

### WHERE'S JESUS?

My daughter Elizabeth is a children's librarian. Her technical title is Director of Youth Services. She works for a public library in Massachusetts, and is responsible for a wide array of duties ranging from conducting story hours to monitoring computer usage to selecting and ordering new books for the children's section.

When it comes time to buy a book for one of my three grandchildren, Elizabeth is a great resource. She always knows what would be just right for her nephews and niece. I've been known to wander through Barnes and Noble's Children's Department with a couple of books in one hand, and my cell phone in the other, as I consult with Elizabeth about my latest purchase.

When Liz was a little girl herself, one of her own favorite books was *Where's Waldo?* Waldo, you may remember, is a funny looking little guy dressed in a red and white striped jersey, and wearing large, black rimmed glasses. On page after page of his book there are complicated and elaborate drawings. Your task, as the reader, is to find Waldo, who is always tucked into one corner or another on every page. Hence the title, *Where's Waldo?*

I suppose we could call Mark's version of the Easter story, "Where's Jesus?" For unlike the accounts of his resurrection recorded in the other canonical gospels, Mark leaves us asking that very question. All four of the gospels tell about the women going to the tomb on Easter morning and finding it empty. But each of the other gospel writers also goes on to recount various times the Risen Jesus appears to his disciples: in the garden, on the road to Emmaus, at supper in the upper room, on the shores of the Galilean Lake. But not Mark. There are no resurrection appearances in his gospel. The women go to the tomb, discover Jesus is missing, and are told by a young man, presumably an angel, that he has been raised from the dead. "Go," he tells them, "tell his disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." (16:7) And then Mark brings his story to a quick conclusion: "So they went out and fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (16:8) Or, as Eugene Peterson translates it: "They got out as fast as they could, beside themselves, their heads swimming. They said nothing to anyone." (*The Message*, 1845)

And that's it. End of gospel. End of Mark.

No resurrection appearances. No further encounters with the Savior. Just some instructions, some confusion, some fear—and a question. "Where's Jesus?"

Arguably, that's the question that has preoccupied Christians for almost 2,000 years. Where's Jesus? Where can I find his holy presence? How can I spot him in a crowd? He doesn't wear a striped jersey, he doesn't have black rimmed glasses—how will I know when I see him?

Peggy Kay tells about driving to church one Easter. On the way to service she explains to her children why the day is so special: "This is the day we celebrate Jesus coming back to life!" "Really?" asks her three year old son Kevin, "Will he be in church today?" ("Heart to Heart," *Today's Christian Woman*)

Of course! I imagine that's why many of you are here! You hope to get a glimpse of the One who has been raised up! In the retelling of the ancient story, in the grandeur of the "Hallelujah Chorus", in the beauty of the lilies and tulips, in the faces of those who share your pew—you're hoping to see Jesus. You're hoping to find the peace and love he offers right here at church. And I hope and trust you will.

But even though, as my wife says, I'm at church practically 24/7, you can't be. You've got to be at home, at school, at work. You've got to be out and about and living your life. And while it's great to find Jesus here at Saugatuck, it'd be awfully nice to know he's other places as well. It's great to know Jesus is present in a beautiful church service, but it would be grand if we could count on finding him in the midst of darkness, and in the center of all day to day living, good or bad.

Mark's abrupt ending leaves open that very real possibility. The empty tomb tells us he can't be confined to just one place. He can't be held down. He can't be held back. For he goes on ahead of you. Out there where you live and work and learn and play. You just need to look! You have to be as alert as a kid searching for Waldo!

Last fall we all were horrified by the news out of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania when Charles Roberts interrupted an Amish community's routine, violently changing the lives of young and old alike. It was a time of great despair and darkness for many.

But as the days went on, we all realized that right there, in the midst of that grieving community, Jesus was truly present. As Amish mothers and fathers offered up words of forgiveness, we were amazed at the depth and power of their faith.

Reflecting on that day, one of the Amish women of Nickels Mines, a woman named Hannah, asked a reporter this past week: "Don't you know the Lord's Prayer? 'Forgive us our trespasses,' [it says] 'even as we forgive those who trespass against us. How can Jesus forgive our sins if we can't forgive others?'" (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 4-1-07)

In truth, most of us find their ability to forgive as amazing as the resurrection story itself! That is, until we realize it too is a resurrection story!

The memories of that day, forgiveness notwithstanding, are sharp and painful, and the school itself has been torn down—the ground it stood on leveled.

But out of the destruction of that day, out of the ruins of that building, has come a nation inspired by their example, and a powerful symbol of their Christlike love.

A week after the events of last October, the Amish school teacher, Emma Mae Zook, started up classes again in a nearby garage. And in January, using some of the money donated by people from all over the world, and their own well-honed construction skills, many of the fathers of the victims and others, started to rebuild on the very site the school had occupied.

And just this past week, the new school opened for classes. It is a simple structure, in the traditional Amish style. No electricity. No indoor plumbing. Just a plain jungle gym, basketball court and picnic table in the front. It is made of bricks sided with tan vinyl clapboard. Tuesday, the day it opened, boys could be spotted out front shooting hoops before class started. And later, inside, the school day, no doubt, began with prayers of gratitude for their new building.

The school has a plain and simple name: New Hope.

New Hope Amish School.

Where's Jesus? And he's here at Saugatuck; I have no doubt about it. I see him in the ways in members who reach out to each other when there is sickness or death. I see him in the folks who volunteer to cook meals at the Gillespie Center, or build houses for Habitat, or give so much of their time to keep this place going. I see him in the smiles of our church school teachers and the beautiful songs of our choirs. He's here.

And he's in Nickel Mines, in the courage of Emma Mae Zook and those fathers who rebuilt a school and in the children shooting hoops and saying prayers. Indeed, he's anywhere people of faith and goodwill are willing to love and forgive and live in hope.

For the tomb is empty, and he's gone on ahead. The tomb is empty, and he lives again. He lives and breathes and moves in the hearts and minds and very lives of all those who seek to do his will.

And it is indeed amazing.

Where's Jesus?

Right here—and anywhere else you are willing to look for him.

Alleluia!

Amen!

--John H. Danner

