Columns
Spirituality



"Easter Morning Sun," by Sr. Paulette Kirschensteiner (Courtesy of Paulette Kirschensteiner)



by Margaret Cessna

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The inspiration of the life of Jesus is usually attributed to his presence, his miracles, his preaching, his message and his followers. And of course, the major miracle. The empty tomb. The rulers killed him because of his message which they thought was a threat to them.

But I think the marvel of his life was in his one-on-one encounters. When he came face to face with a person, he telegraphed: "I see you." Can you imagine the power of that? I mean, this is Jesus. Can you grasp the emotional response of having Jesus see you, know you, value you?

In my crazy imagination, I can hear what he might have said in these situations, that the Gospel writers either didn't hear or just chose not to record:

1. Jesus encounters the woman taken in adultery. I can see him taking her hand. Standing up. Now eye to eye. "Pay no attention to the rock throwers. I will take care of them. From now on, you choose to be good. Choose to be kind."

2. Jesus is chatting with a group in a friend's home. There are crowds outside, hoping to hear or get in. Jesus looks up and a man on a mat is being lowered through the roof. "Be careful. Don't drop him." Now in front of Jesus. It is clear that the young man is paralyzed. "Tell me about your family," he asks. Then, "You can stand up now. Don't forget your mat. Go home and surprise your mother."

3. The Samaritan woman at the well encounters Jesus. John devotes several lines describing this encounter. I can imagine a shorter version. After asking for a drink of water, Jesus tells her to look at him and then says, "I know your shame and I know your neighbors look down on you. There is a chance for you to be good again." The woman is so overcome by his gaze and his words that she runs back to her neighbors who have demeaned her, and tells them they have to meet this man who has changed her life and that theirs can be changed as well.

4. Matthew reports that Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Use your own imagination to hear what Jesus said to the children whom he had on his lap.

Jesus had some big crowds and some big miracles. But often he dealt one-on-one.

5. "Sir, come down before my child dies." "Go," Jesus replied, "Your son will live" (John:4:46-54).

6. A man with leprosy came to Jesus. On his knees, the man begged him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean" (Mark 1:40-42).

7. A centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." And his servant was healed at that moment (Matthew 8:5-13).

8. His friend Lazarus had died. When he got to the house, he called to Lazarus to come out. He did. His sisters, Mary and Martha and his friends were filled with wonder and gratitude (John 11:1-46).

These were all "I see you" moments.

Word of his influence and popularity spread. The man Jesus and his message were considered a danger to the powerful. So they labeled him a common criminal and executed him on a hill with other common criminals. If the story had ended there, we might never have even known his name. After all, his meanderings and teachings happened in small neighborhoods in a very small part of the then-known world.

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But three days after the execution, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb to clean him up and to prepare his body for proper burial. When she got there, the tomb was empty. She turned and saw Jesus. Jesus told her to go and tell the others what she had seen. What would have happened if Mary had stayed home and mourned? Or hid like the others for fear that the powerful would come after them next? But she loved him. She had to go to the tomb.

She did tell the others. Then Jesus told them himself, and then they did as he taught them. "Spread the good word. Truly see one another. Love one another as I have loved you." His message grew wings and spread. Although miracles are not an option for us, the main teachings remain to this day. For all of us.

John writes of the last words of Jesus in his Gospel: When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit (John 19:30).

And so, more than 2,000 years later, on a Sunday morning every spring, we celebrate the empty tomb. Because it is never finished. And we pledge to keep his command and his memory alive. By loving one another.

One person at a time.