

CHRIST INCOGNITO

Jesus died. Misunderstood. Misjudged. A fallen hero.
What were his followers to do now? Where could they go?

Two despairing devotees made a choice to walk back down the road, seven miles away from the reminders of ruin in Jerusalem. They are walking off their post traumatic stress. As they go they are trying to make sense of the events surrounding Jesus' death.

They had hoped that he was really going to be the one to set the oppressed free. They had hoped that he would be the one to lead their movement for liberty and justice for all. They had hoped. But no more. Devastation and despair almost overwhelmed them.

A stranger came and walked beside them and listened to their story. They were astounded that he had not heard the headline news. Then their heartbreaking news spilled out, 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.' Understandable with the cruel reign of the Roman Empire. Those were very hard days for them. Up to that time he had always been with them as comforter and friend. He had filled them with wild dreams of a new heaven and a new earth where peace and forgiveness would be the norm. He helped them believe in themselves, each in his or her uniqueness – the sunburnt fisherman, the tax collector, the idealistic zealot, the woman who dared sit at his feet. They all believed in him. They believed his love, his laughter and his words. They believed he was the Chosen One of Israel, the Holy One of God. They trusted him when he talked about his kingdom.

The quickest thing for Jesus to do would have been to tell them who he was, what had happened to them and invite them to believe. He didn't do this. Instead he walked with them and asked them to tell him what was troubling them. After he heard their story Jesus wasn't exactly tactful. It was they who were the foolish ones, not only slow of brain but of heart. Hang on a minute, that's no way to speak to the grief stricken. But they didn't really believe all that the sacred texts had promised from ancient times.

Not only did they disbelieve the prophecies, they didn't even believe the testimony of those in their own community who came running back from the empty tomb. Why? because it was only women blurting. It was the women who had the courage to stand by Jesus in the hours of his suffering and death. It was the women who had gone to the tomb and met the angelic messengers of God.

'Some women of our company amazed us.' they said.
They were amazed but not convinced.

As the stranger on the road talked with these two heart broken refugees of the event of this tragic Passover, *their* hearts began to burn within them. No wonder – imagine being there while Jesus explained the OT to them!

It was getting dark and Jesus was invited to stay the night. First they must eat. Jesus, the guest, took the bread and blessed it, and broke it and gave it to them. It's Jesus – that's what he always does! They cried with joy. When they had wiped their eyes, He was gone. Instead of staying to eat, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem and told the disciples what had happened to them.

What strikes me is that Jesus chooses to meet us in our homes - as we eat ordinary bread with him, not a Sunday roast but bread and cheese as it were. 'Whenever you do the simplest things, like eating a meal together, remember that I am with you. Do not despise life or any part of it. All of life is holy if you have the eyes to see. That's how they knew him - in the breaking of bread. Not in the theological talk along the road.

Life goes on as usual – meals are still eaten, but everything is different now, because he is here, in the midst of the usual, the taken-for granted. His Kingdom was among them in this life, in the common, everyday gestures, words and actions. They had wanted a kingdom set apart – like Camelot.

When we walk or drive, remember that he walked from town to town. When we dance, remember that he loved parties and turned water into wine so that the party could continue. When we weep, remember that he looked out over Jerusalem and wept. When we laugh remember that he made puns about camels trying to fit through the eye of a needle. When we feel forsaken and can't believe that God is here for us, remember that he cried from the cross, 'My God, my God, where are you!' When we touch another person, remember that he was never scandalized by love; remember how a woman burst into Simon's house uninvited and kissed him from head to toe. When you embrace a child and feel those small hands around your neck, remember that he loved to hold children. And when you eat a meal together, remember how he loved to eat with his friends.

In everything that we do, remember that he is with us; that he goes before us, sometimes recognized, sometimes hidden from our eyes.

Incognito Christ he may sometimes be, but all we are asked to do is to look for him in the everyday.

May we keep on looking, for his name's sake. AMEN

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