

It's frustrating enough when you can't find your keys.

When you return after the sabbath to the tomb of the one you love, and you can't find the body, real panic sets in.

Dead bodies don't just move themselves.

Thankfully, the women have each other for support and a sanity check, which will be important when they look up in the graveyard dawn and see that they are not alone.

They are startled by well dressed strangers who aren't much help.

All they provide is a snotty "He told you so" and a story about resurrection that no one would ever believe.

They say, *He is not here.*

They never say where He is.

Perhaps you can sympathize with the women at the tomb.

You get up early and show up at church, which is where Jesus is supposed to be, but you can't find him here either.

All you see are well-dressed strangers who range from not helpful to hypocritical.

The place feels a bit like a mausoleum, with new flowers freshening the face of decline and death, a big gilded sepulcher for God, only you don't see the body.

Perhaps it has been hidden in the back somewhere.

Perhaps it has been mummified in layers of Ziploc® doctrine that seals itself so tightly that no decay, no fresh air, no real life can ruin what it seeks to protect.

Surely Jesus inspired it all, in some way at some point, but so much of religion is managing lightning in a bottle...once it's in the bottle, it's not lightning anymore.

The architects of theology and the artists of liturgy have constructed some beautiful stuff, but where is Jesus in it all?

With church scandals and cover-ups splattered across the headlines, it is hard to believe that Jesus would associate with such a crowd, unless he fell into the wrong hands, which of course has happened before.

If *He is not here*, where is He?

This morning's gospel reading ends with Peter at the tomb, looking in, looking around, seeing nothing, and being amazed at what he doesn't see.

Along with the other reasonable disciples, he did not believe what the women told them, which the Bible scholars chose to translate "an idle tale" because the editors wouldn't let them use the more accurate word, which is the steaming pile from the back end of a bull.

But Peter had the temerity to run to the tomb anyway, to investigate the obvious lie, and something in the midst of the nothing opened his eyes.

He still hasn't seen Jesus.

And that's why he begins to hope.

In the profound book our congregation studied this Lent, *It's Really All About God: Reflections of a Muslim Atheist Jewish Christian*, Samir Selmanovic writes, "a God who can be enclosed by our religion is not worth worshipping."(p, 237)

And any Christ who remains trapped in a tomb or in a church isn't worth celebrating.

Today, with Peter, we are blessed with the sacred opportunity not to see Jesus.

We too have the wild hope that *He is not here*.

This lovely room doesn't contain Jesus anymore than the tomb did, and there are times that I can say with absolute confidence that *He is not here*.

And there are other times that He is here, though you likely wouldn't recognize Him even if you did see Him.

Christ is alive, and He slips in and out of this building just like you do.

Maybe He's here, maybe He's not.

So what should we do?

Wise gospel writer Luke doesn't give us simple answers but he does give us good clues.

Like the men at the tomb, he reminds us to remember, which brings what we do know about Jesus from the past forward into the present.

Reflecting and acting upon now what he said then brings Him present in a very real way.

But Luke also gives other clues as to His whereabouts, particularly in the story that follows the one we just read today, the one we still live today.

Two of Jesus disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

They are walking away from the community of Jesus' friends and followers, slowly, sadly, toward a town that was a Roman military outpost.

They are walking from faith to politics, shuffling along from Christ to popular culture, from the promise that was to the powers that be.

They are getting lost, drifting away from their community, lost in grief, lost in thought, lost in despair, lost like the sheep or the coin or the prodigal son in one of the memorable stories of the dead rabbi whose corpse was also lost.

Along the way they are joined by a stranger, who listens to their sadness and speaks of the Scriptures.

They walk for miles, in long and passionate conversation, until they finally stop for a bite to eat and ask their companion to join them.

It is then, in the breaking of the bread, that they recognize that He is Jesus.

They glimpse Him, clearly but quickly, and He vanishes.

Their eyes cannot hold Him anymore than the tomb could, anymore than a bottle can hold lightning or a religion can hold God.

So they race back to Jerusalem, back to the family of followers who are still fighting about who and what to believe, because that's what we Christians like to do, and Jesus appears again there, where the community is gathered together, sharing food and trying to remember and understand what he said.

Which, of course, is why we're here.

Share the fragmented stories and the broken bread with our blessed and broken family of faith.

And keep your eyes open.

Maybe you'll glimpse Him.

Or maybe you'll be amazed at what you don't see.