

When I was working in Little Rock, there was this big rummage sale upstairs in the Parish Hall. I'd tried to stay clear of the thing as much as possible because I knew if I went in, they'd expect me to buy something, and the last thing I needed was some random ceramic duck or another set of orange plastic glasses. But it happened directly above my office, so after a couple of days of listening to hundreds of pairs of feet stomping overhead, I broke and went upstairs. As I was going up, another person was coming down, so I sorta scooted over and kept ascending as this person descended. Only they didn't. They stopped and turned to look at me, so I looked up and nodded a silent greeting and kept going. The person on the stairs piped up and said, "Brooks Cato! You don't remember me?" I froze, sure I was in trouble, but when I looked the person in the face, I had absolutely no idea who she was.

She introduced herself, and the locked door in my mind palace flew open. This was my best friend's high school girlfriend. Lord knows how much time we spent together, how many dates we went on with me as the third wheel, how many times they "rehearsed" the stage kiss their characters had in the big spring production. I absolutely knew her, I just didn't recognize her. It was only a thirty second encounter, but it threw off the rest of my day. I spent a few days really thrown by the hole in my memory. Only it wasn't really memory. When I looked her in the face, I didn't have a moment of vague recognition followed by a struggle to place her. She was just another person coming and going, and all I had to offer was a shallow hello and the bare-minimum manners to get out of her path. It's not that I was sure I knew her; it's that I was sure I didn't.

But this wasn't the first time. When I was tiny, I saw my kindergarten teacher in Wal*Mart, and it blew my little mind. I stared at this kind-eyed woman and knew she looked familiar but I couldn't figure it out. It wasn't until mom said hi and Mrs. Brown came over that it clicked. And then my little brain blew again when I realized that kindergarten teachers were allowed to leave the school. I could've sworn they just lived there, but no, here she was, in the wild. Had she escaped? Was she on the lamb? Is the order of the whole world disintegrating? It was a big moment for little ol' me.

These days, I'm often on the receiving end of that. When I'm out in my civvies, I get a lot of those looks: "where do I know that guy from.?" My favorites are when they figure out I'm a priest and immediately change how they act. A lot of y'all are or were teachers. I'm certain you've had these moments, too. And I'm glad to see you've escaped the confines of school to be here this morning. And since you weren't my kindergarten teachers, and since you're in these pews where I know you best, I recognize you. And since I'm up here and collared and preaching, I suspect you recognize me, too.

But it doesn't always work out so cleanly. The day Jesus steps out of his tomb, the day Mary Magdalene and the other Marys run to tell what they'd found, the day something in the world dramatically changes, Cleopas and another disciple make their way to a little place called Emmaus. It's such a small place, by the way, that no one knows where it is now. So, those two are on the way to Emmaus, a name that means something like "a place with some hot springs," and we have no idea why they're going there. Though, if I'm honest, after all they'd been through, a place with some hot springs sounds like an amazing idea to unwind and process the horror of the previous week and the unbelievable news they'd gotten that morning.

That name, by the way, "a place with some hot springs," part of the reason no one knows where it is is because it was super common. It'd be like saying you're going to Springfield without saying which state. We don't know exactly where they're headed, and we don't really know why they're headed there either. But I don't think it matters all that much what specific place we're talking about. I think what matters is that the place is unremarkable, the name is unremarkable, and the encounter begins on an unremarkable road and ends in an

unremarkable room over a typically unremarkable meal. In other words, it could've been anywhere, anytime, any food, maybe anybody. Cleopas is never mentioned anywhere else in scripture. And we don't even get the name of the "other disciple." It's anyone.

You know, Jesus walks among them unrecognized over and over. This is our third week of this. Mary Magdalene mistook him for a gardener. It wasn't until Jesus called her by name that it clicked. The disciples saw Jesus walk right through a wall and were astonished until he showed them his wounds. And now these two on the road get hours of conversation before bread reveals his identity. He walks among them unknown. This post-Resurrection Jesus is kinda confusing. Does he really look different or are those closest to him so incapable of imagining seeing him again that they look right at him and don't see the truth. Like a kindergarten teacher in Wal*Mart, he's out of place. Or maybe he does look different, we don't know. What we do know is that when things start to click they recognize him when and where they least expect. He's supposed to be dead; he should've been in the tomb. But that's already turned up empty. So it's empty; that doesn't mean he should be walking around. But that already turned up wrong, too. He definitely shouldn't be able to talk or touch or teach. But here we are. Scriptures opened, bread blessed, hearts burning.

I guess in all this, I'm taken by how unremarkable it is to fail to recognise everyday people, and how easy it is to extend that to the most remarkable. Where do we know that guy from? Oh! Oh. Oh yeah. *That's Jesus*. If we take our theology seriously, there's something cool in the works here. We say we're supposed to look for Christ in all persons. That's from our baptism! "Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself, ... striving for justice and peace .. and respecting the dignity of every human being." It starts with looking and loving and leads to a whole lot more. And that's hard. I mean, respecting the dignity of every human being is hard, because "every's" a mighty big word. It's hard to love everyone and, sometimes, it's *real* hard to even want to look for Christ in 'em. And it might just be hard to look for Christ in everyone because we're probably gonna have to change something when we find him there. There, in the weirdest of places, in the most normal places, in the faces of enemies and jerks and castoffs and modern day lepers. The voiceless, the debt-laden, the underpaid, the desperate...they're all headed to Emmaus. Watch the news for twenty seconds, and you'll see a hundred unlovable faces, each of them carrying something of Christ to be found.

To be clear, not everything about everyone is Christlike, but everyone carries something of Christ. It's easy for a lot of us to see Christ in about half the population, and the other half is anything but. That might be human nature, but it's not the love we promised to share. Turn on that news again, and look, really look. The Tennessee Three, faces of Christ all of 'em. The trans rep in Missouri silenced anytime she wishes to speak, voice of Christ. The child shot for ringing the wrong doorbell, heart of Christ, God knows it. But y'all, that's the easy part of looking for Christ. It's easy to see Jesus in folks like that, at least I sure hope it is. The hard part's looking at that news again and searching for Christ in Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas City on the other side. Is there any bit of Christ in the folks doing the nasty work to sanction, to silence, or to shoot? The hard answer is yes. There is. It's not Jesus in the silencing, it's Jesus in spite of that. It's searching for the better angels of their nature.

Now, I don't say this lightly. I'm fairly certain this is the single hardest thing our tradition asks us to do. Seeking Christ in *all* persons is a mighty big ask. At times it leads to blessing and heart-warming treasures. And at times, it opens us up to all the dangers of naivete. But it's worth it. Our Presiding Bishop likes to say, "if it's not about love, it's not about God." Love has the power to change the world, but it's gotta be sincere and searching. Love rises that fateful Easter day. Love holds us, love surprises us, love walks among us. Love saves us, even when we can't recognize it. Love saves us even when we can't imagine it in a new face. Love saves us

even in new places. Love opens our eyes and our hearts and our hands to the ever-growing wonders of this world. And love is hard.

I want to be abundantly clear. Love is a lot of things, but love is not a get-out-of-jail-free card. Recognizing Jesus in the most despicable doesn't release them from consequences. Some people need to get to know real accountability real intimately. That's fine, and it is, crucially, different from revenge. Those oppressing, those stealing wages, those sending Creation through a woodchipper, they're not exempt from consequences. And neither are they exempt from our love. The two are not mutually exclusive. We can still seek and serve Christ in all persons while also holding all persons accountable. As long as we do it with love. Because if it's not about love -- love for *all* people -- then it's not about God.