

“Who am I?”  
Acts 2:14a, 36-41  
Luke 24:13-35

Your Christian beliefs are at your disposal twenty-four seven to assist you in life's choices. You remember Jesus' disciples when they huddled in the Upper Room following his resurrection, wondering if their beliefs about Jesus would sustain them. You remember Jesus appearing in the Upper room to the disciples saying, “Peace be with you!” denoting that God provides.

Some time passes. Two of the disciples were walking to Emmaus, a seven-mile journey from Jerusalem. It was at some point during that forty-day period following the resurrection but before the ascension. On the journey, a stranger came alongside the two disciples. What occurred in their conversation was startling. The stranger, who was Jesus, equipped the two disciples “...to put together the disparate experiences of life into a meaningful, coherent whole, to see a pattern and purpose in human history.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus demonstrated to the two disciples that their belief in him gathered up the events of their time with Jesus, particularly the past weeks, that did and did not make sense into a coherent pattern of meaning.

That's what God does for us in our journeys my friends. Our basic Christian beliefs, when practiced, gather the various sensical and non-sensical aspects of life and provide an overarching plan that our experiences do make sense, since God is at work in and through them all. In fact, placing one's faith in Jesus Christ for the first time and each and every day, answers the question “Who am I?” Who am I? I am a beloved child of God. And so are you. And you'll experience that belovedness when you exercise the belief that placing one's faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord really makes a difference. Jesus was, is and continues to be an amazing Savior and Lord. Wouldn't you agree?

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<sup>1</sup>John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 30.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, Christians have an excellent opportunity to live their faith. In this regard, Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and the emerita Butman Professor of Religion at Piedmont College, writes, “‘I think I just did the worst on my own religion,’ one student says as she drops her paper on the pile. A young man behind her asks me if Constantine was the main figure in the Protestant Reformation and slaps his forehead when I break the bad news. The only student who makes an A+ on the Christianity quiz is Shlomo, the orthodox Jew, perhaps because he is the only one who knew he had to study for it.”<sup>2</sup> Know what you believe. Live those basic Christian beliefs.

The texts in Acts 2:14a, 36-41 and Luke 24:13-35 declare that the answer to the question, “Who am I?” is best discovered by knowing who knows you the best and loves you the most.

In Acts 2:14, 36-41, we hear the continuance of the first public sermon about the resurrection. Not everyone who was present went to be baptized. At least the text suggests that Peter’s efforts weren’t 100% successful. What we do know is that Peter’s presence and words communicated to everyone that Jesus Christ loves them. Those who did not welcome Peter’s message that day, however, were told that the promise remains for them and their children, as well as “for all who are far away.” And the promise remains to this day.

In Luke 24:13-35, we learn, once again, that death loses and love wins. The story of the road to Emmaus engages us in familiarity and mystery. The stranger, Jesus, opened the minds of the disciples to the reality of love winning and death losing. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, not only the two disciples, but every person has the offer to believe in Jesus and have the story of salvation capture them. The stranger, the resurrected Jesus, helped the two disciples then and us now to be honest with the brokenness of being human. In fact, Christ’s appearance to the two disciples on the road testifies to the presence of Christ in the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup. Once again, the significance of Jesus reframing Passover in the Upper Room prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, connects to Jesus saying “Peace be with you” in the Upper Room on

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<sup>2</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2019), 140.

the evening of the resurrection, which now informs the two disciples on the road to Emmaus how Jesus' life was given for them and all humanity.<sup>3</sup>

What difference does the risen Savior make in answering the question "Who am I?" When you know that you are reconciled to God the Father through God the Son and live life empowered by the Holy Spirit, you are grounded in forgiveness and hope that God is with you, at all times and in all ways. On the road to Emmaus, the two disciples knew the story of Jesus's death and resurrection. They knew the story of God's love calling a people to know, love and follow Jesus. But at the time, it was their beliefs not being put into action that caused their knowledge to be ineffective for the real life needs they experienced.

There is a plan and purpose for your life. Reflect upon basic Christian beliefs such as God being Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life; that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; and that God is sovereign and nothing happens in life by accident, but with purpose. Jesus, because of his resurrection and by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, makes a real difference in real people, who live in a real world, who have real needs. Again, Barbara Brown Taylor, the author of *Holy Envy*, writes,

When I talk to "everyone else" on school field trips, I learn that Christian evangelism has done more to dim their view of Christianity than anything else they know about it. "Let us think of the bulk of your people who preach the gospel," Gandhi once said to an Indian missionary. "Do they spread the perfume of their lives? That is to me the sole criterion. All I want them to do is to live Christian lives, not to annotate them." As a convert myself, I get that.<sup>4</sup>

The tension between familiarity and mystery, which we experience daily, asks us to embrace the unknown with the confidence of our basic Christian beliefs. Only when we practice what we believe to be true as Christians to inform the decisions we make can we embrace mystery with confidence. Jesus calls each one of us by name to follow him. God has a warm

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<sup>3</sup>In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Ian A. McFarland, Karoline M. Lewis, Margaret P. Aymer and Ruben Rosario Rodriguez in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 225-227, 227-229, 236-238 and 238-240.

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy*, 151.

relationship with you. God loves you and wants you to love others with that same empathetic, listening, caring, loving and compassionate warmth. Put your beliefs into action and experience knowledge being effective for the real life needs you and others experience.

Until your Christian beliefs inform your answer to the question, “Who am I?” you’re not living authentically in the public square discussion on any number of matters that are shaping the “new normal” that’s emerging for our existence as individuals, communities, societies and global citizens. Let’s seek a better way to live together, acknowledging the crucible of familiarity and mystery, in which everyone lives. That better way is remembering, telling and living the way of Jesus. Practice the basic Christian beliefs you affirm. You are a beloved child of God. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 26 April 2020  
by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in his Study at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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