

Emmaus Road Mennonite  
April 18, 2010  
Anita Rediger

### “Who Are You, Lord?”

Monday evening, I was delighted to visit with Janean and Millard – at their Indiana street home. Janean had returned home from the hospital just a few hours before and Kathy was at work preparing supper. As we visited, I extended our Fellowship’s desire to provide meals for the next few days. I told them that Jan already had on her “thinking cap” and was getting organized! As I drove home, I called Jan to pass along Janean’s suggestions in regards to meals. From my list of “contacts” on my cell phone, I clicked “Jan.” The phone rang a few times and a man answered. I said, “Hello, Greg, this is Anita, I’m calling for Jan.” The connection didn’t seem all that great, so when the man replied hesitantly, I repeated, “This is Anita, I’m calling for Jan.” Then...the man said, “This *is* Jan...may I ask who you are?” Uh Oh! Suddenly I realized that I had not dialed the “right” Jan! Instead of “our Jan,” Jan van Asselt from McPherson, Kansas was on the other end of the line...a dear friend with whom I hadn’t spoken with in at least two years!!! (we did go on to have a delightful visit; sorry Millard – there won’t be any meals coming from Kansas!)

On the telephone, when we are baffled by the voice on the other end of the line, when after a few sentences we still can’t figure out who’s talking, we cringe politely saying, “may I ask who’s calling?” Then there are the occasions – in the grocery store, or downtown as we meet up with someone, whom seems to know us well, when we wish we could simply ask, “Who are you?” (instead of standing there fidgeting as we try to figure out the person’s identity as the conversation unfolds?)

Interestingly however, it isn’t only strangers or folks with familiar faces who evoke this question within us. Sometimes we look at those sitting across the kitchen table from us and wonder, “Who are you?” Sometimes we look in the bathroom mirror and ask ourselves this very same...and often uncomfortable question, “Who are you?”

Our two New Testament readings for this morning invite us to walk alongside of folks who also found themselves asking these very questions.

1. There was the band of disciples who were trying to make sense of mind-boggling experiences of Jesus’ death and his Easter appearances. Not knowing what else to do, they decided to go back to what was familiar, “let’s go fishing”- maybe that will make sense of life again.
2. There were the experiences of Saul and Ananias as they-each one in their very own particular way-encountered the risen Christ. One did not know what to do

Emmaus Road Mennonite

April 18, 2010

Anita Rediger

and was left bewildered; the other knew exactly what as being asked of him, and wasn't sure at first whether or not he wanted to continue the conversation!

Somewhere in the midst of these three experiences of meeting Jesus, we may recognize our own stories. I know from my own life that there have been times and seasons when I have felt these very same feelings!

In the Biblical account, Jesus makes himself known to each one, leaving each to wonder... "*who are you?*" It seems like a surprising question, doesn't it? We presume that the disciples would have had the sense that they had been well-acquainted with Jesus. Traveling with him, listening to his teaching, bearing witness to his ways- they would have said, "Jesus? We know him well!"

Saul, on the other hand, had never met Jesus face to face, but he also had his own first-hand knowledge about Jesus. He had heard what "those Jesus people were saying!" He knew about this bold, edgy teacher. Saul "knew" Jesus alright – but with his own particular bias!

And then there was Ananias, a disciple living in Damascus who in his own quiet way was a follower of Jesus. We know very little about him, but when the Lord appeared to him in a vision, Ananias "recognized" the Lord's "voice." They all seemed to "know" who Jesus was.

Yet, when each one was met by the *risen* Lord – they found themselves asking "Who are you, Lord?" And as they questioned Jesus, "Who are you, Lord," they discovered that they were also asking of themselves... "*and now...who am I?*"

Saul, "breathing threats and murder" against the disciples of the Lord, encounters the risen Christ and this meeting knocks him to the ground – not a very dignified position for a distinguished leader of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. This powerful, passionate Pharisee face flat on the ground says, "What's going on here? "Who are you, Lord?" (Sir) *The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...but get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.*

Saul, this highly educated, widely respected Pharisee – a leader of others in the Jerusalem religious community –now is taken by the hand and led into Damascus. He won't be telling others what to do; instead he is to be told what he is to do! Saul is so stunned by his experience that for three days he is unable to see; his encounter so profound that he is unable to eat or drink.

Emmaus Road Mennonite

April 18, 2010

Anita Rediger

In the meantime, an unsuspecting Ananias, perhaps at work in his small workshop or store, is invited to play a major role – for just a brief moment – in one of the foundational stories of discipleship. Ananias' actions are integral to Saul's healing. How would have Saul's future unfolded if Ananias had brushed aside the Spirit's promptings – even if his reasoning to stay away from Saul was right on? I love Ananias' response of “Here I am, Lord,” but even more his next exclamation of “But wait just a minute! To go to the house where Saul of Tarsus is staying...that could be very dangerous!!” Yet, in spite of his fears, Ananias goes to the street called Straight and meets this man who only yesterday was intending to kill him.

