

## How Do You Know?

By: Meagan McLaughlin

April 18, 2021. What are we witness to? How has God shown up in your life, and how have you been changed? Who are you called to share the hope, love, and promise of the resurrection with? In today's sermon, Pastor Meagan asks these questions and talks about how we can know.

Readings: [Luke 24: 36b-48](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

The disciples were understandably a little bit skeptical when Jesus appeared to them. As Pastor Tina pointed out last week, they were exhausted, traumatized, afraid, confused, even despairing. Jesus showing up, in the middle of that, was the last thing that they expected. And yet, there he was. And there they were, caught up in a tangle of trauma, joy, disbelief, and wonderment.

The disciples didn't know it was Jesus right away. That seems to be a theme of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection, like Mr. Jesse mentioned. Honestly, who can blame them? Trauma is real, and they had been through it. Clear thinking was impossible in the wake of the horror of Good Friday, and Jesus's appearance was not enough to instantly erase that. On Easter Sunday, we heard that the women were afraid to tell anyone, at the beginning. Last week, Thomas doubts — and as Pastor Tina pointed out, Jesus understood that, and meets him where he is. And today, one more time, the disciples are struggling to make sense out of what is happening right in front of them, how to know what it all meant.

How do we know? When we're encountering something unexpected, traumatic, challenging, new, confusing, how do we discern where God is leading? How do we find God, when any sign of God seems completely absent?

I remember realizing, soon after starting seminary, that for many reasons it was time to seek out a new church. On the website of one of the ELCA churches in our Minneapolis neighborhood, the tagline read “Traditional Worship — Contemporary Message.” The church we had been attending claimed “Traditional Church with a Modern Message.” I got goosebumps and I thought, “I think I've found my people!” And I had.

When my Seminary Advisor returned from sabbatical I told her that I had joined the ELCA and was switching to an Mdiv degree, and she exclaimed, “Why not the UCC? Or the Episcopal? How do you know?” To her, the way I had made this decision made no sense. Later, I discovered that she had made a similar change many years before, becoming Presbyterian after months of studying church doctrine. This was my first realization that there are many ways of knowing God's will, and discerning where God is leading.

Looking back, I have always relied at least somewhat on instincts when making decisions. I chose St. Olaf for college largely because of a sense of at-homeness when I visited. And when we were looking at St. Louis houses last year, Karen was gratified to discover that our house had a new furnace and AC, but I knew we were at home when I discovered the sound of the rain on the tin roof of the sun porch — my squeal of joy brought our realtor running, sure that something was dreadfully wrong.

The disciples had heard the experience of the two who walked the road to Emmaus with Jesus, and

knew who it was when they broke bread together. But hearing from their fellows didn't prepare the rest of the disciples to see Jesus' themselves. Jesus understands this, and he acknowledges how shocking it must be for them, how confusing for brains and spirits that are still shaken by what they'd been through — and he offers them peace, not as a command, but as a gift to beloveds he knows are confused and afraid. He invites them to enter into the truth that he is there — to see his hands, to touch his feet. He asks for something to eat — as Mr. Jesse mentioned — as if to say, I really am here. I still get hungry and I eat, just like you do. And then he teaches them, opening their minds to the scriptures, and all that he told them all those years along the way. My advisor would have loved that part!

And finally, whether because they saw, or felt, or touched, or learned — or maybe because of all of it — the disciples knew that it was Jesus. Connecting with their own embodied experience through their senses grounded them, and they knew. Perhaps not the kind of knowing that means they fully understood everything that was happening or what the future would hold, but a knowing that helped them to trust in something that they still couldn't quite understand. Jesus embodied in humanity met the disciples in their humanity to share promise, life, and hope.

And Jesus, having been fully human, meets us where we are. Whether through goosebumps or rain on the tin roof, or website taglines, church teachings or scripture studies, or seeing or touching or eating, God in Christ continues to reveal to us the good news: death is not the final word, we are not alone, the love of God for all creation cannot be contained, and we are, often despite ourselves, exactly where we need to be. How do you know?

In all of the gospels, even in Mark that leaves us hanging with the women at the tomb afraid to speak, Jesus helps us know — and then, as Mr. Jesse talked about, calls us to be witnesses. This can feel impossible — we are overwhelmed by trauma, we're too frightened to speak, we think we don't know or understand enough, or that we should leave it to the preachers or others better trained, or we feel like our doubts and questions disqualify us from carrying the gospel. But still, we are called. We are witnesses, as Mr. Jesse mentioned.

We are sent out together. And today, with the rest of Central States Synod, we remember the witness of our partner in the gospel, the Kote District of Papua New Guinea. Like the disciples, and like us, they have experienced the struggle and despair. They have, like us, lived through the despair of the pandemic, and had limited resources to help their community. They're grieving the loss of beloved President Mutu, and they're seeking wisdom as they choose a new leader and make decisions about how to use their country's rich natural resources for the good of all. We stand with them as we all seek to know God's presence and share the good news of God's abundant love.

It's interesting to note that as Jesus reveals himself to the disciples, it is not miracles or perfect knowledge that help them know, but Jesus showing up in his humanity, asking for something to eat. The most powerful witnesses in my life in times of despair and woundedness have been those who have also known despair, and found hope in the presence of God who meets them there. When shame, trauma, and despair bound me and blinded me, others who understood embodied Christ for me, reminding me of the truth of my identity as a beloved child of God. Like Mr. Jesse had us sing, Jesus loves me. People were able to witness that, demonstrating by their presence that God of love and life was there.

In the neighborhoods of Minneapolis, as the verdict in the trial surrounding George Floyd's death looms, trauma, anger, and grief threaten to snuff life out — and guns and tanks and soldiers struggle to contain it. Community is embodying Christ there by bringing food, water, medical supplies,

counseling, diapers, and connection, showing up with their presence and demonstrating that the God of life is there. It's like Mary, showing up after the horror of Good Friday and the silent despair of Holy Saturday, proclaiming simply and with great wonder, "I have seen the Lord!"

And this is our call: to know, and to witness. What are we witness to? How has God shown up in your life, and how have you been changed? Who are you called to share the hope, love, and promise of the resurrection with? Feel the breath of Jesus as he proclaims peace. See the wounds in his hands, touch the holes in his feet, share your fish — and bread — with him and watch in wonder as he eats, and hear the promises that are revealed in scripture. And then, know that we too are witnesses to these things, and proclaim the good news: We have seen the Lord! Christ is alive! God is still here! Alleluia!

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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