

April 19, 2020
Sacred Moments
Luke 24:13-35

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Where have you seen God today? This question is part of a spiritual practice that asks us to ponder where we have seen God in a given time period.

Whitney's Prayer and Share small group uses this practice every week when we meet--- "Where have we seen God in the past week?" We have been using this question as the main part of our gathering for many years and every week it is amazing to see where we have encountered God. You would assume that the answers would be huge moments when we experienced God's presence. But in reality, most often we have seen God in everyday moments where we would not necessarily assume we would see God there.

We have seen God in moments at work, in baking, in worship, in the sunrise and sunset, moments with family, among many other ways.

Occasionally we will have a powerful-you-could-not-have-missed- that -was God moment. But most often, we encounter God in small ways that become sacred moments we didn't plan for.

In our scripture lesson this morning, Cleopas and the other disciple experience this very thing as they walk the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

It is still Sunday morning. Jesus' death had just occurred on Friday and they have now heard seemingly crazy news that Jesus is risen from the dead.

But you can almost see that they still are unsure and fearful. The events of Friday were so horrifying—mass of soldiers, confusion of crowds, watching the soldiers treat Jesus cruelly whipping him, slamming a crown of thorns on his head, seeing blood drip down his face. Then they watched the soldiers nail his hands and feet to the cross and watched him breath his last breath.

Then if that was not enough, there was an earthquake and rocks splitting in two. Then his dead body laid in a tomb and a rock rolled over it.

It was so final, so horrifying. Their grief still so strong.

And now the women are saying he is risen from the dead. I suspect even though this is Good news, it felt like too much too soon. They had not yet processed what had happened on Friday yet to be able to take the news that he was risen to heart.

As I imagine those two disciples walk that dusty road to Emmaus, I imagine them walking as if they were carrying the weight of the world. Their shoulders hunched over. Slow steps as they slowly walk their way to Emmaus.

When have we walked like that?--- The weight of the world on our shoulders, moving slow, because we just don't have the energy to move any faster. When have we had events in our life that was so heavy, so hard to process, that even the mentality of Good News is not enough to take away that weight?

Those moments when we wonder if you will ever feel like yourself again.

We experience these moments of deep grief and heavy hearts especially in times of loss. But not just in the death of loved ones. Loss happens in a variety of ways. Loss of our health, loss of a job, loss of a marriage, loss of what was normal. Loss can happen even in good things—marriage, moving, children graduating and moving away, etc.

We certainly are now in a season of loss. The loss of life, the loss of control, the loss of normality, the loss of things we were looking forward too.

In our time of loss and grief it is often hard to see where God is.

Those two disciples certainly did not see God even when God shows up and walks with them.

As these two disciples are walking to Emmaus, they are talking among themselves about all these things that had happened over the weekend.

As they are talking, Jesus shows up and walks with them.

Scripture says that their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Why couldn't they recognize or perceive that this was Jesus? Did God keep them from recognizing him until they were ready? Did their grief and confusion keep them from seeing who this really was?

What keeps us from seeing Jesus in our midst?

Often, we don't recognize Jesus because we are not expecting too. We often walk along our life journey, not expecting God to show up and so we don't see God when he does.

Jesus joins the two men and asks them 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, -- Jesus literally stops them in their tracks. Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'

Where have you been? How do you not know what has occurred here.

Jesus asks 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. They continue to tell this seemingly stranger all that has happened and then they share their hopes with him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. But now we just are not sure of anything. (Luke 24:17-24--- with a little bit of Christina paraphrase)

Jesus then connects the present events with the stories of their faith traditions. Jesus connects what is happening now in their lives with the story of Moses and the prophets. He explains God's time to them—Kyrios Time, not the time of clocks and calendars.

Jesus explains to them and to us that God doesn't always work in our time. God's time operates on a totally different plane, as explained in 2 Peter 3:8-9 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

When they get to the place where they are going, the two disciples invite Jesus to join them. It is at the table when this seemingly stranger takes bread, blesses it and breaks it and then gives a piece to each of them--- and at that moment, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him. And Jesus vanishes from their sight.

