

It is said there is an 80-foot tall maple tree in Milford, Connecticut that hasn't changed much over the years. There are new leaves every spring, of course, and the leaves fall off every autumn. And there is the spot where a limb came off when Hurricane Gloria blew through in 1985. Other than that, missing branch the tree on Hawley Avenue has looked the same for as long as anyone can remember.

The spot where the limb was blown off caused quite a stir in the neighborhood sometime back. **One of the residents, Claudia Voight, looked at the tree one day and saw what looked like the face of Jesus.** "It took my breath away," she recalls. ***"I told my friend to come over and pretty soon we had the entire neighborhood here looking."***

Word spread quickly throughout the area and before anyone realized it the maple tree became a popular attraction as car after car drove by to see the face of Christ on the tree. Drivers slowed down as they passed by, while others parked and walked through yards to see firsthand this strange event.

Claudia, the lady who first made this discovery, describes herself as someone who attends church but is not "overly religious" whatever that means. She told a reporter, "I'm not reading the Bible all the time." The tree for Claudia is some kind of sign, though. "I just think people may be able to take some hope from it," she says.

Eve Mizera, another Hawley Avenue neighbor, brought her 17-year-old son over to touch the tree in the hope it would cure him of the seizures that he suffers. "You never know," Eve says.

Another resident, Cathy Cornwall, says she brought her three children over to see the tree. "We have a lot of single mothers in the neighborhood," she explains, "and teenagers who have to make tough decisions in these times." **Cathy also sees the face in the tree as a message of hope.** She says *it's "like a message to have faith in ourselves and to have hope for the world."*

This brings me to our question for the day. WHERE IN THE WORLD DO WE FIND JESUS? That question has been asked by every generation. ***Where do we find Jesus in times of heartache, in times of disappointment, in times of tragedy?*** The residents of Milford, Connecticut saw what looked like a face on an old tree. Some thought it was the face of Jesus and that somehow it was a message from God. In recent years people have reported seeing Christ's face on the side of a house, on the side of a barn, and on a town's water tower, among other places.

Where do we find Jesus? Even more important, how can we be sure that Jesus is really with us when everything seems to be going wrong?

What a weekend it was for the followers of Jesus. *For many it seemed like the bottom had fallen out. All their hopes and dreams seemed to vanish when Jesus died on the cross.* They were in a state of shock and fear. Everything happened so fast. Early on Easter Day the women reported seeing angels who told them that Jesus had risen. The disciples at first dismissed the women's report as "an idle tale." Peter, though, ran to the tomb and discovered it was indeed empty as the women had said. He went home "amazed at what had happened."

That afternoon two of the believers, Cleopas and an unknown companion, were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus-- a distance of seven miles. The walk would take over two hours. Maybe a walk of this distance would help them put the events of the past weekend into some perspective. Maybe they could make sense out of it all.

On the way they met a stranger. It was the risen Jesus, but they did not recognize him. He walked with them and asked them what they were discussing. Cleopas replied, ***"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these last few days?"*** Then the risen Lord asked, ***"What things?"*** They answered, ***"the things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all people."***

Their discouragement and their lack of faith blinded them to the risen Lord who was standing right beside them. ***That happens sometimes. It happens to you and me.*** We can be so down that we forget that finding Christ is really not that

difficult. *And we don't have to look for him on the surfaces of old tree stumps.* **SO WHERE CAN WE FIND HIM?**

FIRST, WE CAN FIND HIM IN THE PAGES OF OUR BIBLES. Have you ever had a Sunday School teacher who made the Bible come alive for you? Have you ever been reading the Bible and come upon a word that seems to have been written just for you? *YES, sometimes we meet the risen Lord on the Page of the Bible.*

As they continued their way to Emmaus Jesus began teaching Cleopas and his companion what the scriptures said about the Messiah. *As he interpreted to them the Word, their hearts burned within and they began to discover who it was that walked with them.*

A man named Dan Wakefield made that same kind of discovery. Dan grew up going to Sunday School but left the church and was away from it for many years. Until one day he visited the Holy Lands. It was truly a life-changing experience for him.

He thought how amazing it was that he, Dan Wakefield, of Indianapolis, Indiana, was standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. **The name Galilee was magic for him.** While standing there, he recalled images of Jesus and his disciples, men who really did walk there and who went fishing there. Standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee he could not help but think of the hymn, *"I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked."* He spent the day fishing with local fishermen. In that holy atmosphere Dan recalled the stories he had learned from the Bible. **It was a memory he would carry with him all his life**

On the road to Emmaus Jesus taught and interpreted the scriptures to Cleopas and the other believer. They also would remember that special day for the rest of their lives. They found Jesus, first, in the Scriptures.

