

Would You Recognize Christ?

As two disciples walked along a road to Emmaus, Jesus came alongside them, but they did not recognize him. Even as Jesus rebuked them for being slow to believe, even as he explained the fulfillment of scripture, even as their hearts burned within them, they still did not see him until he broke bread with them. Perhaps they overlooked him simply because they did not expect to see him. How often do we see Christ without recognition? How often do we experience miracles but fail to see them because they do not match our expectations? How often are the answered prayers disregarded because they are answered in ways we can't imagine? These are questions that Emmanuel Garibay's *Emmaus* evoke in me.

Garibay's depiction of Christ as a laughing Filipino woman in a red dress is unusual and, for some, so far from our expectation of what Christ looks like that it offends them. John the Baptist's imprisonment brings into focus the painful relationship between expectation and offense. John had prepared the way for the Messiah, witnessed the Spirit descend upon Jesus, and spoken truth with courage and conviction. Yet the world after Messiah's arrival did not look redeemed in the way he expected. The unjust structures remained intact and powerful people continued to evade accountability. John himself, the prophet who announced the kingdom, sat in prison for pointing to the unrighteous behavior of Herod, which made him questioned if he had misunderstood what he had witnessed. Jesus responded to John



Emmanuel Garibay (b. 1962), *Emmaus*, 2012, oil on canvas.

with assurance and challenge: “How blessed is anyone who is **not offended** by me!”

Offended? Expectation is the story we tell ourselves about what will (or should) happen and the emotion we attach to that imagined future. When it is not fulfilled, sometimes disappointment hardens into offense. This offense can become a crisis of faith, making us wonder if God is present, if we misunderstood, or if we were wrong to trust in the first place.

Scripture tells us repeatedly that God works in unex-

pected ways. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the crowd's adulation, he wept. The people expected a warrior Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, but Jesus did not fulfill that expectation in the way they imagined. When their hope was unmet, many turned their praise to anger. They could not see beyond the emotions attached to their expectations. Sometimes, offense is small, like discomfort over a painting depicting the risen Christ as a woman. Other times, the offense is devastating, when a cure does not come despite prayer or when an innocent person is executed by the state despite appeals. In each case, offense comes when God's answer does not look like an answer to our prayer. But God keeps his promises. Unmet expectations is what blinded the two disciples on the road. Rather than let disappointment become offense, maybe we should question our expectations before we question our faith. Otherwise, we may miss the presence of Christ standing right before our eyes.

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