

As we conclude our summer worship today, we also wrap up a seven-week sermon series on the significance of God being embodied in the person of Jesus. We've explored what it meant to have God live in the day-to-day life of the communities connected to the city of Jerusalem. We've examined the social impact Jesus had on the people who saw him as a Jewish man from the backwater town of Nazareth - how gender, ethnicity, place of origin, religious background, all play a part into what is expected of a person and how people treat that person. We've seen what happens to one who seeks to liberate people who are bound up in one way or another, and as a direct consequence challenges the power systems of the society. We've understood deeper the significance of the embodied Jesus being killed, being resurrected, and presenting his newly embodied self to the community, putting an exclamation point on the bold statement found in Romans 8 that answers the ultimate question based in our mortality:

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the first Sunday of the series, I asked the congregation to reflect on your personal journey with Jesus, and to write down the significance of having known that God loves us--loves YOU--enough to become one of us, and to intimately know what it is like to be human, and to show us the way to full life. I hope that in some way you have reconnected with that idea, and maybe even been challenged to think of other ways about the impact of God being embodied in Jesus has on a diverse humanity.

God was embodied as Jesus 2000 years ago, but what does that mean for us today? Jesus isn't still walking amongst us. The gospels give witness to Jesus' embodied self leaving the community either by "ascension into heaven" or with a commendation to "go and make more disciples" or without an explanation. But by the time we move into the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus is no longer with them and they are called to carry forth his teachings into the world.

And the disciples did so, not just by teaching and preaching, or even by baptizing in Jesus' name. There is a strong witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit as the continuation of Jesus' power in his disciples. In John's gospel, after his resurrection Jesus breathes the spirit of peace onto his disciples. In Luke's book of Acts, the Holy Spirit blows strongly over the gathered community in Jerusalem and helps people of different faith see and hear one another through the lens of Jesus.

So, it would seem, that while the singular body of Jesus went away from the original community, the Holy Spirit continues to inhabit and make God present in bodies all around us.

In the Matthew text, we hear Jesus , through a parable, tell of how we encounter the Christ in those who are most vulnerable:

I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. 36 I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

There's a wonderfully holy unsettledness to this teaching, for we never know how or when it is that we are encountering the risen Christ. And yet the charge is to treat all those whom we encounter with respect and in a spirit of hospitality. How we do that is clearly messy and without definition - which makes it hard to measure our effectiveness. And yet, as we hear from the text in Isaiah, whenever we -- release wicked restraints or untie the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated; or when we share our bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our house; or, cover the naked when you see them, and not hide from your own sisters and brothers -- this is how we partner with God when we claim ourselves as followers of Jesus.

Over the years, Colleen has given us and particularly the young people with whom she does ministry the opportunity to ground themselves in this theology that sees people being and receiving Christ in the world. This summer, some of our young people were able to travel to Denver to participate in a ministry called City Service Mission, or CSM. We who went would like to share some of our experiences and how we may have been witness to Christ amongst us.