

Easter 3-B  
4/18/21 CTK

*Luke 24:36b-48*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Everybody was asked to share an example of a time when they had felt God's presence in their lives. We were all sitting around at our assigned tables in the fellowship hall at the workshop on congregational health. The facilitator had just asked an icebreaker question to get us started.

I was eager to hear how the participants at my table felt God's presence in powerful moments in worship; or in a profound discussion in bible study; or maybe even in an inspirational sermon. No such luck. Not one of them said that. Instead one by one they began to talk about each other. Not by name and not just the people at our table but about people in the church through whom they had felt the presence of the risen Christ.

Peg, a single mom, talked about how when her teenage son got in trouble with the police and she needed somebody go down to the station with her, and somebody from the church went with her.

Helen, talked about how when she had had a baby with Down Syndrome, the church rallied around her. Her daughter had grown up not just as her child but a child of the congregation too.

Edie, talked about how when her husband died suddenly in his fifties of a heart attack while sitting in his favorite chair across from her, she had felt healing and comfort through her friends from church.

And this was a regular congregation, one that had arguments about the budget and differences of opinion about music and worship. But clearly, for them, this was where they experienced the love of God. Not just in a religious or ritual way necessarily, although we certainly don't want to downplay the importance of those things. Word and sacrament. The times of the dark night of the soul when we reach out and pray to God and we feel the warmth and the relief of knowing that God is with us in a mystical way that goes beyond our understanding. I certainly wouldn't discount that. But that day all the people at that table talked about feeling God -I

would say the presence of the risen Christ - in other people; flesh and blood people, in this case, other members of their church.

That's what we mean when we talk about incarnation.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus shows up to the disciples on the day of his resurrection in "flesh and bone as he says. This is Luke's account of the same event we heard about last week in John's gospel. It's Easter evening. Two followers of Jesus have already seen the risen one in flesh and bone on the road to a village called Emmaus and spoken to him. It wasn't until they broke bread together that they actually realized that it was Jesus. In the simple human act of sharing a meal together, they recognized the risen one. And then he was gone.

They rushed back to tell the other disciples, who were gathered in a house in Jerusalem, and while they are all together Jesus appeared to them again. And he speaks to them and blesses them, and he is particularly at pains to show them all that he is not some specter, some ghost, but flesh and bones, a real human being. Shows them the bloody wounds in his hands and his side. Then, as if that wasn't enough, he asks for something to eat. He's apparently hungry after a long and busy day. The point is: Jesus, the risen Christ, wants them to know that he is a live person in the world.

This is the incarnation. The en-fleshment of God. God deep in the flesh, as Luther used to say. In the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth born in Bethlehem 2000 or so years ago, crucified, died and buried in Jerusalem. And also in our flesh, alive and well in Columbia SC; at Christ the King, as the body of the risen Christ. In the flesh of his adoptive brothers and sisters in whom the his Spirit. This is one of the ways, for some people clearly the main way, that they experience God's presence in their lives.

This idea comes to life when we do mission. Maybe we don't always do it perfectly, but when we reach out to others in our neighborhood or across the world with the good news of the resurrection, as Jesus commissions the church today; and with the love, and mercy and grace of God, it is not us doing this. It isn't even that we are bringing Christ to other people. It's God at work in us. But we understand that God is already at work in them too, the people whose lives touch ours. We are just getting on board, just joining in the fun. We are meeting Christ in that person and they are meeting Christ in us.

I've never been to India but I know that Hindus have this idea too. They have this greeting "Namaste" – people say it to one another and put their palms together and bow a little. It can simply mean hello on a very surface level. But on a deeper level the spiritual translation of Namaste "The divine in me bows to the divine in you." God in me bows to the God in you. An everyday reminder that I am made in the divine image and so are you and that the divine lives in us and in everyone we meet. The Christ in me bows to the Christ in you.

So in a feeding program in a downtown church, all the volunteers, the people who provide and serve the meals have to sit down and eat with the people that they served at some time during the meal. This to put flesh on the idea was that there is no "us" and "them." We are all here to meet the risen Christ together in the breaking of bread. It's not me bringing the love of Christ to you or vice versa.

This makes so much sense biblically. Jesus spent his time on this earth healing and feeding and blessing people and forgiving their sins. And he tells us, his followers, to do that too. But here's the kicker: Jesus also tells us that he lives in the one being healed and fed and blessed. He said whenever we give a drink or something to eat or clothes or care, to one of the least of his brother or sisters, you do to me (Matt. 25:40.) That person is being Jesus to us just like we are being Jesus to that person.

This is the incarnation.

How do we feel God's presence in our lives? Well, as my good old theology professor Scott Gustafson used to say, "Jesus is a grownup; he can go anywhere he wants." We know he is with us in Word and Sacrament, in our worship service. And, apparently he is out there too, in all of us and in all the people we meet. That's good news. That's why we say, "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed, Alleluia!"

*And now that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*