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I love a mystery, a whodunit suspense, whether it's an Andrew Greeley or Dean Koontz novel or a CSI drama on television. Sometimes I figure out what's going to happen before it occurs, but more often I'm quite surprised by how the story ends. When Staci and I watch something suspenseful on TV, we often try to see who can guess the outcome first—a friendly competition of paying attention to the clues.

Those who first heard the story in Luke's Gospel about Cleopas and his unnamed friend, who could possibly be his wife, may have felt the mystery as ancient storytellers told about the encounter with a traveler along the road to the town of Emmaus. Today the story contains even more mystery, for the town no longer exists, gone without a trace of where it may have been located. Some biblical manuscripts suggest it was about 7 miles from Jerusalem, while others indicate it was more like 19 miles away.

What's even more mysterious is the fact that only Luke tells this story about the two travelers on their way to Emmaus. In addition, Cleopas and his friend are never mentioned again in scripture, dissolved into the mist of time.

It reminds me of the musical Brigadoon, a mysterious Scottish village that appears out of the mist for one day every 100 years. Two American tourists wandering through the woods stumble into this town that does not exist on their maps. From there the story evolves into a love story, with one of the Americans falling in love with a woman from Brigadoon, who will disappear the next morning for another century.

In Luke's story, there's a similar sense of mystery, and my mind begins to add special effects. A little mist here and there. A few spotlights on the travelers. Mysterious music playing softly in the background.

But did you notice what's even more mysterious? The two followers of Jesus didn't even recognize the traveler who joined them. Did *you* catch who he was? The narrator tells us the mysterious traveler was Jesus. When he appeared to Cleopas and his friend after the resurrection and joined them on their walk, they didn't even recognize him. He casually entered into conversation, asking them about the latest news, and they found it somewhat surprising that he seemed to not know the big event—the death of Jesus. They

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explained how they had hoped Jesus would be the one to set them free from their oppressors, and they told him how some of the women had discovered an empty tomb.

This mysterious person they did not recognize as Jesus then referred to the ancient scriptures, explaining how the Messiah would have to suffer. The two travelers were so intrigued that when they arrived home, they invited the supposed stranger to stay with them since the evening was late.

Jesus stood there in their midst, and they didn't even recognize him! The story prompts me to wonder, how many times have we missed the presence of Jesus?

We often get so caught up in the big news stories about the struggling economy, the environment, the political gossip, or the conflicts in the world, that we sometimes miss the presence of Jesus nearby.

Other times we get so overwhelmed with our own life issues: the unpaid bills that continue to pile up and block our view, the check-engine light that comes on in the car and blinds us, the disappointing grade on a test at school that fogs our vision, the friend who

suddenly won't talk to you for no apparent reason, or the boss at work who's giving you a hard time. All of these events make it difficult to see any hope.

Sometimes we find ourselves feeling like Cleopas and his friend, sadly walking along the road, forgetting our stories of faith, missing the presence of Christ right here in our midst.

Cleopas and his friend didn't recognize Jesus walking with them, telling them stories about himself, staying in their home—until he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Did you hear that? The story echoes the actions of the last supper Jesus had with his disciples—took bread, blessed, broke, gave—which also recalls the time he broke bread and fish offered by a little boy and fed the crowd. At those ordinary moments of breaking bread, something extraordinary occurred. When Cleopas and the unnamed friend broke bread with Jesus, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

When we gather to break bread, our eyes are opened to see that we are one family, as writer Peter Marty observed as he wrote about

an incident Viktor E. Frankl recounted from when he was in a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl was at the end of his rope from the deprivation. At this point, when he had lost every possession and had every value destroyed, someone gave him a piece of bread. Frankl wrote, “I remember how a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at the time. It was the human ‘something’ this man also gave to me—the word and the look which accompanied the gift.”

Marty comments, “Keep on the lookout for that ‘human something’ the next time you break bread with another person. Their words may offer more nutrients than the bread in your hand. Their look may open the eyes of your heart. It might all be a small taste of the first Emmaus.”¹

It’s through the breaking of bread that our eyes are opened, that we can see the presence of Christ among us, not just here at church, but in each moment of our lives—even in the world around us.

Yesterday, on Earth Day, many opened their eyes to see God’s creative presence in the environment that sustains our lives. Did you ever stop and think about how amazing our world is put together? We breathe oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, which is exactly what plants need to survive, which in turn give off oxygen for us to breathe.

Did you ever stop and think about ice? Just imagine what would happen if ice did not float. The ice on rivers and lakes would sink to the bottom, the surface would freeze again and sink, and soon the entire body of water would be solid ice. Since ice floats, only the surface freezes, keeping the water temperature stable and allowing fish and other wildlife to survive.

Our planet Earth is just the right distance from the Sun. If we were closer water would boil away; if farther away, the water would freeze. Either scenario would destroy us.

Our environment is so amazing, and sometimes we need to have our eyes opened to see how we can care for it, as did a group of 21 youth who brought a lawsuit against the government two years ago,

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suggesting that the government has known that burning fossil fuels is harmful to environment.²

Levi, age 9, the youngest plaintiff, said, “I work hard to protect the environment and animals near my home. I want my government to work hard to protect my future and the future of the animals and ecosystems in our country.”

Victoria, age 17, said, “Climate change isn’t just about temperatures and weather, it’s about people. Our earth will be here for millennia; it’s up to us to decide if humanity will be too.”

Hazel, age 11, had her eyes opened and hopes all eyes will see, for she explained, “We need to protect

our land, water, air, and wildlife. Our government is turning a blind eye to our planet and our future.”³

Not everyone will agree on how to care for our planet. Some may consider the solution as mysterious as the missing town of Brigadoon or Emmaus, but these youth remind us to open our eyes and find ways to care for this wonderful world that God has created. When we break bread together, may our eyes be opened to recognize God’s presence not only in the bread of the earth and the juice from grapes of the ground, but in each holy part of God’s wonderful creation.

¹ *The Lutheran magazine*, June, 2012, quoted in *Homiletics*, May 2014.

² See <https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/federal-proceedings/>

³ All quotations from <https://www.ourchildrenstrust.org/meet-the-youth-plaintiffs/>