

How come they didn't recognize Jesus?
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This sermon was preceded by telling all of Luke 24 which contains the story of the women at the tomb, the road to Emmaus and finally Jesus' appearance to the disciples concluding with his ascending into heaven. For those at church Sunday this is an approximation of what was actually preached.

Again this week I've told all the resurrection story from one of the gospels. This time Luke. What is the benefit of telling the whole story in context? Well how many of you had realized that Jesus rose from the dead, talked to the two on the road to Emmaus, appeared to Simon Peter and then all the disciples in the same day? Not to mention concluding the day by ascending into heaven from Bethany. I sure never really caught that. Of course that sent me back to my bible because.....

We all know that Ascension Day is 40 days after the resurrection. According to the Book of Acts Jesus did many other signs before he ascends yet in Luke there it is all in one day! Amazingly enough Acts and Luke are written by the same person. So what are we to make of this? Well my guess is that what is described in Luke is exactly what the disciples experienced that day and the important point was for them to wait in the city until Pentecost when they are clothed with power from on high. That doesn't mean that there were not other appearances of Jesus in the intervening period. Given the large amount of doubt that seemed to exist in the 11 and the others in this passage it seems they were even slower than Thomas to believe. Did you all catch that?

Last week the gospel contained the story of Doubting Thomas or at least that is what we all seem to like to call it. However, look at the amount of doubt in this week's passage! The women are terrified of the angels and when they come back and tell the disciples they are dismissed as telling an idle tale. While some claim that is because the testimony of women was not admissible in court at that time, but I think there is more to it.

Then with Jesus standing in front of them after Cleopas and the other disciple come back the passage says, "While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering." Did you catch that? At least in John they were excited and believed right away, yet this group is really skeptical. So Jesus feels it necessary to prove to all of them what he did with Thomas. Yet that isn't quite the same either.

Did you notice that it says he showed them his hands and his feet. He says to them "touch me, does a ghost have flesh and blood like I have?" Unlike with Thomas he doesn't tell them to stick their fingers in his wounds. In fact it really doesn't say that the wounds were there now does it?

There is a recognition problem of Jesus in this entire passage. Just as in the Mary Magdalene at the tomb, where she doesn't recognize him, or as it says, "assuming him to be the gardener" There is a recognition problem that seems to be very important to Luke.

Cleopas and the other disciple, probably his wife, have heard the message from the women, yet they, like Thomas last week have not really wrapped their brains around the entire situation. So they are walking, talking, wondering what the heck happened and then Jesus walks up and joins them. Yet, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." So what is that all about?

Richard Rohr has an interesting speculation about this. What if it was a stranger on the road? What if in John it was the gardener that spoke to Mary? Part of Jesus' becoming fully human is that he becomes part of all humanity. This the idea that some of Jesus is in each and every one of us.

Jesus physically leaves, but there is the promise, which is fulfilled on Pentecost of an ongoing spiritual presence. The promise that we heard on Easter that, "I will be with you always even to the end."

There is also an emerging Eucharistic theology developing in this. How do the two disciples finally recognize Jesus? It is in the breaking of the bread. Well if we can believe that Jesus is in the bread and wine that we share at the communion rail, why is it so hard to believe that each of us has some Jesus in us.

Welcoming the stranger. Seeing the divine the Christ in every person we meet. This is how we recognize the Jesus the divine spark in each and every person we encounter. How many of us have been in a situation where all of sudden we realize in some way we have encountered Jesus in another person.

Part of what I will be doing very intentionally on the Camino is looking for Jesus in the many people I will encounter. I do not know what I will learn on this pilgrimage, but I'm willing to be open to the movement of the Spirit as I go. Seeking out the divine in my fellow pilgrims and in those who care for us at the alberques or hostels.

I spoke with the spiritual director I have used at Wernersville when I go for my retreats every year. He said, hold the reigns loosely and see where the Spirit leads. Take time to notice and look for the divine in all that you see and do. Now that is a wonderful suggestion for my Camino. However that is a wonderful way to walk through life as well. Looking for the signs of God everywhere in God's creation. As it says in Genesis God made the world and pronounced it was good, very good. God is in all things we just need to recognize God's hand, God's presence.