

Walking with “Strangers”

Written by Angela Anno

If you spent time with someone you deeply admired for nearly three years, you’d certainly recognize him—his face—especially his eyes; his voice; his movements; even anticipate what he was going to say and do. If you really knew and cared about him, you’d never forget—you’d know him anywhere—no doubt about it.

Not so fast—just ask the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were so preoccupied with their loss that they didn’t recognize Jesus when he was right there with them. They were sad and downcast, grieving Jesus’ death and not believing the reports that he had risen. Suddenly a “stranger” walked with them, compassionately listened to them, and gently taught them that the messiah was different from what they had anticipated. They still didn’t get it. They were too deep in their own grief. And they were hungry and stopped for a meal. It was only then that they recognized him “in the breaking of the bread.” And he slipped away. Newly convinced that even death couldn’t keep them from the teacher they loved, they ran back to excitedly tell the others of their experience. “Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us?”

This was a unique experience, one they wouldn’t soon forget. Yet Jesus is in our midst everyday in ways just as powerful, though perhaps not as dramatic. Jesus meets us and interacts with us just where we are and sends “strangers” to walk with us on our journeys and tell us of God’s goodness and provision.

At St. Leo’s we are often are delightfully surprised by the way God is revealed to us. Just recently one of the parish nurses was visiting an ill elderly person who mentioned that she’d really like to have some fried chicken and was especially partial to “meat around the bone”—drum sticks, thighs, and wings. The nurse bought her the chicken she requested and when she went to the food pantry to get some extras to go with it, the director offered her some fried chicken that had just come in—drum sticks, thighs, and wings!

A family from one of our partnering parishes brought some size 10 slim pants a son had outgrown. I asked one of our parishioners, a grandma, if any of her grandchildren could use the slacks. Her grandson needed new pants in size 10 slim. “This is answered prayer,” she said.

Shirley Cade, our food pantry director has many stories of God’s surprises. One of the most recent occurred around Christmas when she served a woman with a large family. Shirley said she felt the spirit nudging her to offer the woman two bikes that had been donated, only to discover the woman had hoped to get bikes, but had no money.

Jesus showing up at unexpected times and places has a long history at St. Leo’s. Lois Broerman, now director of the North Fairmount Community Center tells of a woman who desperately needed clothing but wore an unusual size. Shortly after getting the request, she got a call from a man whose wife had died and wanted to donate clothing. He hoped she could use it, he said. It was an unusual size—and a perfect fit for the lady who had asked for clothing. A coincidence or Jesus assuring the woman she was cared for even down to what size clothing she wore?

Each of us has our own stories of Jesus coming when we least expect it. After my sister died at a young age leaving two little children, I struggled to come to terms with my grief. I wanted to know what

she was thinking as her days came to a close, whether she was fearful or at peace. The answer came one day when I was confined to bed with an illness no one else ever got. A package from my brother-in-law arrived with her final diary. He said he was thinking about me and thought this might be helpful. So as I snuggled under the covers, Jesus and I read and relived her dying thoughts. She was at peace—and so was I.

There have been many other times when I've been surprised by Jesus and how and through whom he reveals his love and care for me, often in very simple ways, like a phone call from a friend, my daffodils beginning to peek out of the earth, or the warmth and gentle breath of my newborn grandson. I recognize Jesus at that moment yet how quickly I forget. During this holy Easter time when we read about Jesus coming through closed doors and bringing peace, encouraging the doubters to touch and feel his wounds, and cooking breakfast on the beach for his disciples, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be more tuned into Jesus' daily presence among us?

God walks with us through "strangers" every day. Who did God send you today? Be sure to say "Thanks."

