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**Seeing Jesus: Again and Again and Again**

Matthew 16:21-23

Mark 8:14-21

Luke 8:22-27

John 16.12-15

It probably should have come as no surprise to me, but it did all the same. I thought I had a good sense of who my Mom was. After all, I was in my fifties and had known her for a long time. I had gone through the developmental stages one goes through with a parent, from childhood, moving into independence, re-establishing a more adult like relationship in my twenties and thirties, in my late forties beginning to provide care for my mom that she once provided for me as she got older and Lewy Body Dementia put her on the steady slope of memory loss.

We sat together as a family in Braham Covenant Evangelical Church as we celebrated her life, preparing to soon place her body in the ground with my dad. I thought I knew who my Mom was. But, then people from the town and people in the church began to share stories about my mom that I had never heard. By the time they finished, I knew what of course is true for all of us. Our images of one another are always incomplete. Each of us has a mystery about us, a moreness that is yet to be discovered. No one has the full and final picture of who we are, including those who think they know us best.

In his book Meeting Jesus for the First Time, biblical scholar Marcus Borg begins with the reminder of our tendency to narrow down our image of Jesus, much like I had done with my Mom. Borg states,

“We have all met Jesus before. Most of us first met him when we were children. This is most obviously true for those of us raised in the church, but also for anybody who grew up in Western culture. We all received some impression of Jesus, some image of him, however vague or specific.

 For many the childhood image of Jesus remains intact into adulthood. For some, that image is held with deep conviction, sometimes linked with warm personal devotion and sometimes tied to rigid doctrinal positions. For others, both within and outside of the church, the childhood image of Jesus can become a problem…and no persuasive alternative has replaced it. Borg concludes, “For them, meeting Jesus again will be – as it has been for me – like meeting Jesus for the first time. It will involve a new image.”

 But, I would go so far as to say that it is not only those who are troubled by certain images of Jesus who need a new image, all of us need new images, because our current image is always incomplete. It is the incompleteness of our Jesus image of which the Gospel writers continue to remind us.

For the past many weeks we have been reflecting on portraits of Jesus presented to us by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Mark gave us an image of Jesus as a Healer and Liberator – fusing the freedom from body ills with freedom from social ills. Matthew gave us an image of Jesus as Subversive Wisdom teacher, drawing on the richness of Hebrew faith to challenge the wisdom of empires and all forms of dominance. Luke offered a picture of Jesus as a Social prophet and movement founder – living in tension with and a challenge to injustice of every form. John gave us a picture of Jesus as a spirit person, a mystic, whose experience of the spirit is firmly grounded in the reality of the world in which we live, while pulling us toward that new place God is leading. If you missed any of those portrayals, they are all found on our web site under sermon archives. I would encourage you to read them. None of the Gospel writers have a full and complete image of Jesus. Each of them offers a portrait that is only partial.

Six weeks ago we began by reflecting on the image of our white stained glass image of Jesus. We have been intentional in noting that Jesus is white, because the whiteness of Jesus is not only inaccurate historically, but also part of the incompleteness, which is true for all images of Jesus. We have also been mindful that in drawing attention to the whiteness of Jesus we are drawing attention to something that can cause discomfort because it comes close to home, especially when talking about race and racism. Our invitation on that first Sunday was to look at the window and to write a poem that captures what you see in the image beyond the issue of race. We were particularly eager to hear those things that spoke to you in a positive way.

On subsequent Sundays we have offered images of Jesus representing different cultures, ethnicity and race. This morning we return to one of those images and invite you to reflect on it and write a short poem, using the Cinqauain form, you find in your bulletin. We will give you approximately five minutes and then those who are ready will be invited to share what you have written. What in this image gives you an experience of Jesus that you would wish to affirm and embrace? What do you experience?

Who this morning is willing to share your poem? We can bring the mike to you.

Sharing

Thank you to all who have shared. I invite all of you to post your poems on the designated board in the Fellowship Hall so others might see what you have written.

I thought I knew who my mom was and yet I was surprised to learn there was more to her that I did not know. Perhaps we also will also be surprised by who Jesus is for us. It is both challenging and exciting to know that are portraits our incomplete.

**Matthew 16:21-23**

*All four of the Gospels reveal the on-going challenges the disciples face as they try to formulate their own picture of who Jesus is. The Gospel writers never hesitate to show us how often the disciples either get it completely wrong or are utterly confused. If there is a consistent message coming from the Gospels it is that ultimately each of us must struggle with and come to terms with who Jesus is.*

*In our first lesson from Matthew it is Peter who fails to see Jesus clearly. Although, Peter is the one who ultimately takes leadership for the church, he nonetheless is rebuked for how his image of Jesus is a stumbling block to the true identity of the One who reveals God’s love.*

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ 23But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

**Mark 8:14-21**

*In this lesson from Mark, the disciples have already experienced firsthand the power of Jesus to transform hopeless situations by providing enough food for those who are hungry. Yet, they are unable to understand the close connection between the bread which feeds our body and the bread which feeds our souls. In essence they fail to understand who Jesus is and what Jesus is about.*

14 Now the disciples\* had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15And he cautioned them, saying, ‘Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.’\* 16They said to one another, ‘It is because we have no bread.’ 17And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? 19When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?’ They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ 20‘And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?’ And they said to him, ‘Seven.’ 21Then he said to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’

**Luke 8:22-27**

*In Luke’s Gospel the disciples find themselves on stormy seas. By now one might expect the disciples would see Jesus as One who has the ability to calm the waters in our lives, but once again the disciples are surprised and confused by Jesus.*

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side of the lake.’ So they put out, 23and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. 24They went to him and woke him up, shouting, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. 25He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?’

**John 16.12-15**

*Perhaps because the Gospel of John is written last, some 70 – 80 years after the death Jesus, John seems less surprised by the challenge experienced by the disciples in creating an image of Jesus. On the contrary John assumes that who Jesus is becomes an ongoing revelation that is never quite complete for any of us. John’s Gospel encourages us to let the Spirit be our guide in discovering who Jesus is.*

 ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.