5-3-20 online Faith When You Can’t See Rev. Amy Haines

Luke 24:13-35 Easter season

Have you ever struggled to recognize someone out of the context of where you know them from?

You are at the grocery store and someone calls you by name, and it takes you a moment to figure out they are a new member of the church.

You meet a new coworker who looks familiar, then realize you were classmates in high school.

Almost ten years ago, at a Women of Faith conference, I approached a woman in line and said to her, “Niki Wade?” She looked at me with confusion and asked, “Who are you?” She did not recognize me. When I said to her, “Amy Palmer,” her eyes lit up in instant recognition and she smiled and gave me a great big hug.

The person in line beside her jabbed her in the side and said, “But she’s the one who was up on stage. Why did you not recognize her?” (I had been sharing the story of our group leader, my co-pastor, who was also battling cancer.)

Niki did not recognize me because it had been two decades then since we graduated together from high school and my name and my hair are much different now than they were then.

Never in a million years did she expect to run into an old classmate at a women’s gathering in an arena in Columbus.

Have you ever been so focused on a conversation that you tune out the rest of the world around you?

You are talking on your cell phone or pondering a problem at work while driving in your car.

Five miles beyond your exit on the highway you finally realize that you are driving in unfamiliar territory, with your mind a million miles away.

Or you talk with a friend so intently on the phone that you tune out what is happening in the next room, ignoring a spouse raiding the refrigerator before supper or a toddler or a pet getting into something they shouldn’t be in.

Today, our Scripture passage takes us back to that original Easter evening, when two of Jesus’ followers struggled to recognize the risen Lord in their midst.

Cleopas and his companion were walking away from Jerusalem, journeying to Emmaus, when a stranger joined them. They didn’t recognize that this stranger was none other than Jesus—risen, alive!

Luke says they were looking sad. I imagine that sadness was tinged with disappointment, and even anger. Can you relate this morning to such emotion? What we had expected to be two weeks apart has now turned into 8, with more weeks to go. May’s celebrations have been adjusted or cancelled. Life currently is not what we ever expected it to be.

Those followers of Jesus had hoped for so much more from Jesus. They didn’t expect his death.

They couldn’t grasp the good news of his resurrection.

So when Jesus appeared alongside them and asked what they were talking about, they looked at him as if he was the only one in all Jerusalem not to know that Jesus had been crucified and his tomb three days later found empty. In fairness, not everyone in Jerusalem would have known or cared to know about the death of Jesus.

But his followers and disciples were distraught not only about the news of his death but also about the news of an empty tomb. They still did not believe the empty tomb was good news!

These two followers shared their grief, confusion and shattered hope with Jesus, and Jesus listened. Then Jesus shared the scriptures with these followers, and the followers listened.

When they all came near to Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion compelled Jesus to abide with them a little longer, to stay in their presence and share a meal with them. And Jesus agreed.

There, at table, the stranger became the host. Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, and gave it to them. As he spoke familiar words, as he offered bread to them, they saw his nail scarred hands. Their eyes were opened. Their hope was restored. The faith was rekindled. Jesus was in their midst! Alive!

Having finally found Easter joy, that same hour, they ran back to the disciples, still huddled together in Jerusalem, to proclaim, “We have seen the Lord!”

Their joy reminds me of the movie *Hook*, an updated version of the classic story of Peter Pan.

In Hook Robin Williams plays a grown-up Peter who has married Wendy and is now the typical too-busy-for-family businessman. But Hook captures Peter’s kids and Peter has to remember his past in order to find his missing children. The Lost Boys help Peter Pan to recover his children, but first they have to find the boy in the grown man.

There is one scene where one of the Lost Boys comes up to the man Peter, pulls and squeezes his face to get rid of the wrinkles, and finally exclaims, “It IS you Peter!” Peter Pan is finally found and the news is proclaimed with joy.

The followers of Jesus were surprised where they found Jesus, where they met the risen Lord.

The women met Jesus mourning beside an empty grave. Thomas met Jesus behind closed doors when he needed proof of Jesus’ presence. Cleopas and his companion met Jesus along the road and in the breaking of the bread.

Today, we can meet Jesus in our homes as we continue to be the church scattered for love of our neighbors.

Even in our grief and sadness, even in our confusion and pain, even in our hope and faithfulness, Jesus meets us where we are. This is the good news of resurrection joy!

Where has Jesus surprised you this week, meeting you where you are? Where are you seeing Jesus, in the unexpected and ordinary of everyday life? Are you seeing Jesus in ordinary meals gathered around your table, in the sacrifice of healthcare workers to care for others, in video chats and phone calls with loved ones and close friends, in this worship service.

Share with someone later this day where you are seeing Jesus. Share on the Facebook chat window, share in conversation around a meal, share in a phone call with a friend, share in a text to me.

Then, as you share where you see Jesus, like Cleopas and his companion, share how seeing Jesus is good news. How is Jesus meeting you where you are today encouraging your faith?

Like the disciples on that first Easter day, we don’t know what the future will be. At this point we don’t even know what challenges and opportunities are coming our way tomorrow.

But we do know that death is not the final word. We do know that we can face the future together. We do know that whatever we face, Jesus is with us. And we do know that Jesus calls us to go and live by faith, sharing his hope, his joy, his love, his grace with others.

Go now, and live, with hearts open to learning from God’s word, with lives open to sharing God’s grace, and with eyes open to seeing Jesus.

Jesus is with us! Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.