

D.J. Reed
May 8, 2011

Mother's Day – 8:30 & 10:30 Worship Services

Chilson Hills Church
Howell, MI

“Mama Jesus”

Luke 24:13-35

(<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>) (NRSV).

This past Monday, I woke up hearing news that Osama bin Laden had been found and killed. The ten year search for the most infamous of terrorists had sounded more like a Snipe hunt or a quest for Bigfoot. But now it seemed like a sure thing – they got him. He really did seem to be dead.

But the most amazing fact about this story wasn't the fact that bin Laden had been shot - it's where he was shot. Osama bin Laden was discovered in a costly, custom built compound with 20 foot walls near a major military academy just around the corner from Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan.

For years we have believed bin Laden was in the mountains, hidden away in a secret bunker. But military officials, intelligence agents, government officials, and the American public all learned a valuable lesson: just because our eyes are wide open, doesn't mean we can see what's under our nose.

It's a lesson we can draw from the story we just read from Scripture as well. It's a story set on a road winding towards the village of Emmaus (about seven miles from Jerusalem). We see two unnamed disciples walking along this road, talking about the amazing stories they have been hearing. The resurrection has been reported, angels have been seen, and women have been spreading the news that Jesus is alive. Of course, no one has seen Jesus yet, and no body has been found either.

While they are engrossed in this conversation, the text says that Jesus himself came near and began walking alongside of them acting as if he is completely clueless of the recent news. And the disciples for some reason are unable to recognize him.

It's kind of comical really. You almost get the feeling that Jesus is kind of playing with these two guys as they walk along the road to Emmaus; like he's messing with their heads.

The late author, Mike Yaconelli, wrote about a time when he was writing about faith. His office was a mess. Books and papers were strewn all over his desk. And then he began to sense the presence of God in his study. He said it was kind of weird, like God was playing with him. And so he went to the computer and wrote down what he was experiencing:

“I sit in my room this morning, playing hide and seek with God, enjoying the seeking as much as the finding. Catching glimpses of my Father smiling, darting from one book to another, hiding in my mind. Suddenly He is standing there in my thoughts laughing, escaping my grasp, only to turn up on the page of my notes. As I gather my notes, my Bible, my books to prepare this talk I find my soul overflowing with gratitude, with the tears of joy because God and I have just spent two hours together, just He and I playing with truth, and I leave my study with a strange understanding that I did not find God... God found me.”

Yeah, I think that's what Jesus is doing here in this story. He messes with his disciples, not so that he could show off his superpowers like Peter Parker after he got bit by a radioactive spider. He messes with them so that the faith of his disciples would be stronger. He did it to show that ultimately following Jesus is more about being found by God and less about us trying to find God ourselves. God comes to us first and we come to God. Jesus appears to us, and we discover God. That is what it means to be a Christ follower.

But the playfulness Jesus exhibits isn't like a cat that has discovered a baby rabbit in the backyard. Jesus isn't playing like a bully playing keep away from a smallish pipsqueak. No, the playfulness is an act of love, like a mother gently leading her child to a greater understanding by feigning ignorance.

My mother, like most mothers, was quite particular about her decorations, particularly her Christmas decorations. The tree, for instance, was off limits. We could put up the ornaments, but touching the brightly colored balls and figurines, or tousling the tinsel was a

definite no-no. And mom also had a tremendous symmetry radar, so if you happened to upset the color balance or move a branch out of place, then you'd better believe mom would catch it.

So, you can imagine how frightened we were when we accidentally hit the tree with a bean bag frog during an indoor game of catch. It left a huge crater and no matter how hard we tried to tease the tree back into shape, we knew mom would see the hole. And she did. But she still wanted to hear us talk about it. So, she sat down next to us and asked us to tell her what happened. My brother told the whole story, and mom listened intently, asking us brief questions for clarification.

And, you know what, she didn't punish us. At least I can't remember a whupping, tv restrictions or being grounded for two weeks. No, mom just wanted to hear us talk about it. She knew the whole story, the babysitter had already told her. She just thought it was so cute to hear our little voices give the play by play. She even recorded it. Without us knowing it, she hid a tape recorder, pressed "record," and then listened. To this day, she loves to listen to our innocent voices tell her what she already knew. And as she did this, she was helping us remember rules, the value of confession, and the power of forgiveness.

This is what Jesus did as he walked down the road and listened to the unnamed disciples who were so unaware. He veiled his own unending wisdom and listened, letting them do the talking, helping them remember and recall memories.

This is what a good mother would do: teaching by listening, being present and asking questions. He lets them process their own feelings. He lets them hear their own voices say who they thought Jesus was; that he was a mighty prophet. He lets them replay the crucifixion and the death that would follow. He lets them express their hopes, and feel their own disappointment.

One of the things we have been learning as parents is the importance of letting our boys feel disappointment and frustration without fixing things. Instead of always agreeing with your child, or trying to always solve the child's problems so that they are happy, you instead, say things like, "I'm here," or "I hear you," or "I understand," or "I care." And what happens, at least with our boys, is that it lessens their anxiety by making them feel valued, understood, comforted and cared for.

This is what Jesus does as he walks beside his disciples, who are really his children. He's being more than a good teacher or friend; he's being a good mother by

letting these two disappointed and frustrated disciples speak their minds.

But while these tender moments are to be cherished and valued, every good mother knows that there is also a time to correct the child. And Jesus does this as well.

"Oh how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!" (v. 25) he says. It was necessary for the Messiah to go through all of these things. And then he repeats the words of the prophets and Moses, interpreting the Scriptures so that they can see Jesus throughout the bigger picture.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? Just like a good mother, Jesus is giving his children a view of the bigger picture. It's almost like he's saying, "Silly! You know better than that! Remember what I told you before?"