Laying hands on him....the one who had been breathing murderous threats...Ananias greets Saul with the words, “Brother, Saul...” (I wonder if Ananias told any of his family “If I don't come back in a couple of hours, *don't* come looking for me!) As Ananias reaches out to Saul, something like scales fall from his eyes and he rises to take food and drink...and his strength is restored... Saul receives his sight; he also receives a new way of seeing. We can only wonder how Ananias' felt as he must have marveled at being “part of this!”

In the Gospel account, the disciples...homesick for the good old days, decide to get in their boats and go fishing...remember the story from Luke in which Jesus, the carpenter, calls out to the fishermen who are mending their nets after fishing all night – for nothing? Remember Jesus, the carpenter, giving these fishermen advice on when and where to catch fish? Well, once again, a greeting is carried to them across the quiet morning waters... “Children, you have no fish, have you?” (Does he have to rub it in!) They answer, “No!”

Jesus, the carpenter, invites them to fish on the other side of the boat (only a few feet away from where they were already fishing!) and the nets were filled. One of the disciples exclaims, “It's the Lord!!” At this news, Peter dives into the water while the others bring in the catch... Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” But at this... *none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord.* What a great line...no one dared to ask “who are you, Lord?” because they knew who it was. Why would they be afraid to really acknowledge that it was Jesus? What “world” of theirs did this upset?

When we are “stopped in our tracks,” when our passion and intentions about the direction of our lives are profoundly interrupted, we, too, find ourselves asking, “who are you, Lord?” When, in the midst of ordinary life, the promptings of the Spirit surprise us with unlikely opportunities and slightly scary challenges, we may respond by saying, “are you sure, Lord?” When our hopes for the future slip away and we are left feeling “dead in the water,” we wonder, “who are you, Lord? And then, when we do glimpse of what must

Emmaus Road Mennonite

April 18, 2010

Anita Rediger

surely be Jesus – maybe in places or persons we would rather not see – we might be afraid to inquire more about him.

Even though the circumstances differ greatly from the accounts of Saul, Ananias and the disciples, I, too, recognize the risen Lord in the stories we share together.

- As a young woman, fresh out of college, newly married and within a few years mother of three sons, I tried really hard to get it right! I tried so hard that I found myself “down and unable to get up.” I revisited these questions over and over again...sometimes sitting alongside the hay barn, other times awake in the night, **“Who are you, Lord? Who am I, Lord?”**

However, With the support of dear “Ananias-type” people who came into my life...ordinary people like Mary Beth and Maggie, Bob & Miriam, I was given opportunity to discover a new and better way to be “a good wife & mother; a more enlivened follower of Jesus.

With the professional support of a kind therapist my eyes were opened to the possibility of resurrection. I’m grateful that they didn’t let their own fears prevent them from coming alongside of me. (It’s not easy or even safe sometimes to be with hurting people!)

- And like the baffled disciples...each of us know the pain of great loss- perhaps through death; perhaps divorce or as a result of the a serious illness, the loss of a career opportunity. We know what it is to be adrift with our hopes for the future sinking in front of us...living with the questions, **Who are you, Lord? Now what?**

We’ve pondered God’s actions this morning in the lives of Saul & Ananias and the disciples. I wonder what stories are stirring within you? How can we better share with one another our experiences of God- the jarring ones, the quiet ones, the surprising ones? Have we considered these encounters could be invitation to resurrection, to seeing life anew?

As we wonder about God, as we wonder about Jesus... it becomes clear to us that at the same time we’re also wondering about our own identity. Who is this Jesus that we’re in relationship with? As life unfolds, do we come to see him in new ways? And what does that mean about our own sense of self? Could it be that with pain and surprise come the possibility for new awareness of God’s in-breaking in our lives? Could it be that the risen Lord comes to us – over and over – again and again – with each encounter inviting us to

Emmaus Road Mennonite

April 18, 2010

Anita Rediger

explore uncharted territories of faith? Could it be that we're invited to see ourselves and others through new eyes, the eyes of Christ? New every morning?

Together with Saul, Ananias and the disciples we celebrate that

- There is no place that the Spirit of Christ is not present, or cannot find us
- Anyplace, anytime, anyone is/may be "holy ground"
- Saul, Ananias, the fisherman disciples....all continued in their life's work, but with new understandings of purpose and ultimacy; their daily lives transformed!
- "the Holy Spirit does not force us into one mold where all of us come out looking exactly alike, or even thinking alike...but that the Spirit molds us by one force...the power of unfailing, unimaginable Love.

When we find ourselves asking, "Who are you, Lord?" may we say "Aha", it's the Lord! the Spirit of Christ is reaching out to me! When we open ourselves to this holy encounter we WILL be given the gift of resurrection life! Just wait and see!