you for my family, be with my brother because he can not see you. Talk to my sister because she does not know who you are. But I know you and am glad you live right under my bed.” As the older brother walked away he smiled to himself, perhaps he was the one who was handicapped, because his brother know just how close God was.

God is near us all the time. The modern day ramifications of the Easter story, is that the tomb was empty and Christ was raised. Christ is alive and showing up in all kinds of places. Now I am not talking about the images of Christ on the piece of toast in New Mexico or the corn flake shaped like Jesus in California, but sometimes God is as present as a companion on a walk, right by our side. In this gospel text from Luke we hear of Christ's surprising appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and how they did not even realize it until it was almost over. Have you ever felt God showing up unexpectedly, on the road, in your home, or in the breaking of the bread? Have you see him?

I think for many people it is much easier to see God at work in their lives when they are looking back than when he is right there. Think of times in your life when you were in need or going through a difficult time. Was God there for you? What about the joyous times in your life, was God there as well? Why is it that it seems so clear now, but back then we were blind to it?

The disciples could not tell and Christ was physically walking right beside them, taking with them. How is it they were so dense and could not see it was their Lord? I think one of the problems was that they were caught up in the drama of the moment, in the gossip and scandal of the day and in the telling the story to this stranger. “Don't you know what's happened in Jerusalem?” They were so focused on the crisis they did not see Christ. God was present and their eyes were not open to it. They had been told that Christ was alive but they still did not believe it. They had all of the answers, all of the information they need from scripture foretelling this would happen, but they did not understand. They were blind to Christ's presence because without the understanding of

faith, one cannot “see.” It was not until later when Jesus had explained everything that they were able to finally see, finally believe.

Do you know why we use so many scripture texts in worship, why we go over the same texts again and again and again, year after year? We need to immerse ourselves in the scriptures so that we in fact can develop an understanding faith. Just as Christ used the scriptures to show the disciples, we need to know what to look for and how God works. This is what the whole story of God was pointing to. Jesus was the one for whom all of the prophets and leaders were waiting for. Once they were reminded of this and the faith in which they clinged, to the disciples were ready to “see.”

So it was then, that in the breaking of the bread, they had their “Aha” moment. It was then that they saw the fulfillment of all of their hopes and dreams, the grace of God given “for them.” In the breaking of the bread they were able to see Jesus right beside them. In the breaking of the bread, that is where Christ will forever be present. For it is here, at the Lord’s Table, that we come as humble beggars. It is here where we are invited by Christ, as children of God, that we belong. It is here that we are invited to take and eat, to take and drink, and to receive what we could never achieve on our own, the forgiveness of our sins and unconditional love of God. When we come to this table, we come with open arms, seeking, pleading, asking, and hoping for a connection with our creator. We come seeking a relationship with the almighty, to once again be in communion with God. When we come here we are open to receiving this gift of God, and it is then that our eyes are open and we can see the true love of God in Christ. Here our hearts are opened in gracious appreciation for being relieved from the burdens of our lives. It is in the breaking of the bread that all of our hope lies and we can see that hope fulfilled by Christ. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we eat this bread and drink this wine because Christ said this is how I want to be present for you so you will know I am here. I am present in this meal and I will be with you always to the end of the age.

When we stop focusing on the crisis’s before us, on the crucifixion, we can begin to see Christ alive. Through our faith we can begin to see God at work in us, bringing us life. Through our faith we can see God at work in the hands of others. Through our faith we can hear God calling us to serve others, giving us a purpose well beyond our selves. It’s through faith that we begin to understand and can grasp those “Aha” moments. The disciples finally realized through their faith that in the breaking of the bread, yes it is true, yes, Christ did die and rise again. Just like Jesus said it was going to happen.

Did you ever have an “Aha” moment? A time when your eyes were opened to the ways God was acting in your life or reaching out to you. Back when I was in college at St. Olaf I was not a regular at daily chapel. I tried not to have a class before 10am so I often slept through chapel as well. One day I happened to have an early

appointment and then had extra time to kill before my first class so I moseyed on over to the chapel and sat down. The speaker that day was a visiting pastor named Paul Preus who in his remarks challenged us all to ask how God might be calling us to use our gifts to serve the church. Now I was an undeclared major at the time, leaning toward speech communications but I also like my religion classes. You would think to become a pastor was all laid out for me, especially being a PK, but I had never seen myself that way. Not until that day did I go, “Aha,” perhaps that is why God gave me these gifts. I was not able to see it before, not until that day when my heart was open to it and I was ready to receive God’s hint.

There is this great book out called, “Surprise Me God,” by Terry Esau. Terry takes this idea to heart, and then one step further, boldly asking God to show himself in his daily life. His point in the book is that we each need to open our eyes to God working in the spectacular and the mundane events of our lives. The reality is that there are many opportunities through the good and bad surprises in our lives to draw us closer in our relationship with God. The writer claimed “if I’m a dull-eyed dimwit I won’t see them.” Sometimes that is the simple surprise itself. That we should not let life become a forgettable blur but look for what God is doing. One day it might simply be seeing God at work in your child as they run and wrap their arms around you, another it might in a miraculous encounter with a stranger. The first day the writer prayed this prayer he saw God showing him how his church could work better while watching his kids soccer team play. The next day he was out riding his bike and fell-in riding with another guy. Normally he rides alone but decided for some reason that day to ride in tandem and in their conversation discovered this man had just lost a dear friend mountain climbing and was struggling with his own purpose in life. He needed a word of hope. God is there, at work, in the mundane stuff of life and in the heavy stuff life throws at us. There are “Aha” moments waiting for us everywhere and when we come with an open heart and mind we too can receive them. That is where God wants to surprise us with his presence and bless us with his grace.

I challenge you, for the next week, no for the next month, when you begin each day try praying “Surprise me, God.” Then keep your eyes and your heart open and see what happens. Listen to the intuition of your heart. What is God doing in your midst, in the mundane of your life? What is God doing through others that cross your path? What is God doing through you? Don’t get caught up in the chaos at hand or the whirlwind of life. Look deeper at those doing it, or at how people are responding to it. Do you see God, because he is right there?

God is walking right beside us each and every day, just waiting for us to take notice. And it’s through our faith, through our Easter faith, that we can actually begin to understand and see! He might even be right under your bed. Amen.