

Sermon for Sunday, January 21, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"THE UNRECOGNIZED COMPANION"

St. Luke 24:13-35

Text: "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." St. Luke 24:16

Our text for this morning is in some respects one of the most amazing passages in the Bible. After the crucifixion, two men set out for a little town near Jerusalem named Emmaus. The risen Christ came and walked along with them, but the Bible tells us they did not know him. Early Christian tradition--and most modern Bible scholars agree--indicates that these two men were a part of the 70 disciples whom Jesus sent out. You will remember the incident recorded in Luke 10 where we read, "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place." We would tend to agree with this identification of these men when we remember that Jesus appeared only to his followers after the resurrection. He never appeared to the Jews who were responsible for crucifying him, nor to Pilate who sentenced him. The very fact that he appeared to these two men indicates that he knew them and they knew him; it indicates that they had had a close relationship together of master and disciple.

It is important that we be conscious of this close relationship for it is here that the point of amazement lies. Why did they not recognize him? How is it possible that these two men, apparently known and loved of Jesus--men who had closely worked with him--how could they have failed to recognize him? While it is true that none of his followers recognized him immediately after the resurrection, these two men walked seven miles with him. They talked with him along the way and shared with him the agony of their disappointment and grief. Yet, in spite of this, they did not know him.

And is not this our problem, too? We are told that this Christ is alive. Yet, if he has walked and talked with us we have not recognized him! Like the men who came to the disciples, we, too, would see Jesus.

"We would see Jesus--for the shadows lengthen

Across the little landscape of our life;

We would see Jesus--our weak faith to strengthen,

For the last weariness, the final strife."

("Let Us See Jesus by A. B. Warner)

Let us think together this morning about the reasons the two disciples did not know Jesus. Perhaps there we will find the clue to our own failure to recognize him.

Notice first of all that the two disciples did not recognize him because they were not expecting him. They had heard the first wild rumors that swept through the ranks of his followers that he was risen, but the Bible says "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." (St. Luke 24:11) These two, along with all the others, were sick at heart. They had placed their faith in Jesus, but in spite of his teachings, in spite of his mighty deeds, their faith had been utterly decimated by the catastrophe of Calvary. For all practical purposes the entire affair was at an end, Jesus was dead. Their Christ was gone. So, they did not expect to see him again.

Has this not been the case with us? As we travel along the highway of life, so often we do not encounter the living Christ. And why? Is it not because we really do not expect to see him there? Tomorrow, as you begin your day, do you expect to meet Jesus? Do you expect to see him in school? Or in the market place where the hum of traffic and the sound of the crowd arises? Or in the quietness of the home as you do your daily chores?

Joan of Arc believed that God spoke to her through voices. Through her the nation of France was raised to its feet in its conflict with England. The weakling King Charles, whom she helped put on the throne, impatiently exclaimed, "Why don't the voices come to me? I am king, not you." Joan answers, "They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them.. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it; but if you prayed with your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do."

Perhaps our problem is here: We have not listened nor prayed with our hearts nor we really do not expect to see his face nor hear his voice in the middle of life. Yet, is not this precisely the fact on which our faith is founded? Do you remember how Paul put it? "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (I Corinthians 15:14) This is indeed the great affirmation of the Reformed faith, that this Jesus who was crucified is risen and that he is the living Lord. We have no crucifix with the crucified Christ transfixed with nails upon it. No, ours is an empty cross for our Lord is a living Lord who comes to meet us in the middle of life and in the face of every experience. And if we do not see him there, perhaps it is because we do not expect to see him.

Notice in the second place that perhaps they did not recognize him because they did not know him very well after all. Christ has many faces and comes in many forms and they had not yet learned to see him in the experiences of life.

See how it works! There is an old legend that goes something like this: In a certain valley the word got out that the Lord was coming. The rich man began to make elaborate preparations, knowing that the Lord would visit him first because he was the most prominent. Since he was busy making preparations he impatiently turned away a beggar at the door, a sick man who sought shelter, and a little child who came asking for a drink of water. Down the road a poor, simple man was making ready, too. Perhaps the Lord, when he had visited all the rest would have time to see him. But he never finished his preparations for there were too many interruptions: A beggar came by who had to be fed; a sick old man came and he put him in his own bed; a thirsty child stopped by who needed a drink of cold water from the spring. But last of all there came to the poor man's home Jesus himself. The rich man, when he heard it, could hardly believe his ears. Hurrying there he addressed the Lord, "Why did you not come to my fine home? All day I have been preparing for your visit." "Yes," replied Jesus, "and three times today I have been to your home and you would not receive me."

Do you see? Sometimes we do not recognize Jesus because we do not know him very well after all. We are too much like the man who prayed, "Use me Lord, but only in an advisory capacity." Kagawa, that great Japanese Christian, put it this way: "God dwells among the lowliest of men, he sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. With the juvenile delinquents he stands at the door, begging bread. He throngs with the beggars at the place of alms. He is among the sick. He stands in line with the unemployed in front of the free employment bureaus. Therefore," he continues, "let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar standing at his door."

