

## NAMES ALONG THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Sermon material by The Rev. Ralph W. Bayfield, D.Min.+, April 26, 2020 for  
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On most people's mind today is the coronavirus that struck us as the COVID-19 disease.<sup>1</sup> When God made the first revelations to humankind they were frequently through an angel, a dream, or in a stranger. The first words spoken by God's messengers were often, "Fear not." That is still true today. In spite of the worldwide; pandemic where thousands are sick, and many have died. God is in control. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ. Today, let us hear the Word of God from the Bible, "Fear not, Do not be afraid." Listen to the scientists, "Stay the course at home. Wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds each time. (I sing Happy Birthday to my two children, that takes about 20 seconds.) If you must go out, stay six feet apart from other people. Then, have faith, look forward with hope, and; "Let us pray."

"O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family, take away all fear, arrogance, any hatred and the covid-19 sickness that infects our hearts and well-being. Break down the barriers that separate us from you. Unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth. In your good time, unite us in health and harmony. Eventually bring us together around your heavenly throne through Jesus Christ our Lord."AMEN<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Von Drehte, David: *The Washington Post*, April 23, 2020, *The Saga of COVID-19* page A27

<sup>2</sup> Price, Charles; *The Prayer Book, For the Human Family*; Church Publishing Co., Harrisburg, PA 1979 adapted by RWB 2020 page 815

Our Gospel lesson for today which follows a previous Resurrection experience, is a reading unique to Luke (24:13-35) It begins later on Easter day. Two followers of Jesus, Cleopas and an unnamed person are walking on the road to Emmaus, a village about seven miles outside of Jerusalem. They are talking about all the things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself joins them, but they do not recognize Him. Their eyes are not focused on Jesus. They may have felt so down that they are looking at the ground. The Gospel tells us, they do not realize Jesus is with them.

Jesus, the Stranger asks them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”<sup>3</sup> Cleopas answers, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem that doesn’t know the things that have taken place there these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth.” He was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. But our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and they crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, besides this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning. When they did not find his body there. They came back and told us they had indeed seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But they did not see Jesus body.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* Luke 24:13-17

Then the stranger spoke to them, “O how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets declared. Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into glory?”<sup>4</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

Luke’s Gospel goes on to tell about how the the Stranger walked on ahead, as if he were going on. But the disciples strongly urged the Stranger to stay with them, because it was almost evening and the day was nearly over. So He went in to stay with them.

Although Cleopas was the host, The Stranger immediately took charge, with words that were identical to those of Jesus at the Last Supper.<sup>6</sup> When they were at the dinner table, “He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” Then the disciples “recognized Him;..... and He vanished from their sight.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus story is really an allegory about Himself, He is the “Stranger” in the narrative.

These are difficult times today. Sometimes wonderful things can take place in the midst of difficult times. There is the recent story of two people who are strangers to each other. An eight year old boy from Queensland, Australia heard that Tom Hanks the actor of “*Won’t You Be My Neighbor*” fame and a noted typewriter enthusiast, spent more than two weeks isolated with his wife Rita Wilson, in Australia last month after testing positive for COVID-19.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* John 24:26

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* John 24:27

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Luke 22:19

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* Luke 24:31

An eight year old Australian boy, Corona De Vries after hearing about the double Oscar-winning actor's illness wrote Tom Hanks a letter.

In the letter, he asked, "Are you ok? The correspondence was the beginning of a long distant friendship. In the heartfelt letter, De Vries tragically revealed that his schoolmates called him "the coronovirus" because of his COVID-19 evoking first name, "Corona." They bullied him and picked on him as kids can do. Children can be very mean. The boy Corona wrote that it "made him sad and angry."

Hanks wasn't one to see the boy suffer. So, dusting off his retro *Corona* typewriter, which he happened to have brought with him to Australia, Tom Hanks wrote back on April 10th, "Your letter made my wife and I feel so wonderful!" The Hollywood icon added, "You're the only person I've ever known to have the name "*Corona*." Corona is like the ring around the sun, a crown." Its a beautiful thing. Then, to further lift the bullying victim's spirits, Hanks bestowed Corona De Vries with the vintage typewriter that bore the boys unique Corona name. "I thought the typewriter would suit you," he wrote, He cheekily added, "Ask a grown up how it works. And use it to write me back." "P.S. You got a friend in ME!" The star wrote this phrase about friendship in reference to the immortal line uttered by his character Woody in "Toy Story." The boy said, "I'm famous!" He cried out, "I'm a friend to him!" "I'm gonna write back soon," he said while pounding away on his eponymous typewriter.<sup>8</sup>

Tom Hanks was a "Stranger" whose gift saved the day. It was meaning and purpose for an eight year old boy, making his life livable and

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<sup>8</sup> Cost, Ben Tom Hanks gives typewriter to bullied boy named Corona;[myPost.com](https://www.mypost.com), 4/23/20

enjoyable. Corona De Vries “was on top of the world when he got the letter from Tom Hanks and the gift of the typewriter. It was a coincidence. Or was it an act of *The Holy Spirit*? Both Tom Hanks and Corona DeVries were strangers to each other, before they met.

The Resurrection Experience of Jesus meeting the disciples as a Stranger, tells us God may be working through many different people as “Strangers.” The Gospel’s tell us, God works through Holy Spirit in people. I have no doubt there are many people who are “Strangers,” in whom God is carrying out God’s purposes in God’s world.

We too receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ when we receive the gift of bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus gives us His Life. He is with us. Jesus is a stranger, but no longer strange. Remember Jesus words when He told the disciples in the story of the *Judgement of the Nations*. The King who is judging in the narrative is an allegory for Jesus Himself. The King says, that if they do something for someone else, (even the least who are Strangers), they do that to Him.....”I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”<sup>9</sup>...but he also said, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus Words are a call to each and everyone of us to do something beneficial, worthwhile and constructive for our neighbors, God’s people,. We may find Jesus is near us through Holy Spirit even when we meet “God’s Strangers” in our daily lives.

The New Testament scholar, Isabel Anders, wrote about our lesson;

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<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible, Matthew 20:40*

<sup>10</sup> *The Holy Bible, Matthew 20:45*

Luke tells us “their eyes were kept from recognizing him (the Stranger).”<sup>11</sup>

This is a situation similar to Mary’s Resurrection encounter with Jesus in the garden.<sup>12</sup> She does not recognize Him at first. Mary thinks he is the gardener until He calls her name “Mary.” One word her name “Mary,” from Jesus is significant. Names are important. People’s first name is called their “Christian” name. That is the name we are gifted at our Baptism.

In these Resurrection events we are led to realize the difference between *perception* and *recognition*. Webster defines *perception* as the act of taking possession, observation, discernment, appreciation, insight by the senses. On the other hand, *recognition* is acknowledging a claim on us. *Recognition* is the formal de facto existence of a union of two elements. Anders claims *recognition* always involves a gift from God.

As an example of *recognition*, Anders cites the Biblical call by God of Peter, who will build God’s Church. Jesus then raises the question “But whom do you say that I am?” Simon recognizes Jesus by saying, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Simon here proclaims the Stranger’s identity. Simon is gifted with a new name, “Peter.” Jesus tells Simon that “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. And you are ‘Peter’ and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it! I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”<sup>13</sup> - Here is the gift from God. AMEN.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Holy Bible, Luke:24:16*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid. John 20:14*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid. Matthew John 16:13-19*