



Luke 24:36-50

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Pastor Robyn Hogue

Your best hope is to quickly start asking questions of your own: “Well, how are *YOU!*” “What have you been up to lately?” “Tell me about the family,” all in the hope that those answers will spark some lopsided neuron in your brain to give you some help in identifying this friendly stranger. Sometimes stalling works. Sometimes it doesn’t.

Then what? The best you can hope for is to escape before your ignorance is revealed. Worst case scenario? Your “friend” is offended, crestfallen that his or her existence has been wiped from your memory. It’s a situation that all the apologies in the world will never change. Like those dreams where we realize we’re standing in front of a crowd unprepared, it is a moment of excruciating embarrassment.

The only “upside” of such encounters is that they put us in familiar company. We are in the same pew as Jesus’ first disciples. In every case when the newly resurrected Jesus appeared to His closest followers, they unflinching got it wrong. They did not recognize him. 100% of the time.

In this week’s account, Jesus’ followers are gathered together when suddenly “Jesus stood among them.” Even though these disciples had heard the testimony from the Emmaus road travelers, a testimony that proclaimed, “The Lord has risen indeed,” they still fail to recognize Jesus in their midst. Instead, this is how they respond: “They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.”

It is not just that they do not recognize their Lord and Master. They immediately assume their visitor is some sort of ghostly apparition, probably with nasty intentions. At least the Emmaus travelers greeted the unrecognized Jesus with some decorum. They speak with civility to the stranger before them. Here? The disciples are just plain panicked. But unlike our unrecognized friend in the grocery store or the shopping mall, Jesus treats His disciples’ failure with gentleness. “Why are you frightened,” He asks? “Why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

Why is it so hard for those who knew Jesus best in His earthly ministry to recognize Him after His resurrection? Perhaps, Jesus doesn’t appear where His disciples expect to see Him. The Emmaus travelers have heard the story of the empty tomb and the tales of resurrection sightings, but

never dreamed of such a wondrous miracle as the risen Messiah could possibly be encountered walking along a dusty road between Jerusalem and a little no-count village known as Emmaus.

The disciples in today's text, fearfully huddled in Jerusalem, didn't expect Jesus to just "show up" in their rented room. If the stories they were hearing were true, then obviously a risen Messiah, one who had broken the *power of death*, would return to them with *power and might*, proclaiming His identity, perhaps even waving a sword of triumph.

How could the risen Lord simply stroll into their midst and greet them with the traditional "Peace be with you" . . . as if nothing was new?

The problem Jesus' first disciples had in recognizing their Master and Lord is the same problem that plagues today's disciples: You and me. We can't imagine Jesus showing up in ordinary places.

We look for Jesus in places we separate from everyday life and call "holy," or "sacred." We look for Jesus among the professional elites, the powerful people, the movers and shakers. We look for Jesus among the gifted, the miraculously touched or the sanctified saintly. Surely these are the ones who will most clearly reflect the presence of Jesus in our midst.

Like these first-century disciples, we twenty-first century disciples fail to look around and even look down. To find Jesus' presence, we assume Jesus would never be found in a "rent by the day" flophouse. Or that the presence of Jesus would never be found wandering on streets lined with so many needs. Surely the presence of Jesus doesn't hang out in a fast food restaurant. We look for Jesus in the cream of the crop, not the skimmed milk of the earth or the dregs at the bottom of the cup.

Part of our failure to recognize Jesus may be a "brain problem." Snuggled between the two hemispheres of our brain there is a region known as the amygdala, which is part of the limbic brain, the region where some of the most basic responses to stimuli are situated. The amygdala doesn't like "different." When we encounter someone or something that is noticeably "different" the amygdala gets jumpy and sends out messages encouraging us to be wary, keep our distance, even just plain run.

This built-in defense mechanism against anyone or anything that is "not us" probably served us well in primitive communities. But it causes problems in the trans-racial, multi-ethnic, complex global societies we live in today. So maybe we should move on from "looking" for Jesus and instead try "listening" for His presence.