They experience a sacred moment they did not plan on.

When they started out on that road to Emmaus, they had no plan and no idea that they would encounter God. They had no idea they would have a sacred moment with the Risen Jesus in the simple act of breaking bread.

Sacred Moments happen all around us--- sacred moments are any space, event or occasion that connects us to God and reminds us in a powerful way that God is present with us and giving us what we need in that moment.

We often assume that Sacred Moments must be huge, spectacular, powerful, God was for sure in this place moment in order to be true Sacred moments.

But how often sacred moments happen just like they did for those two disciples. Sacred moments often happen in small ways in ordinary things we do every day.

I have a friend whose parent died recently, who had a sacred moment when she encountered God and knew her parent was with God, when she heard a beloved family song on the radio—in a very unexpected moment.

Sacred moment occurring when flowers bloomed in a flower bed where no flowers had bloomed before. In the simple joy of connecting with school friends on a Google chat.

Sacred Moments can happen in small quiet ways that assure us that God is present.

Certainly they also happen in large powerful ways. This week, the church hosted a short turn around fill the truck food drive to support St. Vincent dePaul and The Salvation Army. The first day, we gathered 7 shopping carts of food and \$1100 for St. Vincent's. God was very present in this event.

The challenge is recognizing these sacred moments for what they are—God's risen presence with us—God communicating God's love and grace to us in a variety of ways.

The two disciples, as Jesus vanishes from their sight say, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32 Jesus was with us the whole time and we did not notice.

So how do we recognize these sacred moments?

- 1) Pay Attention. Pray every morning "God help me to see you and encounter you today." And then pay attention for where God will show up.
- 2) Read and mediate on scripture. Jesus comes and helps them understand the scriptures. Often God speaks to us through the sacred word. The more we read and wrestle with scripture, the more we have verses memorized, the more we have sacred encounters with God through scripture.

3) Look Back. Those two disciples only understand that they had just had a sacred moment by looking back on that journey to Emmaus. They only understood that was God walking with them in hindsight. But there is nothing wrong with realizing God was present after the fact.

For many biblical characters they only understood that it was God in hindsight.

Moses—as God passes by, Moses can only see the back of God, not God’s face.
Exodus 33:23

Job 9:11 says ¹¹ Look, the Lord passes by me, and I do not see him; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

After Jacob wrestles with God in Genesis 28:16 Jacob awoke from his sleep, and thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

We often understand that we had indeed seen God as we look back on something. When we examine our day or past week, we often see where God was, but only in hindsight. Being able to look back and see where God was at work is a gift.

This is what is so important about the Spiritual discipline often called the Examen. Our Prayer and Share group uses a simple form of it when we ask the question, “Where have I seen God this week?”.

Some weeks I know the answer to the question. But some weeks I must stop and look back at my week to find the answer. It is especially in those weeks when my sacred moments come in small ways—sunrise, sermons that just come to me, special time spent with my family. And sometimes, I don’t always know where I encountered God.

Looking back on our day or week allows us to understand a bit of who God is and how God interacts into our world.

We start to understand that God is present in creation as we are reminded in Psalm 8:4--- “When I look to the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established. “

That God is present in the stillness. Psalm 46:10—Be still and know that I am God.

That God comes in the presence of others—story of God appearing to Abraham in the figure of three strangers in Genesis 18 and in Jesus telling us in Matthew 25 that when we feed and cloth others, we see Jesus.

That God is present in the breaking of bread. (From this scripture)

It is in these times of our lives when normal gets flipped on its head and a new normal enters that it is most important to find these sacred moments.

For those disciples, everything they knew about Jesus was turned topsy-turvy and it is in this sacred moment of Jesus walking with them and breaking bread that they are able to know God is with them and will guide them through this new normal.

We need these sacred moments especially now as we head into our second month of social distancing because of this coronavirus.

The best part is that God is providing us these sacred moments, reminding us that the Risen Christ is all around us and is guiding us through. We just must pay attention and to look back to see where God is at work in our lives.

“Were our hearts not burning within us while he was talking to us on the road? . . .”

Amen