

When thinking about the readings the last three weeks, I wonder how it is that the people who actually knew Jesus have so much trouble identifying him when he comes back from raising the dead. I mean, really, you spend days and nights on end with someone who is offering you an entirely new perspective on every aspect of your life, leading to eternal life, and you don't recognize him when he's right in front of you?

On Easter morn, there's Mary, mistaking him for the gardener. When he shows up in the upper room the disciples don't recognize him until he shows them his hands and feet. Thomas, missing the appearance the week before, needs the same confirmation the following Sunday morning. Now this morning we have these two walking home from the crucifixion on Easter Day after hearing the reports of these sightings of the risen Lord. Jesus comes to them, asks them what they are discussing, and they chastise him for being the only one not to have heard about his death and their despair over the unfilled promise of the future. It's as if this idea of eternal life inherited through his resurrection is just too good to be true. But they've all seen Jesus and heard the promise made for our souls. Why do they have so much trouble recognizing their beloved friend?

As I am asking myself these questions, God gently reminds me of the times I too have walked right past the embodiment of Love standing right in front of me.

Well this weekend, I was blessed to have the opposite occur. I had the privilege to spend Friday night at dinner and yesterday with individuals who know how to recognize Jesus. Yesterday, three deaneries gathered together in Lynn to celebrate the confirmation and reception of about 100 Christians. Evan Aroko, Mason Nalipinski and Timothy Reynolds were confirmed from Grace Church. David Ashton was received into the Episcopal Church. These four people have found Christ in many ways these many years. These four seem to have no problem seeing Jesus all about them.

Confirmation is considered a sacrament of the Church. When I was growing up, confirmation was when you received communion for the first time. My classes were spent memorizing the catechism. This was helpful in knowing what Episcopalians believed, but it was the parish family and my own that taught me that developing a vibrant faith was a lifelong endeavor, and they would walk with me. So confirmation meant that I was sure that God's promise to never leave me was fulfilled. God's Love was confirmed.

These stories from the last few weeks are stories of confirmation as well. Mary's faith in the promise of the resurrection is confirmed when she hears Jesus' voice. The apostles' faith is confirmed when they see Christ's wounds. Thomas' faith is restored when he touches Jesus' side. The two on the road to Emmaus believe when their hunger for Christ is sated in the breaking of the bread during the communal meal. Different ways of confirmation, but what is confirmed is the same:

**That through the death and resurrection of Jesus,
God never reneges on his promise of his eternal love throughout our eternal life.**

This is what is publicly stated at every confirmation service; that we believe in God's promises. In response, we state that, with God's help, we will strive to keep our own. In David's reception into the Anglican Communion, he too states this belief. He also confirms his understanding that God is a universal God who welcomes all; who loves all and who keeps his promises with everyone. David confirms that he will celebrate this grace in an inclusive community that values the Anglican tradition of revelatory worship and who holds a reasonable hope.

These four have found Christ in times of trouble, as Mary did; as they struggle with their faith, as Thomas did; in prayer and table fellowship as the two returning home to Emmaus; and in serving others, for they know that God is always present to those in need. In leading a faithful life, these four people lead us to God.

David regularly attends the weekly adult study on Wednesdays. David has the best questions, which he freely shares with us all. As he struggles with his questions, with his understanding of the nature of God and humanity you can feel the Holy Spirit stirring us up. His questions offer new perspectives, new lenses for identifying Christ among us. David wants to touch Jesus' side, not because he doubts, but because he wants to probe every aspect of his belief. David points Christ out in our struggle to deepen our knowledge of God.

Mason's been coming here since she was a toddler (she was shorter than I then). She also follows Melissa Barnes' credo that some are called to Church School while others are called to attend church. She's been acolyting for the last 8 or 9 years. She has served at the altar and she has served those in need. She just came back from a service trip to New Orleans and learned that she can be the hands and voice of Christ in the world.

Mason points Christ out in those in need whom we serve.

I remember when Melissa Reynolds came with three small boys to ask me all about Grace Church and what it means to be an Episcopalian. All three of these young boys were fascinated with the objects in our Young and the Restless Chapel where we met. Within a short amount of time, Tim was called to serve at the altar as well. He finds Christ in prayer and devotion. He takes acts of worship very seriously, and Christ is revealed to him in sacred spaces and time.

Tim points Christ out in acts of worship and table fellowship.

Evan holds a special place in my heart because he is the only person I have both baptized as a baby and then presented for confirmation. This is just one way the church has been where Evan sees Christ. As many of you know, Evan's father recently. Evan found Christ everywhere during that time, giving them the courage and strength to endure this pain and grief. He's also been involved in a leadership project at MIT where he told me he's learned how to relate to a diverse group of people, seeing everyone as a child of God.

Evan points Christ out in times of trouble and in faith and respect.

There were two other people yesterday who made it easy to see Christ. We are so fortunate to have Gayle Harris as our Suffragan Bishop. She took time with each candidate, sharing something about their name in relation to God. She charged them with taking the light given them and sharing it in the world. She celebrated the fact that this was not a graduation or ending, but the beginning of a new and promising adventure in God.

The other person was Joanne Moar. Joanne came to reveal Christ through the power of community. She came to support and pray for her colleagues who serve at the altar with her.

She points Christ out in the connections we make, in the responsibilities we take on, in our faithfulness to one another.

These friends of ours and others have worked on their relationship with God by worshiping regularly and by sharing their own personal encounters. They know how to stick together and work things out. They follow through on their commitments and they follow their hearts rather than the crowd. They have developed holy habits for recognizing Christ. They are exceptional leaders of this parish who model servanthood, faithfulness and hard work, all for the kingdom of God. We would not be the sacred place we are without Mason, Evan, David and Timothy for they show us their perspective of the risen Christ at work in the world.

So let us all confirm our faith in God's promise of love, as we recommit to the journey of faith, which leads us to the heart of God.

Amen.