A child sees long strip of blacktop in between them the multi-colored beach ball that lies in the grass on the other side. But a mother sees so much more. A mother sees Harley Davidsons, big, aggressive dogs, broken glass, and speeding silver Miatas. A child can only see painful shots at the doctor's office, curfew-free nights, difficult algebra tests, and boring church services. But the good mother sees so much more. A good mother knows shots can stave off an illness. A good mother knows there are limits and boundaries that include bed times. A good mother knows that math and faith are important for a child's development. A good mother sees the bigger picture.

This is what we see in Jesus who mothers his disciples towards greater understanding. But the disciples still can't see that it's Jesus. It's almost like Jesus' maternal behavior throws them off. The two disciples have these preconceived notions regarding the Scriptures, Jesus and the very God of the Creation. And because of these preconceived notions, they can't see Jesus.

William Paul Young's book, "The Shack," (a book many of you know quite well), tells the story of a man named Mackenzie who is grieving the tragic death of his daughter. And in the midst of his grief, Mackenzie or Mack has a vision about God, but God isn't at all what we expect God to look like.

God is depicted as a relationship between three distinct individuals (like The Trinity). Jesus is a Middle Eastern wearing jeans, the Holy Spirit is a lively Asian woman and the individual representing God the Father is a motherly African-American woman who goes by the name "Papa." At first Mack is troubled by the apparent

contradiction in Papa – the fact that she looks like a mama but is called “Papa.” And so “Papa” says this:

“Mackenzie, I am neither male nor female, even though both genders are derived from my nature. If I choose to appear to you as a man or a woman, it’s because I love you. For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest that you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help you keep from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning.”

“Religious conditioning” is why the disciples were kept from fully seeing who they were talking to and fully comprehending what Jesus was talking about. Their preconceived notions, their grief, their disappointment, their approach to Scripture was keeping them from seeing Jesus in their midst.

And it was only until Jesus came into their house and did something else motherly that they were able to finally see Jesus. He took the bread, blessed and broke it and he gave it to them. And their eyes were opened. It was that action of sharing, of praying, of serving them that removed the blinders from their eyes and they could see who they were talking to the whole time.

My wife, Heather, has been playing the French Horn since she was in middle school. She’s quite good, but if you were to ask conductors or anyone involved in classical music several decades ago, they’d tell you, she’s good... but not as good as a man. You see, in the classical music world, it was a well known fact that men are superior to women when it comes to playing trombones, trumpets, baritones, tubas, even French Horns. Many believed women were inferior brass players because they just didn’t have the lung capacity or power in their diaphragm to give the richest sound possible. And so orchestras around the country, particularly brass sections were dominated by men.

But that all started changing when orchestra musician unions began demanding that during auditions musicians and auditioning committees would be separated by a screen. This would force committees to make a decision based on what they heard rather than on what they saw.

And what’s interesting is that when orchestras began using screens for auditions, they actually began hiring women.

Julie Landsman was one of those French Horn players that benefitted from this screen when she auditioned for the principal French Horn position at The Met in New York City.

In her final piece, she wowed the judges by playing a High C (Lori, can you play that note?) for a ridiculously long time. The judges actually laughed because they thought it was above and beyond the call of duty. And when she walked out from behind the screen to reveal that she was indeed a “girl” they were amazed – in fact, they gasped. But what’s interesting is that they didn’t gasp because she was a woman hitting a “macho” note that they would only expect from a man, or because female French Horn players were rare.

They gasped because they knew her. Landsman had played for The Met before as a substitute. But it was only when they listened to her with just their ears that they were able to realize that she was so good. And when they were able to listen to her with only their ears, “a kind of small miracle happened... they saw her for who she was.”

Could it be that some of us who are in this room today have known Jesus but haven’t been listening? You believe in a God and you believe in Jesus, but you just haven’t been able to see Jesus for who he really is. Could it be that there are some of you who have been so broken and wounded that you can’t even fathom a loving God or a loving father? Could it be that some of you have been so disappointed by life and so burdened by grief, pain and sorrow that you can’t quite figure out what God is trying to tell you. Maybe you don’t even know Jesus is there at all?

I want to assure you Jesus has never left your side and has been guiding and instructing you – just like a good mother would do. Mama Jesus has been there all along. And if you invite Jesus into the home of your heart; if you listen and allow your preconceived notions about God and Jesus to be challenged, I believe your eyes will be opened – right here, right now.

And when this happens, I believe you will look back and see how Christ has led you. Your hearts will burn and you will tell the story of a God who is alive, who still shows up, who talks with us and walks with us as a mother with her child – just like Mama Jesus.

Would you pray with me?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

For Sunday, May 8, 2011's Sermon

Foundational Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

Featured Scripture Reflection: "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them..." – Luke 24:15

Opening Icebreaker: Share some positive memories of your mother. What were some of your mother's strengths? What faults did your mother have?

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read Luke 24:13-20. What did you notice as you read that story? What words or phrases stand out to you?
- Read Luke 24:28-35. What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How does this story make you feel?
- Read Psalm 23. Ponder these words. Compare the shepherd in this psalm to Jesus in this story.

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages make me feel?
- How do these passages challenge you?

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

A prayer

God, you walk beside us.

You speak to us.

You listen to us.

You address our questions.

You correct us.

You sit beside us.

You serve us.

May your words "burn in our hearts."

We leave this place eager to tell others about how you have worked in our lives.