

So, did anybody think we might actually find Jesus hiding behind the communion table?

Does it seem unreasonable to ask where we can find Jesus? Especially when we are in a church? We keep talking about church as belonging to Jesus. We talk about Jesus being present with us through the Holy Spirit when we come into worship together. Jesus himself said whenever two or more are gathered, Jesus will be there.

But where? How do we know Jesus is here?

John Wesley, an Englishman and one of three founders of the Methodist church had an experience that might help answer this question. Wesley was in worship, in London, at a time when he - an ordained minister in the Anglican tradition - was in fact feeling very distant from God. Everything that he thought he was supposed to achieve had gone wrong and he even had doubts about God's existence. But one night, he went to worship where something happened. It was something that was already beginning to happen days earlier but it was this night where it broke open. Wesley heard a passage from Martin Luther's introduction to the Letter to the Ephesians and Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed."

I like that phrase, "strangely warmed" because for me it does describe one of the ways I feel when I start to sense God, Jesus Christ, present with me, with all of us. Strangely - because there's a sense of "otherness" a sense of a presence outside of ourselves and its something I only feel when I am sensing God's presence. Warmed is because I feel love. I feel God's love filling me up.

Wesley wrote in his journal about that experience. He wrote, "About a quarter before nine, while he (Luther) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He (Christ) had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

So one of the ways we know Jesus is in this church is very personal. It an awareness, a sensing, that is inside us. We can't say to each other, "Hey, do you feel that?" like you might say "hey did you hear that?" when a beautiful song is sung. Everyone hears a noise but not everyone senses Jesus. Not all the time.

There's another way to find Jesus in a church - and that's to look around at what that church is doing. Is the church acting like Jesus in the community around them? What did Jesus do?

He fed people

He gave them comfort

He taught them about God

He asked the rich to share their wealth

He didn't judge, at least not the people who were suffering and poor like sex workers, farmers who had been thrown off their land, workers who had lost their jobs, not even those evil tax collectors. The only people Jesus judged were the rich ones and even then, he had compassion for the rich people trapped in a system where they couldn't share their wealth with anyone outside of the family.

Most of all, I think, Jesus loved everyone he encountered. Jesus loved them with God's love. And that's what we need to see in a church today if we want to see Jesus. We need to see that church love each other, love the stranger, love whomever they encounter.

And this is where Paul gets going on his next metaphor for that relationship between a congregation and God. Last week, Paul talked about the congregation as being a field filled up with a healthy, well tended crop. That each congregational member has been called into faith, into new life in Christ by God in ways that are much like how a seed opens up underground and out of sight. Paul told us last weekend that the field may be tended by many different workers, the field belongs to God who knows the land and what grows upon it intimately. Nothing happens on this field without God's knowledge and constant creating and re-creating.

This morning Paul turns to the building trades. Foundations to be specific. I don't know a lot about building a house or a workplace but I get the idea that foundations are important. Wood frame and wooden sidings on bare earth don't last for very long. Both rot and bugs find easy dining and soon the house is down. But it turns out you can't just throw down any old pile of rocks or poured cement either. Before you build a foundation, you have to know the earth, the land. If the earth is soft, then the house or building sinks. Sometimes all at once and sometimes it just sort of pitches off to one side like the leaning tower of Pisa. That tower started falling over by the time the builders added the weight of

two stories. The soil on one side of the building was softer than the other and the foundation didn't take that into account. You can have soft soil on one side of the building if you plan extra support. So Paul and the people of Corinth know about foundations too. They know buildings fall down without a decent foundation. But if you build with a really good, well designed, solidly and carefully foundation, then the rest of the building can last forever.

The other thing a foundation does is shape the size of the building. The building will not overhang the foundation at the ground and although it may have a porch or two or maybe a window box, the building takes the shape of the foundation. If you want to expand the size of the building, you have to expand the foundation.

So when Paul says, the church of God is a building built on the foundation of Jesus Christ - he means not only is that a solid, dependable structure we can all count on to last for centuries, we also - as a church built on the foundation of Jesus Christ - take the shape of Jesus Christ at work in this world. No bigger, no smaller. We, the church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, take our shape, our mission, our purpose in existing, from Jesus Christ himself. When we feed the hungry, we are in the shape of our foundation. When we share our hard earned wages so that someone else - a complete stranger - can find shelter, find clothes, we take the shape of our foundation. When we offer love and welcome, we take the shape of our foundation. We take this shape because it is Jesus Christ, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who warms our hearts so that we may be shaped away from the world and toward God.

John Wesley thought all was lost. Even though he was an ordained minister, he thought had lost track of his true shape, he thought he had become unattached from his foundation. But just like fields who are tended with love by the owner who watches over it season after season, the foundation of the church does not let go of the house built upon it. The foundation holds the walls and the walls hold the roof and there finally came a moment when John Wesley was able to see Jesus again. When his heart was strangely warmed. We know Jesus isn't behind the communion table nor hiding here in the pulpit. We know where we can find Jesus in this congregation. In you and in me and in all of us.

Let the people's hearts all be warmed and may we say, "Amen."