But something else happened. **AS JESUS SPOKE TO THEM, THEY ALSO REMEMBERED THE TEACHINGS THEY HAD HEARD.** Cleopas and his companion had heard Jesus on many occasions. In their current state of confusion, they had forgotten what he had already taught them about his suffering, death, and resurrection. There on the road to Emmaus, Jesus jogged their memory a bit and they remembered. *We also find Jesus when we remember what we have been taught in Sunday School or worship by a parent or a trusted friend.*

A Christian lady in Italy writes of waking up in the middle of the night. A strong wind had been blowing for three days, shaking the pine trees making them creak. She was in a period of her life when she felt overwhelmed by discontent and disillusionment. She was about to collapse. She opened the Bible looking for some comforting words. She first did what she usually does, though. She covered her face with her hands and asked the Lord to be with her. In her mind, she began to sing a hymn that she had learned more than 60 years ago.

As she sang that hymn of comfort, she remembered being a child with her grandparents up in the mountains. *"Every evening after dinner,"* she writes *"one of my brothers came with his mandolin and sang several hymns."* The hymn she remembered that night went something like, *"Sweet beautiful words of Jesus, They are the only truth, They are light for the heart..."* The words of this old hymn comforted this lady. **They took her pain and bitterness away. In their place she experienced joy and gratitude.** Our faith is strengthened when we remember what we have already learned. *The stories, the hymns, the prayers.* In them we find Jesus.

Cleopas and his companion remembered Jesus' teachings. They certainly felt better now than they did when they left Jerusalem hours before. When they reached their destination, it appeared that the stranger was going farther. They so enjoyed his company that they *"urged him strongly"* to stay with them. *"Stay with us," they told the stranger, "because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."* **THE RISEN LORD AGREED!**

IT WAS WHILE THEY WERE BREAKING BREAD AT THE TABLE THAT THEIR EYES WERE FINALLY OPENED. They sat down with the stranger to eat. Jesus *"took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."* Suddenly they realized that this wasn't a stranger at all. **This was the risen Jesus. "Their eyes were opened,"** Luke reports, **"and they recognized him."**

Jesus broke the bread and their eyes were opened. That sometimes happens to us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We perceive Jesus in our midst.

Dr. Tom Troeger recalls the time when he had to be away from his fiancée for over a month to take comprehensive exams in his senior year in college. Being madly in love and having to be away from HER made him very sad and depressed. He was on a bus traveling from Ithaca, New York to New Haven, Connecticut. The bus stopped at the Binghamton Greyhound bus station. The station left a lot to be desired. Troeger sat down at a little dinette on one of those circular pedestal stools with the stuffing coming out. **The counter was U-shaped and he found himself sitting directly across from an old woman.**

The old woman saw him and said, "Boy, honey, you sure look depressed." Troeger replied, "I am depressed," and started crying. The woman tried to reach across to pat his cheek. He pulled back because the woman had dirt under her fingernails. **"What's wrong honey?"** she asked. He told her about his fiancée back home and how much he would miss her. He showed the woman a picture of her. The woman said, "O, I never saw such a beautiful woman."

The woman told him she had been married to a traveling salesman who had since passed away. They used to weep, she said, every time her husband had to go away. How happy they were, though, each time he returned. "Marriage was wonderful," she told him. "You're going to have a wonderful marriage. Everything will be just fine." She suggested he might feel better if he ate something. She ordered the last donut from underneath the scratchy plastic cover. The woman broke the donut and said, "Here, eat this." Just then an announcement came on and the woman said, **"That's my bus. I've got to go."** She got up and left. **"Just then my eyes were opened,"** Troeger concludes, **"and I recognized that Christ was there in that bus station."**

Cleopas and his companion had their eyes opened when Jesus broke the bread. Immediately they left that place and ran back to Jerusalem. **They wanted to tell the other believers that they had encountered the risen Christ.**

AND WHAT ABOUT US?? We can find him too. BUT THE QUESTION IS, WHERE?

PROBABLY Not on a tree where a branch has broken off, **BUT IN THE BIBLE**, in the hymns that we sing and in the teachings we have heard throughout our lives. **But the truth is, if we pay attention, we see Him BEST, in the Lord's Supper, in the breaking of bread and in drinking from his cup.**

ARE YOU READY TO SEE HIM AND KNOW HIM IN A WAY, YOU HAVE NEVER EXPERIENCED HIM BEFORE??

IT IS TIME TO TAKE PART IN THE MEAL OF YOUR LIFE!!

AMEN.