An interesting thing happens when you take a class called “Go Preach”. Someone expects you to preach. “We’ll have you start on a Saturday, with just your Saturday peeps,” Amy said. Then every time I turn around, she was announcing it!! I’d planned on doing this all stealth like with just a few people, THEN tell you I’d done it. But here we are … I’m nervous and we may wind up with a 45-minute service today. But…. unlike Bishop Palmer last week, you can count this as part of my message!

I chose this passage from Luke, because it was in the lectionary for today and well, it was an easy way to decide what scripture to use. But over the weeks I’ve been reading it and studying it, I’ve really come to love it. Can you see it? Mary and the other women have gone to the tomb to continue to mourn their master. And he’s gone. Luke isn’t as flashy as Matthew with his violent earthquake and the angel who sat on the stone, but in Luke 24:4 he does say two angels appeared in clothes that shone like lightning and said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Luke tells us that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the “others” went back to the disciples and told them what they’d seen. And the men didn’t believe them, “because their words seemed to them like nonsense.” Ladies, how many times have we heard that??? Peter ran back to the tomb and found the stone rolled away with strips of linen lying there and he wondered what could possibly have happened.

Can you imagine Jesus at this point? Thinking to his risen self, “What do I have to do? I’ve healed the sick, raised the dead, prospered the poor, prophesied my death and resurrection and it happened, and still they doubt me.” Fortunately, Jesus is persistent…

These disciples, one was Cleopas and it is widely assumed that the other is Peter, have left Jerusalem and are walking to Emmaus, possibly on their way home to Galilee. Personally, I think they’d decided to cut their losses, get away from the fray, and hope no one came after them for heresy.

While not a prophetic book, in Song of Solomon, chapter 3, verse 4, I think we see a bit of prophecy: “Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him who my soul loves…” Except Cleopas and Peter were blind to their reality. They were walking away from Jerusalem and, as they got past the Jews, they began to talk about the events of the past three days. A stranger came up to them and asked why they are sad. And they reply with something akin to “Dude, where have you been for the last three days?” And they tell him all that had happened over the three days. The stranger is taken aback by their doubt, and starting with Moses and the prophets, “explains to them what was said concerning himself”. You and I know that stranger was Jesus, but Cleopas and Peter? They still couldn’t see him for who he was. But they liked him well enough to invite him to stay with them for supper and the evening rest. During that supper, Jesus broke the bread, and finally Peter recognized him and at that point Jesus disappeared. Cleopas and Peter looked at each other and said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (I see a correlation to John Wesley’s “strangely warmed” heart here, but we can save that for another day!) At this point, Cleopas and Peter return to Jerusalem, find the other eleven disciples, and say, “It’s true! The Lord is Risen and appeared to Simon.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” How often do we ignore that message? How often do we want to control everything in our lives? The last few years have been difficult for me career wise. I’ve made some poor choices, and then experienced a layoff which, while not unexpected, was still a blow. I launched into a job search without much thought about prayer or Jesus. I had to find a job, because unemployment wasn’t going to pay the mortgage. I took the first job that was offered to me and, while the company and people were great, I was bored out of my mind. I continued to look, and as I started interviewing again, I started asking my friends to say a prayer and started praying for direction myself. It felt like I’d get \*thisclose\* to a job offer, and it would go to someone else. If you can believe it, I even lost out on an opportunity with a local company because I publicly spoke out against the proposed Meijer store in town. And in crept that doubt, “why am I praying about this? God doesn’t work like this.”

In January, a company I really thought I wanted to work for was taking a long time making a decision. I was praying, I was asking people to pray and nothing was happening.. Then my friend Amy pops up with a job at a company I’d left some years before, supporting the division of Honeywell that works with the Department of Energy in the area of nuclear energy. I interviewed on Friday, had an offer on Monday. I still didn’t see Jesus working in this. I even called the other company and pushed harder for an answer. I finally got a negative one. “You were the runner up.” Again. So, I started this new job with apprehension and a lot of insecurity, but eventually it became clear that this was right. I am supporting the people that work to make this country and its people safe through nuclear energy. Finally, I can see Jesus in this. I’m happy, I’m busy, I’m working with good people, and I see some sort of future.

In 2010, my mother was in the hospital, and I was slowly realizing this was going to be her last hospital visit. I was mostly in denial: I was going to lose my mother at 40 and I wasn’t ready. And I wasn’t praying because I didn’t think it helped. What was I going to ask for? Healing? We were pretty obviously past that. God’s Will? That would mean God wanted my mother to die. Wisdom for the doctors? Strength for the family? You guys had those covered. Strength for me? That was selfish. What could I possibly ask for?

