

From Luke's Gospel: While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

I want to tell you about a television show that I watch. It is a reality TV show, which I usually avoid as a genre, but this one is wonderful. It is called Undercover Boss.

Reruns of it come on late in the evening after our children have gone to bed. I watch it with a glass of wine in one hand and Kleenex in the other hand.

The premise of the show is that the CEO of a company disguises himself or herself as an entry-level employee in the company, in order to work alongside the men and women in the lower echelons. Most are boardroom types, so they get the unique experience of seeing what their company is like at the bottom. There is usually a disguise and some made-up assertion about why they are there, all done to make sure that their true identity as CEO isn't revealed until the end of the show. The very first episode of Undercover Boss featured the CEO of Waste Management. He went from the boardroom to the trash truck, and had the lofty experience of what it is like to unload dumpsters all day long.

Most of the episodes feature an element of comedy, because the bosses struggle to do simple, \$7.25 an hour tasks, and they usually fail at them. Many of the shows feature an element of tragedy, as the bosses discover how difficult life can be at the other end of the spectrum. And there is emotion: as they hear stories of sickness and sadness and resilience and perseverance. *The employee who sold his car to pay for his mother's cancer treatment and now walks to work seven miles every day.* That's where you need wine *and* Kleenex.

Then of course comes the end of the show, the moment when the CEO's disguise comes off and they sit at a table, face to face with those whom they have come to know. There is shock, of course, and some who don't believe it, and others who can't believe it. There are some who know they have blown it, who shouldn't have taken a nap in front of the cameras and the CEO. There are wonderful moments, where the CEO, now a changed person, offers a car to that young man who had been walking to work, a

fund to help mom finish chemo, something to help with those medical bills that remained unpaid.

The show has won Emmy Awards for reality television. But to me, as you might imagine with this as a reflection on our gospel this morning, it is a metaphor of Easter. Jesus, our undercover boss, eternally begotten of the Father, came to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to the God and father of all. He embraced the poor and outcast, announcing Good news to them, that they, too, exist in the very heart of God.

And there is that mystery of his not being recognized, how no one ever seemed to recognize him for who he was. First it was the Pharisees and Saducees, but then in the resurrection not even his friends recognized him. In the Garden on Easter morning, you remember, Mary Magdalene thought he was the gardener. On the beach one morning at the end of John's gospel, none of the disciples dares to ask who he is. And in our gospel narrative today, he walks alongside Cleopas and his friend for seven long miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus,

and they are so overcome by grief and disappointment that they haven't been able to believe the story of his resurrection from others, and now they don't seem to believe it when he is standing there next to them. But finally, in the end, there is a moment of recognition: they sit together at a table, and the disguise (if we could call it that) comes off, and he is known to them in the breaking of the bread. And they are left behind but forever changed, endowed with every good gift that Christ has given to those who follow him.

To me this gospel is one of the loveliest of the Easter narratives. It speaks to the wonderful mystery of recognizing Jesus in our world. Or better said, of not recognizing Jesus—in their case it was some sort of immediate task, though for us it lives on as a spiritual task, recognizing Christ in our midst. Luke says that their eyes were "kept from recognizing him," as if this were some part of the divine plan. We don't know why. We only know that he walked with them, and he taught them again. He helped them to understand the meaning of the mystery of our faith—that Christ has died and is risen

and will come again. And then finally, just as this small episode of the Easter story draws to a close, finally they recognize him and life, again, is changed forever.

I suspect that this gospel has lived both descriptively and instructively in the church. *Descriptively and Instructively*. For us, it is descriptive in the sense that it illustrates how we have known Christ at the altar in this great gift that he left for us. But it is instructive, isn't it, how it points us beyond the mystery of him in the bread and wine, to being his people outside these walls.

There is the ecclesiastical way, the church way, of saying this: that in this holy ritual Christ will come among us in bread and wine and send us into the world to be his hands and feet. *The bread which we break... alleluia... is the Communion of the body of Christ*. But there is another way of saying it, the Undercover Boss way of saying it. Whether you are the CEO or the trash truck driver, some days we are all left with the dumpsters of life. We know sadness and despair and diagnoses and loss, but we have come to recognize that he is there with us in all of that.

One body are we... alleluia... for though many we share the one bread. Christ joins us there amidst the rubbish of life. The mystery of our faith lives, too, among the dumpsters.

Jeffrey Lee, Episcopal bishop of Chicago, says sacraments don't make things true; they confirm what is in fact true. Sacraments, like baptism and Eucharist, are outward and visible signs of spiritual, unseen grace. You know that.

Sacraments, he says—baptism, Eucharist—don't make something true; they reveal instead what is already true. Baptism reveals that we are loved by God and are marked as Christ's own forever. Eucharist confirms that Christ is with us—in ways that are spiritual but also in ways that are tangible. That broken bread and outpoured wine always lead us back to him.

I'm not yet sure if I agree with Bishop Lee 100%, but something like this is reflected in our gospel, how Christ walked with them and talked with them and taught them, yet their eyes were hidden from it. He had been with them but they had not recognized it, until finally as

the bread was broken again, Jesus confirmed what was already true: that he lived beyond the grave, that he was already *and* always with them.

The last moment of Undercover Boss is wonderful... if you have wine and Kleenex left... each character reflects on how this drama has changed him or her completely. The CEO vows that life will never be the same. The employee marvels that he has been recognized, that she has been valued for what she does every day. And there is the paradox of it, that someone from up top came to live and work among them, and to know them and finally to be known to them, and to love something about them—there in the trash truck, amidst rubbish and problems and waste—to be embraced in this way.

That, the gospel says, is true for us. That God has loved us, and has deigned to come among us, and to climb into the trash truck of life that most of us try hard not to have to drive, and is with us—in our work and in our companionship, in our sleeping and in our waking, in our joys and in our sorrows, in our life and in our death. And

it is true, not because we make it true; though what we do is important because it is that whereby God confirms it.

So today, pray as the Choir sings descriptively of what we encounter in this holy sacrament, *be known to us Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.*

And today, pray as the Choir sings instructively, sending us back into the world as his people, *be known to us Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.*

And when you leave, pray as the trash truck drives by, rushing through Waban at 80 MPH! *Be present with us Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, and be known to us as you were known to your disciples, in scripture and the breaking of the bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.*