

Finding Christ in the Chaos
Luke 9:28–36; Luke 24:13–35
Sunday, March 2, 2025 (Transfiguration)

Let us pray: Not my word, Lord, but your word be spoken, that your will might be done *in* us and *through* us, in Christ. Amen.

A few weeks ago, Jen and Emily and some others from the church went to see a musical called *Come from Away*. If you're not familiar with it, it is based on actual events from September 11, when U.S. airspace was closed, and 38 planes carrying around 7,000 people were diverted to an airport in the small town of Gander on the Canadian island of Newfoundland. Gander only had around 10,000 people living there, so in an instant, the population of the town almost doubled, and they had no idea how long they would be there. Where do you *house* all of those people? How do you *feed* them? There were all of these logistical questions to answer. But also, people were scared and sad as they found out what had happened in the attacks and that they had lost people they love. People were separated from their families. A lot of the passengers didn't even speak English. And they were all afraid because it felt like the whole world had been turned upside down, and no one had any idea what was next.

The passengers ended up being stuck in Gander for five days, and in that time, the residents of the town opened up their homes and their schools and their restaurants and stores and everywhere else they could to welcome these strangers in and help them feel at home. They got them clothes and food and bedding and toiletries and diapers and medicine and everything else they needed. They made them honorary Newfoundlanders in a ceremony at a local bar. In the midst of all this chaos and confusion, people came to know and understand other people who were different from them. A few people even fell in love! It is a story about showing kindness and hospitality in the most difficult, uncertain circumstances; finding hope in the midst of fear and life in the midst of death.

We find ourselves living in very difficult, uncertain times. Whether it is politics or plane crashes, wars, natural disasters, so many of us feel like the world has been turned upside down, and we're just waiting for *what's next*. In all of that, how do we find hope in the midst of fear and life in the midst of death? Where do we find *Christ* amidst the *confusion* and *chaos* of life?

Today is Transfiguration Sunday, and earlier we heard the story of Jesus taking three of his disciples – Peter, James, and John – up on a mountain to pray. And while they were there, it says, the appearance of Jesus' face changed, and his clothes became dazzlingly white. The glory of God was shining forth from him. And then Moses and Elijah appeared next to him, talking with him. Peter is *amazed* by this; it's like the greatest moment of his life. So he says to Jesus, "It is *good* for us to be here! We should set up three tents – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah – and just stay here forever!

But then just as suddenly, things begin to change. A cloud descends upon the mountain and surrounds them. So Jesus is radiating light, two dead people are there, and now they're inside a cloud. This is like something out of a horror movie! And it says that the disciples were *terrified*. But in the midst of their fear, the voice of God speaks to them from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" And then it's over. Let's hold on to that story; we're going to come back to it in just a moment.

We heard another story of transfiguration from the end of Luke's gospel. Jesus has been crucified, killed, and buried a few days earlier. Their teacher, their messiah, their friend is dead. This movement that they devoted three years of their lives to is over. Their whole world has been turned upside down. Two of Jesus' disciples are walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, talking about everything that has happened with Jesus. While they are walking and talking, Jesus himself starts walking along with them, but they don't recognize him; something about him is different. Jesus asks them what they are talking about, and it says that they stood still, looking sad.

They start telling this stranger everything that has happened with Jesus – how he was condemned by the religious leaders and crucified. And then they say, “But we had hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel.” *But we had hoped....* They have lost their hope.

This stranger starts talking to them about scripture, showing them that *of course* the Messiah had to suffer all these things. They keep walking along, talking, until they reach the village. They invite this stranger to come stay with them, and as they all sit down to eat together, the stranger takes bread and blesses it and breaks it – just like Jesus had done a few days before in the last supper they shared with him – and when he does this, their eyes are opened, and they recognize that this *stranger* is actually *Jesus*. And then just like that, he disappears, and it’s over.

Why these two stories? Obviously, they are both stories of transfiguration, Jesus’ appearance being changed. But these two stories are also connected by a single word. On the mountain, Jesus’ appearance changes, and his clothes become *dazzling* white. On the walk to Emmaus, the two disciples tell the stranger that some women from their group went to the tomb that morning. They didn’t find Jesus’ body there. Instead they saw a vision of two angels. If we look back a few verses earlier, it says that when the women got to the empty tomb, two men in *dazzling* clothes stood beside them.

Dazzling. It’s the Greek word *astrapto*, and these are the only two places in the Bible that it is used. Other words for *dazzling* are used elsewhere, and when they are, it is always in reference to the presence and glory of God. These two stories are about people experiencing the presence and glory of God in the midst of fear and death and hopelessness. But they only come to *recognize* the presence and glory of God after showing *kindness* and *hospitality*.

On the mountaintop, the disciples *see* the glory of God, but they don't fully understand what's going on yet. It's not until Peter offers to make dwelling places for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, giving them somewhere to stay, that they hear the voice of God saying, "This is my Son." *Then* they understand who Jesus is. On the road to Emmaus, these two disciples do not recognize this stranger until they invite him in to stay with them. They give him food, and it is *then* that they recognize Jesus and understand who he is. In the midst of fear and death and hopelessness, they show kindness and hospitality and come to recognize the presence and glory of God.

And maybe that's how it is for us. In these uncertain times, when it feels like our worlds have been turned upside down – whether it's due to politics or plane crashes or natural disasters or wars or cancer or Alzheimer's or addiction or the death of someone we love; whatever fear and pain and suffering and death we are surrounded by – how do *we* find hope in the midst of that? How do we find *Christ* in the *confusion* and *chaos* of life? When things feel too big and impossible and we don't know what to do, maybe all we can do is show kindness and hospitality to the people around us.

One of the hardest lessons to learn as a pastor – and I think in *all* of life – is that we can't *fix* people. As much as we might *want* to, only God can do that. All *we* can do is love them, give them a place to share their hopes and their fears and their pain, listen to them, let them know they're not alone, and maybe we stumble across some crumb to feed them that might nourish their souls. But you can't *fix* them, and you can't fix all of the problems in the world around us. But you *can* love the person right in front of you, show them kindness and hospitality, and if we do that enough, we come to recognize Christ in that other person, and they see Christ in us, and we realize that we are not alone. That God is with us, and that little by little, God is healing this broken world, using our acts of kindness and love as the glue that will hold it all together.

So invite someone in, to your home or your life. Invite someone to share a meal. Welcome the new person in the neighborhood or at work or at school or at church. Feed someone who is hungry. Visit someone who is sick or lonely. Give someone space to share their hopes or their fears or their pain with you. Listen to them. Laugh with them. Cry with them. Pray with them. Be patient with someone, in traffic or in a store or a restaurant or at home. Speak up for someone who can't speak for themselves. Help someone who can't help themselves. Let them know they're not alone, and you will realize that *you* are not alone.

When it feels like the world is falling apart around us, the one thing that we can hold onto is that Christ is risen. He has conquered sin and evil and suffering and death. Those things are still present among us, but they do not hold the final word in our lives. Jesus said, "In the world you will have troubles, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Christ is risen, and because *he* lives, *we* can live new lives with God and with each other, now and forever. Christ is risen, so look for him – in the neighbor and the stranger, the friend and the enemy – show them kindness and hospitality, and you just might see him.