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In the late 1980's and early to mid-1990's a unique style of picture book was popular with people of all ages. The style was sort of like hide and seek, where readers were challenged to find specific items hidden in scenes filled with fascinating objects in fascinating places. Some of the books featured scenes that were photographs of real items cleverly and artistically arranged, like the *I Spy* series. Other hide and seek books featured hand drawn illustrations, like the popular *Where's Waldo?* series.

For those of you who are not familiar with *Where's Waldo?*, the first book was created by English artist and illustrator Martin Handford and published in 1987. Since then, well over 73 million books have been sold in over 50 countries and it has been translated into 26 languages. Each book has pages of detailed illustrated crowd scenes and in each crowd the distinct looking Waldo, dressed in his red and white striped shirt, hat, blue pants, and carrying a walking stick, is hidden and readers are challenged to find him. It is no easy task, because the crowd scenes are designed to be distracting, with lots of people doing all kinds of funny, interesting, and in a few cases, even some slightly risqué activities. Speaking from experience, it really is difficult to find Waldo, and can take a lot of time; except perhaps for people like my youngest sister, Sarah, who possess the gift or talent to find him within seconds, no matter how complex or alluring the characters in the crowd.

Today we could use someone like Sarah who can find a needle in a haystack when considering today's Gospel because it is difficult to tell where Jesus is. There is plenty to distract us from finding Jesus; from intrigue, arrogance, hubris, wealth, power, status, violence, and quite possibly something risqué, all the stuff that can easily get our attention. Some commentators insist Jesus does not appear in today's Gospel at all, and it is a waste of time to look for him in this story that serves as a filler between Jesus sending his disciples out to neighboring communities – which we heard about last Sunday – and welcoming them back – which we will hear about next Sunday.

But to me, interpreting this part of Mark's Gospel as a filler, or simply as a foreshadowing of what is to come for Jesus is like turning the page of a *Where's Waldo?* book without trying to look for him. There is a secret or trick to finding Waldo. The trick is: sometimes, the reader can't see all of him. Sometimes he is partly obscured by people in the crowd, or pieces of scenery like a building or tree, or the edge of a page, and all that is visible is his arm, leg, shoe, elbow, or the top of his face. That doesn't mean it's impossible to find him, you just have to remember what Waldo looks like so you don't need to see all of him to recognize him, and be grateful for what is there.

The same can be said of Jesus in today's Gospel. Jesus was mentioned in the beginning of the Gospel reading, but not for what he had done or said himself. Instead, like gossip or rumor, he was mentioned in the context of what King Herod had heard about him.

It is important to take a moment and be clear this is not the same King Herod who appears in Luke's Gospel when Jesus was born. This is the son of that Herod (it can be confusing because Herod was a common name in that family); and it was his turn to rule over Judea with the blessing of the Roman Empire. Most of today's Gospel is intended to reveal he had all the power, wealth, and prestige that goes with being a king.

We also heard that despite all his status, wealth, arrogance, and power, Herod was not able to figure out who Jesus is. It sounds like from what people were saying about Jesus, he had the misfortune of being considered a legend in his own time. What I mean by that is Jesus' actions and words were talked about and perceived as what people hoped for or wanted. Psychologists and therapists sometimes refer to this as projection. In other words, the interpretation of Jesus being the Old Testament prophet Elijah might have been a reflection that people wanted Jesus to be the past returning instead of realizing his miracles and parables were pointing to something new and the fulfillment of the promise of God's kingdom

breaking into the world. Others believed Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead; perhaps because they believed his death was not only tragic, it was an injustice they wanted made right.

Today's Gospel reveals Herod believed Jesus was John the Baptist, not because he believed in resurrection life, but because for him, Jesus was the judgment of what he had done, and much like the ghost of Hamlet's father represents Herod's conflicted feelings of guilt and maybe regret for his actions and inactions.

This of course is not the whole picture of who and what Jesus is. Jesus is the love of God incarnate here on earth, he brings forgiveness, he is the restorer of life, the healer of our relationship with God, and salvation. Yet, for those who are not ready to receive this love, or who can't because they are constantly looking to the past for refuge, hope, or salvation, or are unable to work through things they have done or left undone without compassion or forgiveness, Jesus can be something else in their eyes. They might mistake Jesus for a type of nostalgia, a promise of a return to a remembered, more prestigious past instead of the hope of new life, or a powerful superhero who will destroy their enemies, or the justification for their desire for violence against those they don't like or understand. Some terrible things have been done in the name of Jesus that have nothing to do with Jesus. This can happen when folks don't receive the whole Jesus of the Gospels: the Jesus who suffered, died, rose again to lead us all into new life of God's Kingdom here on earth, the kingdom he described in parables where the small matter, where what is lost is found, where the one who left is welcomed back with open arms, where there is room at the banquet for all, where God's love is manifest in the unlikeliest places and people.

But this can hard to see, or recognize, because, like the *Where's Waldo?* books, there are a lot of distractions in life. Which means there can be tremendous power in remembering whether or not we like someone or agree with them, all of us are God's beloved. Even you and me. And that whether or not he is clearly visible, Jesus is always with us. Somehow, some way, God's love is in our midst.

Maybe in small ways like being a listening, kind presence for our lonely neighbor, or paying for the person behind us in line at the coffee shop or toll booth, or like someone recently told me, purchased water and energy drinks for the staff at a busy pharmacy counter. Sometimes God's love manifests in making a casserole for the person recovering from surgery or who is just really busy at work, or volunteering to help with ministries like Caritas, or hosting coffee hour or other fellowship gatherings, or visiting someone who is not able to get out of their house. There are other ways God's love can shine through us, through our ministries, through our presence in our community. Maybe even in ways we haven't figured out yet, maybe there are new ministries or programs waiting to reveal themselves to us when we are ready for them as individuals and as a parish. That's not to say what we are currently doing or have done are less or bad or in need of change. All I am saying is there is a deep need for God's love in the hearts and souls of so many people, and the more and varied ways we can share God's love with one another and with our neighbors, families, and community, the more Jesus may become known and visible in any crowd, which could help people grow closer to the resurrection life of forgiveness, joy hope and love God wants to share with everyone.