

What Do We Co-create in Space and Time?

Friends (long-time and new), let us wonder together on this third Sunday of Easter and this Integrity of Creation Sunday: What do we co-create in space and time? Let us pray.

God of resurrection power, you ARE the renewal of life. Send your Spirit into each of our lives today to comfort us and challenge us to follow in the way of your risen Christ. May your love that overpowers death be recognizable among us. In all the challenges we face as individuals and as a community, grant us serenity to accept things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Fellow Easter people, today's readings from Psalms and the gospel of Luke and yesterday's marking of a 54th Earth Day converge, urging us to wonder about co-creation and how our faith guides us as co-creators of love and justice among all created beings.

I invite us to begin by considering a fundamental question of our faith tradition: **Is Christ recognizable among us?** Perhaps you have heard the following statement, attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: *"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."* In searching for context for these words, I found that scholars have not identified a particular oral or written source for this supposed statement by Gandhi. However, I did find a relevant quote from him.

American Methodist missionary Stanley Jones interacted with Gandhi on numerous occasions in the twentieth century. Once, when Jones wondered aloud to Gandhi how Christianity might become naturalized in India, Gandhi offered this thought: *"I would suggest first of all that all of you Christians - missionaries and all - begin to live more like Jesus Christ."*

Words from Mahatma Gandhi to Stanley Jones: *“I would suggest first of all that all of you Christians - missionaries and all - begin to live more like Jesus Christ.”*

So I wonder this morning: **Do you experience Christ alive through the words and actions of those who surround you? Is Jesus Christ recognizable to others in your words and actions – your way of life?**

Let’s remind ourselves what is meant by the term Christ. In the tradition of Christianity (named for the word Christ), we have spoken the words Jesus Christ as a pair so often that the word Christ can sound as though it were a middle name or surname for Jesus. On the contrary, Christ is an important title we use to recognize the role and work of Jesus in human history. Christ is our English translation of the Greek word *Christos*, meaning “the anointed one.” We believe that Jesus was uniquely anointed by God, sent into the world to reveal the way of Love. We believe that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection were God’s defining response to humankind calling on God to save us.

Let’s explore how we might recognize Christ alive through the movements of those around us. And let’s imagine how Christ might come alive to others through the ways we live our lives. Our readings for today provide us with much to ponder. These are the words that spoke most clearly to me from the companion text to the Psalm:

*“Precious to You are all whose will decreases,
who abandon themselves into your Will.
O Beloved, consider me your friend;
I long to co-create with You.
For You have loosed the bonds of fear in me.”*

What a challenge to let our own will decrease as we abandon ourselves to the divine will of the Love that is God! And what a joy to feel bonds of fear loosen in us enough to be able to co-create with divine Love! I'll read that brief passage once more:

*“Precious to You are all whose will decreases,
who abandon themselves into your Will.
O Beloved, consider me your friend;
I long to co-create with You.
For You have loosed the bonds of fear in me.”*

I admit that I initially felt quite troubled by the phrase “who abandon themselves.” However, given that a direct translation of the Psalm states, “The death of your faithful is precious in your sight,” let’s roll with the challenge to abandon ourselves for now. As we wonder today if we are co-creating with a recognizable presence of the risen Christ, let’s consider how concepts and experiences of self fit in.

In the Leadership for Social Justice program from which I will soon graduate at United Seminary, one of our instructors (Ned Wick Moore, renowned trainer of community organizers in the twin cities) recently spoke with us about a spectrum that places selfishness and selflessness on either end and self-interest in the middle. Selfishness is an extreme focus on one’s own needs and desires. Selflessness is an extreme focus on the other’s needs and desires. Self-interest is concern for one’s own advantage or well-being, one’s needs and desires. Clearly identifying our own needs and desires such that we can advocate for our own advantage or well-being allows us to engage with others from places of wholeness and integrity. We can claim our own self-interest without being overly, unhealthily selfish or selfless.

The Psalmist is energized by realizing how bonds of fear loosen when they lean into the divine Will of God's love. That loosening of bonds of fear is in one's self-interest and potentially for the greater good. From that space of release, we can then co-create the reality of the risen Christ – that is, love and justice embodied through our living.

Let's turn now to the gospel reading for today, that it might remind us of Jesus, the risen Christ, the one whom we long to recognize among us.

We heard: *“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’”*

Note that Jesus didn't inadvertently bump into the two friends while looking down at his cell phone, offer a half-interested 'How you doin'?' and hardly listen for a perfunctory 'fine.' Jesus did something that is radically countercultural in our space and time. He consciously worked to make space for the others. Jesus approached them, began to walk alongside them, and asked them several direct questions in order to learn what was on their minds and hearts. He stayed focused on them, resisting the temptation to shift the conversation to his own thoughts and feelings. May we, like Jesus, might make space for others to experience their belovedness.

As the story unfolds, the two disciples begin to experience a new revelation of God's love through Jesus' death and resurrection. Their senses are opened by the blessing, breaking and sharing of bread.

But we cannot overemphasize the crucial power of those first moments of their encounter and convergence with the risen Christ. We all need to know that someone sees or hears us before we will begin to trust that the person cares.

We need to act out of the recognition that others need the same from our companionship. We co-create with the love of God with we accompany one another.

I would like to close by sharing with you a poem by William Arthur Ward that I found at the age of thirteen. In 1995, fifth through eighth graders in my Lutheran grade school had the opportunity to purchase inspirational posters from a magazine. We were likely selling them as a school fundraiser. I purchased a poster of Ward's poem and it has been informing my life ever since. This dog-eared, thumb tacked, beloved poster now hangs framed in our main level restroom here at People's Congregational Church. The poem is entitled "Do You?" I encourage you to close your eyes if it helps you to receive it.

*Do you **pause** to see the sunrise
As you start each golden day?
Do you **stop** to watch the sunset
In the midst of work or play?
Do you **listen** to others
As they share their dreams with you?
Do you **give** them inspiration
For the great deeds that they would do?
Do you **give** a cheerful greeting
To the persons who are sad?
Do you **reach** out, **smile**, and **touch** them?
Do you leave them feeling glad?*

*Do you **give** yourself in service?
Are your motives good and true?
When you **spend life** helping others
They will **see God's love** in you!*

Friends, we would do well to follow the wisdom of the Psalmist and of Jesus and of William Arthur Ward – expecting to see and recognize the powerful beauty of Christ in everyone.

So, do you?

Do you recognize Christ alive in yourself and others?

Do you live in a way that makes Christ recognizable to those with whom your path intersects?

Nineteenth century Swiss philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel once wrote these words: *“Life is short. We don’t have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind.”*

May we be swift to love. May we make haste to be kind.

May we embody the empowering love of the risen Christ. The Earth community and Love itself are counting on us. Amen.

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People’s Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
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Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19; Luke 24: 13-35