Carolyn was here from Texas and the two of us were in the room with mom. They brought her lunch: turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy, which had become her favorite Sycamore Hospital meal. She was in bed when they came. I didn’t like her eating in bed because it was messy, and she had swallowing problems that I felt were exacerbated by being even slightly reclined. So, Carolyn and I got her out of bed and into a chair. She was responding to us, and moved with us, so I don’t think either of us realized at that moment that she was largely unconscious. We got her in the chair with lunch in front of her, and watched as she started to eat. Or, at least, we thought she was eating. I remember hearing myself say, “Mom, stop playing with your mashed potatoes” then realized she wasn’t really playing – and wasn’t really awake. In whatever state she was in, she was remembering some of the rituals she did as a child in the Church of England. Her hands were moving, and she was mumbling. At one point, we heard say “Come to me, Jesus, come to me” several times in a row. We got her back into bed, where she was quiet for a few minutes, then she recited the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s prayer, and then she was awake. Carolyn asked her what she’d dreamed about. And mom said something along the lines of this: I was in heaven! Heaven is full of big, beautiful, billowing purple tents. She’d seen my dad, and she’d seen Jesus and they told her it wasn’t time, so she came back. I think we lost her less than a week later. I didn’t realize it until much later, but I’d had the AHA moment people talk about. If I’d ever had a doubt that Jesus was working in our lives and walking beside us, that doubt was gone. I remember saying to Suzanne once, “it’s not really *my* “God moment” and she looked at me, quite confused, and said, “it *IS* your God moment”. She was right. It was my God moment.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” The NIV Commentary about this passage says this, “Those who choose the way of God’s wisdom as their own, trust that God knows how things ought to go and are willing to stake their lives on it.” Also, “Leaning on one’s own understanding is more than failing to pray about decisions. It is more like being wise in one’s own eyes and believing that one can determine what is right and wrong without guidance from God and his gift of wisdom.” Does that mean we walk alone down a dark alley in West Dayton at 2am and assume that God will protect us? No. We don't go thru life with a blind trust in God that stops us from making critical decisions, rather we trust that living in God is right and true, and God will lead us in the right direction.

God reveals himself to us in so many ways. As with Jesus’ revelation to Peter that evening, it’s often shocking. In the old testament, he revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush, to Jobe in a whirlwind, and to Balaam through a talking donkey. He revealed himself through dreams, visions, and, in some cases, he spoke directly to people. And in his most amazing revelation of all, he sent his son to die for us. I really like the way Nancy Guthrie puts it in her book, “Seeing Jesus - Seeking and Finding Him in the Scriptures”, “God has always wanted His people to know Him—not in a generic or shallow way, but personally, as He truly is. So He revealed Himself in a progressive way, not only through His name, but also through His glorious presence that dwelt in the Temple, through the Law, and through His mighty deeds on behalf of His people. But these revelations all led up to a definitive revelation in the Person of Jesus.”

I have a picture of a 2,000 year old Olive Tree in the Holy Land. It was taken by Carolyn during her first visit to the Holy Land. The vines and branches intertwine and it’s gnarled and if I showed it to you, I’m sure some of you would think that it’s quite ugly. And then you get the backstory. The area it sits in is believed to be where the Garden of Gethsemane was and there are some who believe it is the olive tree where Luke tells us Jesus cried out, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Whether or not it is “the tree”, I think that olive tree is beautiful and I see Jesus every time I see that picture.

I see Jesus in the faces of my nieces and nephews every time I see them. I see him as I look out my living room window at the flowering crab apple tree and remember the beautiful and fragrant blossoms that were there just a couple of weeks ago. I see him in fields of corn and soy beans that grow on the few farms we have left in Springboro. I remember when I attended my very first Stephen Ministry class, and Karen DaRosa brought us into this sanctuary and asked, “where do you see Jesus?” Many of us talked about things similar to those above: nature, children, family. But as I stood here in this sanctuary, on this altar, I felt the overwhelming spirit of Jesus. I have always felt Jesus in this place. From the occasional times that we came with my grandparents when I was a child, to the times I helped with VBS as a teenager, to the Christmas and Easter services we attended when we were “christmas and Easter christians” to today, when I’m here so very often, I feel that overwhelming spirit of Jesus in this place. I might go so far as to say that my own heart has been strangely warmed in this place.

Where do you see Jesus? How does he reveal himself to you? As you read the bible? As you read a book chosen for a bible study? As you tell your grandchildren bible stories? As you walk in the evenings at North Park and ponder God’s creation?

Do you see him in the nightclub shootings that have happened recently? In the deaths of police officers at the hands of criminals with weapons? In the face of the drug addicted homeless person who lives on the streets? In the hospitals as doctors and nurses work to save those who are sick or injured? In the horrible natural disasters we’ve seen in recent years? He’s there. I promise you, that no matter where you are, what your circumstance is, who or what you’re looking at, he’s there. As I learned on that September day in 2010, he might not be able to change the circumstance, but he is always there … in the aid workers as they helped the injured in Haiti after the earthquake and in Japan after the tsunami and as they help rebuild homes and businesses. At those nightclub shootings, he is there with the police officers who go running into situations others are running away from; he is there with the first responders as they respond to death and injury. He is there holding the hand of that drug addicted homeless person, seeing them through their darkest hours and trying to put the right people in their path. He is working in our lives all the time. I love the way Adam Hamilton puts it in , “God’s role in superintending our lives and our world is neither absentee landlord or micro-manager.”

As you go out this week and live your lives, I encourage you to think about how Jesus reveals himself to you. Where do you see him? Look for him in the places you’d expect, but look for him in the places you don’t expect. Say a prayer each morning that Jesus will reveal himself to you in ways you can’t imagine. You’ll be surprised, you’ll be delighted, and you might be saddened, but you will see him working everywhere. As our friends on that road to Emmaus discovered so long ago, he is risen and he walks among us.