

Love Shows Up
LUKE 24:36B-48
3rd Sunday of Easter
Sunday, 4/14/24
St James Episcopal Church; FF

Let us pray...Dear Lord; May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer. Amen.

My Friends in Christ: Grace and peace to you this morning from God, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ; the great Shepherd of the sheep.

A new bishop had just been installed into office at a formal ceremony in a large city, and the media happened to be there and were hoping for a juicy quote from the new bishop. "What does it feel like to be a bishop of this diocese?" one reporter asked. The Bishop replied, "I feel like a mosquito in a nudist camp, I know what to do, but I don't know where to start."

I suspect that Jesus' followers experienced the same sense of being overwhelmed when they saw Jesus for the first time after His resurrection. Some of the thoughts racing through their minds probably included, Is He a ghost or is He here in the flesh. How did He get through the walls without being noticed? What does this new development mean for us going forward?

By the end of this encounter, Jesus informed them that the message of repentance and forgiveness was to be preached to all nations beginning in Jerusalem. Thoughts which may have crossed their mind included; "How is the spread of the message going to happen when we are afraid to leave this room? What does Jesus expect from us individually and as a group in the future?"

In the emotionally charged atmosphere of Jesus' presence in the Upper Room, it is easy to overlook why Jesus showed up in the middle of a group of frightened and paranoid followers. It was love which caused Jesus to enter the space of His apprehensive followers. It wasn't like some Type A boss trying to fire up the troops so that they will do what the boss wants. It was a loving God demonstrating His love to His followers and family of choice in the midst of their doubt and uncertainty.

It is significant that when Jesus appeared in the Upper Room He extended His peace to His bewildered followers: "Peace be unto you." Those words carried with it an invitation into a deeper relationship with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their relationship prior to Jesus' crucifixion reassured them of God's love for them, but now they were being invited into the relationship enjoyed among the three persons of the Trinity. Once again, Jesus showed up because He loved them.

As I have already said two times, I repeat again that Jesus shows up in our lives because He loves us. How He may choose to do that is hard to pin down at times. Certainly, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives reassures us of God's love for us and His concern for our well being. Yet, we can't see Jesus physically, but we can see Him in others, and it is in those encounters with others in which God's love flows through them toward us and His love flowing through us towards them.

I think that most of you are familiar with the 1960's TV show Bonanza starring the late actor Lorne Green and Michael Landon among others. In one episode, the singer/entertainer, Wayne Newton portrayed a young man who was crossing the threshold between adolescence and adulthood. His mother had died and he had been raised by his father. It was through his mother's gene pool that his musical giftedness originated. But his father struggled to accept and to support his son's musical talent, because it reminded him too much of his late wife. This created a breakdown in the relationship between father and son, although the son always treated his father with respect.

There was an important performance in Virginia City in which the Wayne Newton character would be singing, but his father as expected, refused to attend. So Ben Cartwright enters the fray, and tried to talk sense into the reluctant widower. But the father referred to the commandment "Honor your father and mother" as a means of trying to convince his son not to perform and to get Cartwright off his back. Cartwright exasperated finally blurted out. "I think that there is another commandment that goes along with the one you just quoted and it goes like this. Honor thy son."

The final scene in the episode shows the young man singing beautifully to an appreciative audience and then he notices that his father has walked in a little late, and immediately he cannot suppress a smile, as he sang beautifully, grinning from ear to ear. Love means showing up in support of those we love.

Jesus' love for His disciples is also illustrated in two parts of that conversation in the Upper Room. They needed reassurance that Jesus had actually risen from the dead, so He showed them the wounds on His hands, feet, and side, and then proceeded to eat a piece of broiled fish in front of them. You see, a ghost doesn't eat food. Even though Jesus' resurrected body defied the laws of physical nature, it also possessed many of the same characteristics of His body pre-resurrection.

Also, Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures; particularly the OT prophecies concerning Himself. I think that it is important to underscore the fact that Jesus had to clear away the obstacles in the minds of the disciples before they were able to be receptive to the truth He was about to reveal to them. They needed help to understand, and I believe that the disciples knew it. A side note, Jesus had done the same thing with the two followers on the road to Emmaus earlier in the day. By showing them His wounds and by opening their understanding of the Scriptures, Jesus once again revealed His love for His disciples, not so much through words of love, but by His actions.

For you and I, Jesus has given us His Word, the Bible and the Holy Spirit to enable us to see the truth contained in pages of Scripture. The two together enlightens us to things which we would be unable to see were it not for Divine enlightenment. Once again, God's love for you and me shows up in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the gift of God's Word to help us to understand God's character and His work in the world, which has been ongoing from the beginning of time.

Jesus also shows up for those who have failed in life. I believe its important to point out that the disciples in the upper room tell the visitors from Emmaus that Jesus had also appeared to Simon Peter. It is curious that the Gospel writers do not record this appearance, especially the Gospel of Mark whom we believe used Peter as a source. It was left to Luke to allude to this private revelation. You wonder what was said. I suspect Jesus showed up to reassure Peter that He still loved Him and that Peter's failure during the events leading up to the crucifixion would not disqualify him as a leader in the early church after Jesus' ascension some forty days later. Jesus is accustomed to rehabilitating failures like you and me.

Finally, Jesus' love for you and I is also demonstrated by His invitation to be part of His mission in the world, and this mission has many diverse components to it: feeding the hungry; befriending the lonely; bringing the gospel to muslims; sharing the news of God's love for our neighbors; becoming a pastor, or a member of a church vestry or council. In Christ, we are all part of Jesus' mission to the world because He loves us and He knows that in life we need multiple purposes. What better purpose can be ours than by being part of His mission through how we interact with our neighbors and community; how we love our families; how we invest time in God's Word and by being associated with a believing community.

As Jesus wound up His meeting with the disciples, His loving directive to be part of sharing the message of salvation through Jesus was to be done in the context of the love He had for them and in the love and dedication His followers had for each other. May you be reassured and strengthened today in the knowledge that you are loved by God because He shows up for you continually, and that His love is the fuel you need to demonstrate your love for others. Thanks be to God. Amen!