Still our problem is that we might be "tuned in" to finding Jesus in the places and among the people that we already know are "acceptable" and "appropriate." We need to re-tune, to adjust our alignment, in order to find and recognize Jesus' presence. We need to switch from a "worldly wavelength" to the "love wavelength," because that is where we find Jesus.

I will never forgive Noah for not swatting those two mosquitoes when he had the chance. Think of all that humanity would have been spared. Mosquitoes spread deadly diseases; they bite us and cause crazy itchiness; they swarm in our face and food, especially at picnics.

Worst of all, they know exactly where our ears are, especially as they emit their insanity inspiring buzz in the middle of the night. But mosquitoes can teach us a thing or two about changing wavelengths in order to find and greet the one for whom we are looking.

A recent TED Talk video focused on “The Real Reason Mosquitoes Buzz.” First of all, researchers had to find and gather male and female mosquitos. Finding the females was no problem, for it is only the larger females that feed on human blood. It’s the females we bat and swat so desperately. The smaller males are elusive and shy. The researchers then carefully applied a drop of superglue to the thorax of one male and one female skeeter, gluing them to a small pin, (yes, that is someone’s summer job!) but making sure they could still beat their wings—the source of the insects “buzz.”

The first thing the researchers noted was that each mosquito emitted a distinct sound. Each mosquito has a unique frequency, its wings creating a one of a kind pitch. The larger females tended to have a lower wavelength, while the smaller males had a higher pitch.

The researchers then pushed the two insects closer to each other, while they continued to “listen in” on the sound their wings were making. As the male and female came closer they slowly began to adjust their individual frequencies so that the combined tone the two insects created was not a clash but was more like a chord. To show her love, the female raised her pitch a bit. To show his love, the male lowered his pitch a bit, until the two love bugs created a new sound, not matching the frequency of the other, but complimenting it, creating a perfect love duet of tonality.

Do you get it? Maybe we do not recognize Jesus because Jesus is operating on a different frequency than the world. The love frequency resonates with forgiveness, with repentance, with joy. We have to adjust our own frequency, learn to “tune out” the world” and to “tune in” the love frequency that Jesus’ presence emits at all times.

What does the love frequency “sound” like? Where is it being played out? Surely not in some run-of-the-mill neighborhood bar.

I learned from Leonard Sweet that a guy by the name of Jimmy Gilleece owns and operates this kind of bar in Wrightsville Beach, N.C. It is not a seedy place, but neither is it one of the upscale pubs with a trendy crowd drinking the latest micro-brews. One evening a couple months ago a woman patron came to Jimmy in tears. Her wallet had gone missing. Not only did the wallet contain cash and identification and credit cards, but she had also put her diamond wedding ring into her wallet. She was desperate and beside herself. A long search of the bar resulted in nothing and the woman left in tears. But Jimmy felt called to do “something more.” He scrolled

through three hours of video surveillance tapes until he spotted the wallet on a bench, and witnessed a person pick up the wallet and walk away.

Jimmy thought he recognized the person as a homeless guy he had seen around. He tracked the guy down and got him to confess that, yes, he had found the wallet, lifted the cash, and then tossed into the water the wallet and all its contents off one of the nearby docks.

End of story? Or not. Jimmy hired two divers to search the seabed, scooping through the sand and mud, to see if they could find the wallet. Unbelievably they did. There in the saturated leather they found the ring, safe and sound. Jimmy returned the ring to the amazed and grateful woman. Happy ending?!

Not the ending for Jimmy.

It turned out that the person who had stolen the wallet was a 17-year old homeless kid living in the woods just behind the area where the bar was located. Estranged from his family, “River,” the homeless kid, was struggling to make it on his own. He was living in a tent, scrounging for food, and had no job. Instead of calling the police or turning him over to some state officials, Jimmy invited the boy into to his home. “River” now lives in Jimmy’s household, holds down two jobs, and has had his life saved by the “love frequency” that was emitted by one compassionate bartender.

On this road from Emmaus we don’t take Jesus anywhere. Jesus is already out there. Want to find Jesus? Want to join Jesus? Get on Jesus’ wavelength—not the wavelength of the world’s principalities and powers, but the wavelength of the Prince of Peace. The frequency of love.