

## “Two-Week Check Up”

Luke 24: 36-49

Remember the slogan of the Kodak camera company back in the 1970's? I can't quote it verbatim, but I recall it about being ready for the next “Kodak moment” in our lives. The advertising pitch of Kodak was that you never know when that next moment comes when you wish you had a camera ready. Your child's first steps. Grandpa's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. A spring rainbow in the sky. The glory of an evening sunset. The cat crawling up the screen door. These are each one the “Kodak moments” of our lives. Those times when we wish we had had a camera ready to take a picture.

We had one of those right here in our sanctuary just two weeks ago on Easter Sunday. As you will recall, we used a little bit of drama during that time. We had “Jesus” appear in front of the pulpit just as I was wrapping up the sermon. He appeared among us and said “I want you to follow me for the rest of your God-given lives.” Then, as we sang the closing hymn -- “Jesus” (a.k.a. Russ Horneck) walked back up the aisle towards the rear of the sanctuary. Then about three quarters of the way back, a little girl stepped out from the pews and whispered “I love you, Jesus” as she clutched on to his robe. Then she followed him out of the sanctuary.

Now the part about Russ being Jesus -- that was staged. He knew his lines, he knew his part. He had rehearsed. He had gotten himself into character. We had that planned.

But the part with the little girl getting up out of her pew and coming to Jesus -- that WAS NOT staged. That was pure spontaneity and genuine faith as expressed from the heart of a child. We had no idea that it was going to happen.

That was two weeks ago. For all that little girl knew, that really was Jesus whom she encountered here in the aisle of St. Peter's sanctuary. It made a difference to her that the Jesus who had been crucified, was now raised. And she made a conscious decision to follow Him. Her young life changed two weeks ago.

The question that I raise for today is: “Did *ours*?” Did *our* lives change? Does it make a difference to us that the Christ in our denominational name is not a dead martyr but a Living Messiah?

Or...is the Easter story one to be nostalgically enjoyed once each year among the colored Easter eggs, but that it's nothing more than that -- just another neat story; nothing more than allegory?

Last week on the First Sunday after Easter, Rev. Duerwaechter

preached on John 20:19-31 which told about Jesus appearing to His disciples in that locked room, after His Resurrection from the dead.

This week, the Revised Common Lectionary brings us that exact same incident, with the difference being the rendering given by Luke in his gospel, chapter 24 verses 36-48. Same encounter, just two different guys writing about it.

In Luke's gospel, it says that the disciples were "startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost." (verse 37) (NRSV)

Jesus immediately calms them down by asking them why they are scared of Him. He tells them to touch Him so that they know that He isn't a ghost. Then He eats a piece of broiled fish in front of them to further prove it, because ghosts aren't known for eating solid food.

Once Jesus finally convinced them that He isn't a spook, He was able to help them understand from the scriptures that He really is the Messiah -- who was to suffer and then rise from the dead on the third day.

And it changed their lives. The lives of those disciples, the lives of millions of people all across the world and in every century, and the life of that little girl here in our sanctuary two weeks ago -- were forever changed.

As for the rest of us, this is our two-week "check up." Jesus said that He wants us to follow Him for the rest of our own lives. So, two-weeks removed from hearing the Good News of His Resurrection...how are we doing with that?

For each of us, it's a journey. It's a process. It is something that we grow into and we eventually get better at -- provided that we make the effort to get started in the first place. We do that by coming to worship regularly and remembering that we belong to God, daily.

In the United Church of Christ we aren't real big on litmus tests in order to prove to others the validity of our faith, but we still can look at some barometric indicators of where our faith might be.

We go to the physician when we need a medical check up, and it is there that certain measurements are taken. Weight. Temperature. Blood pressure. Blood sugars, etc. There are certain things that we can use to measure our spiritual health as well.

One of those is what we think of Christ. Is He really real and personal to us, or is he just a nice legend? Is He really alive, or is he dead?

There was a woman in a large city who took it upon herself to invite everyone she met on the sidewalk to come to know Christ. She positioned

herself in front of a cigar store and stood right next to one of those wooden Indians like we've seen at the cigar places. From there she would tell people that there is a God in heaven who loves them, and she would hand out a little tract and invite them to church.

Of course, she was criticized for this and accused of being a religious nut. Someone told her that she might as well just talk to that wooden Indian as anything else. She responded by saying, *"I would rather be a real Christian and talk about my faith to a wooden Indian, than be a wooden Christian and not talk about my faith to anyone!"*

One part of our spiritual check up, therefore, is our spiritual respiration. If we take in the Gospel, are we also breathing it back out to others? We may not stand out on a sidewalk and do it that way, but we can by being a witness for Christ to another member of our family or to our next door neighbor. We may not share the Gospel from the front of a cigar store, but we might from an office cubicle at Kohler or from lane number 12 at the bowling alley. You don't have to be Billy Graham in order to do it. If you get tongue-tied, then it can be as simple as inviting someone to come to church with you and then out to Millhome or Schwarz's afterwards!

Another indicator of where we stand spiritually is our stewardship of the environment. I'm not talking about the politically-charged aspect of the whole environmental debate, but rather just an appeal to our most basic beliefs about creation. Do you believe that this earth was created by God, or that it just simply evolved by pure chance? If we truly believe that God is the earth's Creator, then we also believe that God is the owner and we are the tenants.

It's something to keep in mind. It's also something that should influence our behavior towards the environment and the lifestyle choices we make. The scriptures are quite clear that "the earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it." (Psalm 24:1) A believer in the Risen Christ is also someone who will in practice, behave honorably toward the environment. That can mean something as simple as not leaving McDonald's bags and soda cans at the Turkey blind, but rather carrying them back to your vehicle with you and disposing of them properly.

The possible indicators of our faith are many, but I'll mention just one more. Do we have a concern and an active care for the poor? The Bible is full of references to this. It can take many forms and there are many ways of

doing it, but are we doing it? We can swing a hammer with Habitat For Humanity, or we can give to St. Peter's Benevolence Fund. We can volunteer our time or give to the Kiel area food pantry.

Believing in the Risen Christ and having Him reside in our hearts is going to influence how we live. We aren't perfect and we all will stumble and make mistakes, but in the long run whatever we believe in here (our heart) is going to show through how we live out here (our actions).

A true faith is not a dead faith. Someone sent me a story about a stranger who walked into a doctor's office and said: "*I just dropped in to tell you how much I benefited from your treatment.*" The doctor replied, "*But you are not one of my patients.*" The stranger replied, "*I know, but my uncle was and I'm his heir.*"

Does our two-week check up find us spiritually healthy and alive? There are ways we can tell.

In a small town over in England, there is a local church that observes an unusual custom. They have evening worship services there (much like our Thursday nights) At the end of each pew is a candlestick. When the family or individual that customarily uses that pew is ushered in, the candle is lighted. When the people are not present, the pew remains dark. Obviously, the amount of light in the sanctuary is determined by the number of people present in worship that evening.

So it is with Christ in our hearts. If we truly have Christ in our heart, then there is light. If we don't have Christ in our heart, then there is darkness.

That little girl two weeks ago said it better than anyone I've known in a long time, myself included! In faith she just came right out into the aisle and clutched his robe and said: "*I love you, Jesus!*" And she followed him.

May we do the same.

AMEN.