Jesus himself put it this way, "For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." (Matthew 25:35,36)

So, if we do not recognize Christ as we travel along the way, perhaps it is because

we do not really know him very well. In a little poem entitled "The Trimmed Lamp", Laura Simmons sums it up very well,

"I dare not slight the stranger at my door  
Threadbare of garb and sorrowful of lot  
Lest it be Christ that stands; and goes His way  
Because I, all unworthy, knew Him not."

Perhaps a third reason the two disciples did not recognize Jesus was because they didn't want to know him. How long do you suppose it had been since they had been home when they set out for Emmaus? Following Jesus had undoubtedly been a demanding experience for they had been compelled to leave all to follow him. They had wandered from city to city preaching the gospel, with the words of Jesus ringing in their ears, "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way." But now it was all over and they could forget and go home. They could forget such things as "take up your cross and follow me." They could ignore things like, "The son of man has nowhere to lay his head." They could forget sayings like, "No man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Has it not been so with us? So often we do not recognize Christ because we don't want to know him. There are young men and women in this congregation this morning that Jesus is calling to fulltime Christian service, but you won't recognize him or hear him because you don't really want to. There are others of us who are spending our time, spending our money, wasting our talents in ways that Christ would not approve of. And we do not see him standing in reproachful judgment upon us because we do not want to see him. Jesus comes and says to us, "Take up your cross and follow me." But we do not recognize that voice because the demand is too much, the load too heavy, the sacrifice too great, the way too hard, or the cross too cruel. No, too often you and I do not see Jesus or recognize the sound of his voice simply because we do not want to.

Finally, perhaps the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus because he was different from what they had remembered. We know the form of Jesus was changed somewhat. He was a new and glorified person. His was a resurrected life and he was different. They did not recognize him because their own spiritual perception had not matured and changed with him. As he passed through the suffering and tragedy of Calvary and the tomb into resurrection, he was moving to newer and deeper levels of life and they had not grown with him. They did not recognize him because he was different from what they had known in the past.

And is this not profoundly true of us? Our concepts of Jesus are so often immature and childish; they are outgrown and dated. Many of us have not matured beyond kindergarten religion. We haven't read a religious book or studied any theology since we were in church school! Perhaps you remember the story of the two men riding on the train (Actually the way I heard the story they were in a bar. I've cleaned the story up a bit so I could tell it this morning!) They fell into a discussion about religion and got to arguing as to which of them knew the most. Finally the first man bet the second man ten dollars he couldn't recite the Lord's Prayer. So the second man took the bet and began to quote, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." When he finished the first man looked at him in amazement, handed him ten dollars and said, "By golly, I didn't think you could do it!" Sometimes we are as immature. We do not recognize the mature experiences where Christ comes to meet us because we have not grown with him. He is unknown to us because we are still babes in Christ who have not kept pace.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Christ. Through tragedy and suffering he had passed to newer and deeper levels of existence while they had not



matured. If we do not find Christ in the middle of our lives, perhaps it is because our out-worn and dated concepts of childhood are no longer profound or relevant enough. Tragedy and sorrow will find us unprepared.

Let me tell you the story Fulton Ousler tells in his book Modern Parables of Fred, the dead-letter man at the post office. He handled letters with bad addresses. Fred lived with his wife and his little daughter and son. At night, after dinner, he liked to light his pipe and tell the children about letters he had managed to deliver. There was no cloud on Fred's horizon until one day his little son was suddenly stricken and within 48 hours was gone. In his spiritual immaturity Fred's own life became a dead-letter. He never spoke unless spoken to. He did his work in silence, ate his lunch alone, and came home to sit unspeaking at the table. He went to bed early although his wife knew he stayed awake for many hours, staring unseeing at the ceiling. His wife and the little girl named Marian tried to cheer him up and his wife tried to reason with him that he was being unfair to his dead son and his living daughter, but all to no avail.

Christmas time came around and one morning on his desk Fred found a stack of letters. The one on top was clearly undeliverable for it was addressed to Santa Claus. On sudden impulse he opened it and read these words: "Dear Santa, We are very sad at our house this year, and I don't want you to bring me anything. My little brother went to Heaven last spring. All I want you to do when you come to our house is to take Brother's toys to him. I'll leave them by the kitchen stove; his hobbyhorse and train and everything. I know he'll be lost up in heaven without them, most of all his horse. He always liked riding it so much, so you must take them to him, please, and you needn't mind leaving me anything, but if you could give Daddy something that would make him like he used to be, make him smoke his pipe again and tell me stories, I do wish you would. I heard him say to Mummie once that only Eternity could cure him. Could you bring him some of that, and I will be your good little girl....Marian.

Fred hurried home that night, pausing before he entered the door to light his pipe. He entered the door puffing great clouds of smoke. With a smile on his face he took little Marian into his arms and said, "After supper I have the nicest story to tell."

Do you see? Life inevitably brings many hardships and agony and heartaches. Life will carry us to deeper and deeper levels and there we will always find the living Christ if we are willing to grow.

So often we do not recognize Jesus. We do not recognize him because we are not really expecting him or perhaps because we do not know him very well after all or perhaps because we don't want to know him, or because we have not grown with him through suffering and sorrow.

There is one final thing to be said. The Bible tells us that Jesus is coming again. If we do not know him now, how shall we recognize him then?