

Page | 1 As some of you know, I often wear a clerical collar when I go to the hospital to visit someone. I do find it fascinating to watch other people look at the woman in the collar. Some stare, some look away, and some smile – more than usual. I don't wear the collar for these reactions but it is interesting to observe them. Hospitals are generally places where everyone is playing a particular role, and it helps all the different people coming in and out of the room to know what role each is playing. It's not that you the patient needs to know who I am, for I've been pastor for Peace for a long time and I feel confident you would recognize me as your pastor, even if are on pain medicines. But on the other hand, I have noticed that some of you who mostly come to worship and do not show up much during the week for activities are a little surprised to see me without the robe, in regular clothes. Whether I am wearing a robe, a clerical collar, or just a cross, it is always my job to make God known, just as it is your job. More important than wearing a cross, we are clothed with Christ-like attributes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and generosity. That is how we make God known. The beginning of our mission statement. Our mission is to make God known.

Jesus came to make God known, for he was indeed God in human form. Fully God and fully human. For some reason in his resurrected power, he was different, and it was not as easy for those who knew him well to identify him. Mary thought he was the gardener. Cleopas and the other on the road to Emmaus had no idea it was Jesus until he was made known in the breaking of the bread. In each of the appearances, the disciples are a bit mystified by him. Of course, that could be because they had been so sure he was dead. So we start our reading in Luke today as Cleopas and another have been walking to Emmaus talking to Jesus about all that has happened, and he to them about the scriptures, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Hear the Gospel:

Luke 24:28-48

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. ³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-- that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. (NRSV)

How do we make God known? Well, first of all, we have to know God. Not just know about God, but have the kind of warmth of relationship that urges God to stay, that invites God into your house and heart, into a relationship where you can feel both the love and the challenge. In my relationship with Richard for instance, I need to know that he loves me and will always love me. But I also need him to challenge me, to push me to be my better self. Good friends do this too – they don't let you stay just as you are. They help you improve, which means sometimes saying things that are hard to hear. This is the kind of relationship we need with God – where we are trusting that God loves us completely but also is dissatisfied with leaving us as we are. God who know you best is going to push you and prod you and inspire you to be better – if you are willing to listen, and sometimes even when you are not listening. So the first point is that we make God known by having a close relationship with God ourselves. Jesus had the most intimate relationship with God, for Jesus is God. And God is love, and those who truly love are on their way to knowing God (but that's 1 John's epistle not Luke's Gospel so onward to the next point.)

Making God known first mean knowing God, but second it means we are communing with God, listening to God's word and dining with God. That's why we pray before meals – not to draw attention to ourselves in a restaurant so everyone will know (oh, look at those religious people) but to remind ourselves that sharing a meal is sacred and Jesus Christ is sitting in the empty chair. So it's not just about once saying, "Jesus loves me; this I know for the Bible tells me so." It is also about praying constantly, "Be known to me in breaking bread and then do not depart." Or "Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true." Making God known means that daily you are drawing from the wells of God's grace so that the love of Christ is very present in your mind, heart, spirit, will.

But the next part of Making God known is where Christians like us get stuck. Running to tell someone. Oh, why are we so afraid? We are like the women who first went to the tomb – scared to say anything. We are like Thomas who doubted – skeptical that this story can be trusted. We are like the disciples when the women returned from the tomb and finally mustered some courage to speak, and the guys said, "We can't believe this idle tale."

So we even discourage one another from speaking our truth, our testimony, our witness. We judge people for being overly emotional, or not rational enough, or not intelligent enough. And we ourselves clam up. We tell no one anything for fear of judgment. No one wants to be called a hypocrite or a religious freak. Nobody wants to be associated with pushy or narrow-minded Christians. But making God know involves sharing your experience. Notice that it is when the disciples are talking with each other about having seen the Lord that Jesus is suddenly in their midst.

We have seen God. Yes, I feel the presence of the Spirit when I worship. I taste the goodness in communion. Yesterday at Cedarkirk I sat down for the proclamation of the Word as the group of thirty-two, divided into eight groups of four read and dramatized the entire 24th chapter of Luke, starting with the resurrection and ending with the ascension. Yes, when we study the scriptures in classes, or talk about theology or pray to God for help with parenting or go on retreats or go to Bible studies or Christianity and Science or love one another in fellowship and caring relationships, I know something profound about the love of God. I see Jesus. I feel the Spirit. I am challenged and accepted. We have to find the language to discuss these spiritual matters in genuine and comfortable ways with others. It begins with one another. It begins here as we worship, as we converse around the coffee pot, and at choir, and when we dine together under the Cross, in these next weeks, even if not literally under that cross, but we dine together, remembering the sacrificial love of Christ, and how that propels us to make joyful sacrifices ourselves, so that as our gifts come together, we can make God known a little better in this part of the world, and even further as we reach to Haiti, and around the globe. When you see that Celtic cross atop the new sanctuary, remember that the circle is a symbol of unending love, that the circle is a sign we are gathered around the heart and mind of Christ, who came to save us and all people from the messes we make of life.

Making God known means knowing God, dwelling and dining with God. It means sharing our experiences of God, whom we see most clearly in Jesus Christ. But it is not just talking about spiritual matters, but putting our money where our mouth is.

Putting our time and energy and resources to live out what we say we believe. To live the love of God means that we, like Christ, are giving our all, ordering our entire life not around our own desire to “live the good life” but orienting our life around the mission to make God known by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others. Jesus’ body raised from the dead reminds us that we too will be raised, that this fast, fleeting life will be followed by one that never ends, where sacrificial love of God and one another in the context of endless peace will be the boundless, beautiful activity of every day. No longer will we say, “Know the Lord, for all will know, from the least to the greatest.” This is the dress rehearsal for that eternal life. The more we throw ourselves into the drama, the more we live in that realm.