

Sermon Preached
By Doug King
October 3, 2004
World Communion Sunday
Luke 24:13-35

I was talking to a colleague of mine the other day who has accepted a call to a new church in a different part of the country. Whenever you do this you are examined before the governing board of the Presbytery. As his liaison was preparing him for the examination he was told that he would be asked whether Jesus would return and that he should answer yes to the question. My friend responded that he was comfortable saying that yes indeed Jesus would return as long as no one asked him to pin down a date and time.

Some Christians spend a lot of time debating when and praying for Jesus' return, but I cannot say that I am one of them. I have never been able to get my head around a cosmic, dramatic curtain closing of the universe with Jesus taking the stage for one final encore, glowing and nine hundred feet tall. I trust that God in Jesus has a plan for mending and perfecting everything and all of us in the end and I tend to leave it at that.

When I think of Jesus making himself known to us I think of this story with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. I look for the small intimate ways in which God is revealed in our midst. On this World Communion Sunday we join with our brothers and sisters in the faith across the globe in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the pitcher. One way to envision so many people celebrating the sacrament is to imagine the world's largest stadium filled with millions of us sharing the feast. It is an impressive picture. But I prefer to think about it the way it is really occurring across the world. People are celebrating in small country churches, and large urban cathedrals, at hospital bedsides, and the living rooms of home churches in gatherings of every shape and size and style imaginable.

Although many are celebrating this morning, it is not a large scale event at all.

The celebration is really occurring on the smallest scale possible. We celebrate as one person passes to another person the bread and the cup. There is no assembly line production of this ritual. Whether it is three people gathered to celebrate or three thousand, the celebration is always done from one to another.

We discover the face of the Christ in our midst not in the isolation of a crowd but in the intimacy of the person before us. Those two disciples on their way to Emmaus did not recognize the resurrected Jesus in some technicolor display as he approached them. It was only after they sat down at table together to share the intimacy of a meal that they recognized that Christ was alive and in their midst.

I fear that if we only look for the presence of God in Christ in big, bold, and dramatic ways we will lose the opportunity to have our eyes opened to the myriad of ways that God is present in small, up close and personal ways. Whenever we interact with others there is an opportunity for us to recognize the presence of the divine. And as with so many things, the more sensitively we watch for it, the more times we will indeed be allowed to see it.

It is also important to note that the disciples found the resurrected Christ. When we gather around the Lord's table we are reminded that no one is to be excluded. This is a table for all and we are called to welcome all into our lives. This table where we share a simple meal is a reminder that we are being called to share who we are and what we have with those beyond the normal boundaries of our lives.

Even as eloquently and passionately as the Risen Christ told the disciples the stories of the prophets and history of Israel they could not recognize the presence of God until they gathered together at the table. We can study the Bible and its ethics and implications all day long but in the end the words alone do not reveal God to us. The presence of God is revealed to us through our actions, through the ways in which we invite all the children of God to the table. The presence of God is revealed to us as we tutor the children from Ferguson Avenue. The presence of God is revealed when we

celebrate Mitzvah Day with our Muslim and Jewish Partners. The presence of God is revealed when we reach out intentionally to the gay and lesbian community. The presence of God is revealed whenever we invite to the table those who have not felt invited before.

We would be mistaken if we believed that there will ever come a day when we will be done inviting the stranger to this table. When we gather here, we trust that the Holy Spirit is present bringing us into closer communion with God. But if we do not seek closer communion with our brothers and sisters the meal and ritual at this table become hollow.

As we are nourished and nurtured at the table this morning we should certainly see this as an opportunity to grow closer to God. But let us not stop there. Let us be fed at this table for a purpose. Let us be fed in order that we might go out into the world and feed others in whatever way they need to be fed. As we share the bread and cup with each other let us recognize the many ways we can share ourselves with each other both our friends and the strangers that cross our path. This table is both a comfort and a call for us to reach beyond what is comfortable. We should not leave this table feeling full and satisfied and groggy. When we are fed at this table we should walk away energized and hungry for a deeper faithfulness with our God. Part of that hunger can be fed in prayer and worship and education, but if we are seeking the face of God we will need to seek out the faces of the Children of God. We will need to build upon Westminster's history of outreach into the world in ways we have yet to imagine.

When the question is raised about when Jesus will return, the answer is today and every day. At least every day we gather and share with our brothers and sisters and the brothers and sisters we have yet to meet. When we recognize the presence of God in the midst of the presence of others we will truly be on the way to understanding the depth and beauty of the word communion on this World Communion Sunday. Amen.