

The events of Luke 24, verses 13 to 35, would have taken place on that very first Easter. This all happened the same day that Mary discovered the tomb was empty. A couple of Christ's disciples are walking on the Road to Emmaus, a town about 7 miles west of Jerusalem.

It's possible that they went to Jerusalem for the Crucifixion and they stayed to observe the sabbath with other disciples. They're probably heading home, walking slowly as they deal with the sheer emotional weight of all that has gone on. They're still stunned by Jesus' arrest and Crucifixion. On top of that, earlier in the day, they learned that their teacher and friend's body is missing.

They're experiencing what many of us have felt recently: grief and trauma. As they walk, they're talking—still processing the events...still trying to get their heads around it and sort it out. They're probably not thinking very clearly.

It's in that place—that place where things aren't making sense...where their lives have been turned upside down...that's the place where Jesus meets them and shares their journey. He meets them in their grief and in their confusion. (*That's where Christ meets us, too.*)

In times of difficulty and despair, we have Christ as a companion. So right now, as we deal with the novel Coronavirus and the stay-at-home order, Christ is here. As you wonder when you can go back to work-and if the business will reopen, or when you'll get a haircut or when that stimulus check will arrive, Christ is with you. Christ is there when someone you love is sick, or you lose a pet, or someone says, "It's not you, it's me", Jesus is right beside you, listening, tuned in your feelings and providing hope.

The disciples don't recognize Jesus, but he knows them. And he provides a way to have them to open up about what's on their hearts. He asks questions and lets them share their burden before responding to their need. He didn't see their need and swoop in like a superhero to just solve it. First, he gave them a safe place to share their heartache. Turning that over to Christ is where the healing began and more healing likely took place when he shared his understanding of the Scripture.

In the last Resurrection appearances at the tomb, Mary didn't recognize Jesus immediately, and that's a common theme in these post-Resurrection appearances-this one included. You may be on a webinar and not recognize the speaker because his or her publicity photo looked different, but if these disciples were at the Crucifixion, then it's just been a few days since they last saw Jesus. So why didn't they know him for who he was?

It could be partially because all of their experiences told them that dead men don't become alive again. Their beliefs based on their experience was being challenged, just like ours is today given the pandemic. All of those things we took for granted, from eating out to playing with friends to going to the gym aren't the same in this moment. We are adapting, but we still have to

check our expectations against this new reality.

We know that it's getting late in the day. If they were walking toward a setting sun and he approached from an angle where they had the sun in their eyes, they wouldn't have seen him clearly. We also know that the disciples weren't making eye contact with the stranger. (Their eyes were downcast.) They were likely feeling 'down', but also, they were probably afraid. The Empire, the government, had just Crucified Jesus to squelch his Movement. They feel out the stranger with a question, 'Are you the only one who doesn't these things that have happened?'

And all he says is, "What things?" (Did you ever wonder why Jesus just doesn't tell them who he is?!) Obviously, he did know what happened (better than anyone), but he let them tell the story. He let them pour out what was in their hearts. He let them express their anger and frustration and sadness. He gave them an outlet so that it wasn't all bottled up inside of them.

But then, he calls them foolish. These are harsh words, and certainly not what I'd expect of Jesus, but they do get your attention. Then he speaks of ancient stories of Hebrew Bible, giving them an education, essentially sharing his own faith, and in doing so, reminding them of the broader context of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. His life and miraculous Resurrection are all part of a much larger story, one that spans centuries. That story continues here and now and in the future. This is only part of the journey.

The disciples and Jesus walk on and it's getting late. They invite this 'new' friend to join them for dinner and to spend the night. Still Jesus doesn't tell them who he is. They have to realize it on their own. And the way he's made known to them is through his actions!

When there are opportunities for people to unburden themselves, Jesus is there in the listening. When people share of whatever they have to offer, Jesus is present.

And though you and I might not see the historical Jesus standing in front of us, the church is called the body of Christ and his spirit lives in Christians and I would add that God's love lives in all people of faith.

When the disciples invited Jesus to stay with them, their eyes were opened. Sight in the bible is often about vision. Not just physically seeing, but seeing things in a new way—with a new perspective. Early in our passage, the disciples were focused on what they lost, but after Jesus joins them for the journey, they have a new point of view and new hope for the future.

The beauty of this story is that there is movement—not just physical as the disciples walk the Road to Emmaus, but metaphoric movement as they move from a place of deep sadness to a place of understanding and hope. That process happens because both Jesus and the disciples were willing to share of themselves.

In this strange new norm, I have seen Jesus. And I recognize Christ by the actions. Meeting people where they are in their sadness. Listening to them. Sharing a faith-filled broader

perspective. Actions and interactions that bring hope.

I have seen a someone in the high-risk category staying at home, but using her cooking skills to feed others. I know this person is able to do that because of the kindness and helpfulness of those that are shopping for her. This woman isn't called Jesus, but she is called a Christian.

I've seen people checking in with seniors—and not just family or friends, but acquaintances and in some cases, 'strangers' volunteering to call others on behalf of the Center of Active Living and other groups on in town. People are listening while others process the sense of disorientation that we're all feeling.

There's a sign in front of Village Elementary that says, "We Miss You". It reminds children and families that they have a relationship with teachers and staff and even as online school continues, that personal contact is missed. (At the core, people want to know that they matter.) My cousin Deb made me a mask and Seacoast Mask Makers are sewing masks for medical facilities in need. Youth are printing 3D mask extenders and restaurants are donating to front line workers. People are putting out the trash for their neighbors, others are shopping, some are freezing extra meals, and offering online free yoga classes and piano lessons.

I see Jesus when I see people sharing of themselves and sharing their faith. Here in New England, people will easily pitch in to volunteer—they'll gladly step up, but it's been a whole different story when I've asked people to speak up (that is to share their faith). We have a Biblical model right here about sharing our faith and putting our faith into action. It means speaking up and stepping up. In this 'new normal', it can't be 'just the pastors' job'—we're caring for the people in and beyond the congregation, trying to offer comfort and encouragement. We're also YouTubing, Facebooking, and Tweeting. Here's your holy homework: Please share our videos and posts. And share your faith with others.

How are you experiencing this pandemic? Where have you seen Jesus Christ? What needs are you seeing? What can you do about them? Never doubt that you can do something! Rev. Edward Everett Hale said, "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do." Let's take those words to heart. Blessed be and amen.