

Sermon for Sunday, September 30, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"HOW TO SPOT A CHRISTIAN"

Acts 4:13-22

Text: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

There is one thing you have to say about Peter and John--they had guts. Or, as we Presbyterians would put it, they had intestinal fortitude. Here they stand before the ruling council of the Jews. This is the most important and influential group in the Hebrew nation. There had been a time when their knees would have shook and their spines turned to water--but that was before they got themselves filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. There was a time when they had forsook Jesus and fled--but that was before the Holy Spirit, too. Now they looked the priests squarely in the eyes and said, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other." And that took guts.

Why? Because this was the same group of men who had paid false witnesses, who stirred up the multitudes, who led the cry of "crucify him" before the palace of Pilate and who, in the end, had their way and Jesus was put to the cross. Now Peter and John stand before them. We can imagine their arms bound behind them; we can picture them disheveled and rumpled from a night in prison. Yet there they stand, unimpressed and unafraid in spite of all the pomp and circumstance, in spite of the power and prestige of their captors. Now, that impressed the Jewish leaders. The Bible says they wondered--and the King James version makes it more explicit for it says they marveled. And then the Bible says, "they recognized that they had been with Jesus." In other words, they spotted them for Christians.

Well, that raises a good question. How do you spot a Christian? What are the marks of a disciple of Christ? Look at the persons sitting about you this morning. I assume most of us consider ourselves Christians, but I also assume there are some here today who are not sure if they are Christians or who know they are not. Can anybody tell which is which? Would any of us dare to stand up and point out who among us are Christians? How do you spot one?

For that matter, what is there about you that marks you as a Jesus person? Is there anything about your life, your character, your dress that silently advertises to the world that you are a Christian. What are your Jesus spots that mark you as a Christian? You see, Peter and John were marked men. The Jews spotted them for Christians.

A missionary friend of mine told me a story once that I want to share with you. He was telling some little African children about Jesus. He began bringing out incidents that bit by bit showed the character of Jesus. One little black child became terribly excited. Finally, she could restrain herself no longer and burst out, "Pastor, I know him, I know him." It turned out she was talking about one of the native pastors who often visited her village. Here was a man who bore in his life and in his character the marks of a Christian. So much so, that when Jesus was described, the little girl had mistaken him for Jesus--she spotted him for a Christian....which means, "a little Christ."

How, then, do you spot a Christian? What was it about Peter and John that enabled the Hebrews to spot them as Christians? In answer to that let me suggest several things. You see, the Bible says they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus--and being with Jesus left its mark.

The first spot that being with Jesus left on them was indisputable good works. They didn't just talk about Jesus, they did things for others in his name. Do you remember how they got before the Jewish council in the first place? They had been going to the temple and ran into a beggar. They didn't have any money to give him, so they healed him instead. It created an uproar and led to their arrest. But the Bible tells us the Jews had a problem. The Bible says, "But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition." And when you stop to think about it, it's pretty hard to knock something when it's standing right in front of you on two good legs!

Can you and I be spotted as Christians because of our indisputable good works? The Bible tells us that when we have walked with Jesus it leaves this sort of a mark on us. As James put it, "Faith without works is dead." And Jesus himself once said, "A good tree brings forth good fruit." So we ought to be able to spot a Christian by his good works. Jesus once said, "What do ye more than these?" Ask yourself that question--what more do you do than your non-Christian neighbor? Or, what do you do more than the average, nominal Christian? You see, if you really have been with Jesus, it produces good works in your life.

God is leading us to do and begin many new, exciting things for him here at Central. We need more and more Sunday school teachers, we need more and more people in our tape ministry, our ministry to the older people, in evangelism, in our work at Euclid Plaza and in many other areas. Where are we going to get more and more workers? Why, from people who have been with Jesus. You can spot them because of their good works!

Now, a lot of us have knowledge about Jesus. But it is one thing to know something about someone and it is something else to actually know that person yourself. A person may know a great deal about the church and about theology--he may even understand Karl Barth and existentialism--but until the knowledge produces indisputable good works in his life, what does he more than anybody else? When others see the life and character of Jesus reproduced in our lives, then they can spot us for Christians--and the first spot is good works.

But there is a second way you can spot a Christian. You can spot him because of his indisputable loyalty to Jesus. In our scripture this morning we read how Peter and John stood before the highest tribunal of the Jews. The Bible says that those leaders perceived that Peter and John were uneducated, common men. Simple fishermen that they were, Peter and John had never in their wildest dreams imagined that they would be standing before that august body. Yet, there they stand and they are commanded--ordered--upon pain of punishment not to speak or teach about Jesus again. Then comes Peter's startling response, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." As I said in the beginning, that took guts.

What would you have done? In my mind's eye I can see Peter, with his arms bound behind him, square his shoulders, look them straight in the eye, and say with great determination, "I must speak of what I have seen and heard." Yes, he knew where his first loyalty lay.

You and I have many loyalties this morning. We are loyal to the baseball team--to the football team--to our city--to our political party--to our friends--but what do we more than anyone else? Are we above all loyal to Jesus?

When Pompeii was destroyed there were many persons buried in the ruins who have been found in many different positions. Some have been found in deep vaults, others in lofty towers. But where do you think they found the Roman guard? They found him

standing at the city gate where he had been stationed by his captians. In his hands he still grasped his spear. There, while the earth shook beneath him; there, while the floods of ashes and cinders overwhelmed him, he had stood at his post; and there, after a thousand years, he was found, still loyal to his commander who had stationed him there. When you and I stand before the throne of God and our lives are judged, will it be discovered that we have been loyal to the end, that we stood firm at our post in the face of the worst that life could do to us--loyal to Jesus above all else? You see, that's one way you can spot a Christian--by how loyal he is to Jesus.

But there is another way you can spot a Christian, too. He has an irresistible desire to talk about Jesus. When ordered not to tell others about Jesus, Peter replied, "We cannot but speak...." Yes, an irresistible desire to tell about Jesus--so much so that they could not help themselves even if they tried. St. Paul had that same problem. He just couldn't help telling people about Jesus. As he once put it, "For necessity is laid upon me...Woe is me if I do not preach the good news."

I wish all of us had that sort of compulsion. Do you realize what eleven men did? They went out and turned the world up-side-down. What if the Holy Spirit fell on us this morning and we set out with an irrepressible desire to tell the world about Jesus!

What do we talk of to those who mean the most to us? We chat about the weather and the sports scene; we gossip of world events and local happenings; perhaps on rare moments we share our hopes and dreams and aspirations. But do we dare to speak to one another about the most precious thing of all--Jesus, our Saviour? How long has it been since we talked simply, plainly, and with deep feeling to another person about what Jesus means to us? In the office, on the street, on the golf course, in the classroom, in the kitchen over a cup of coffee--have we mentioned Jesus? Can we be spotted as Christians because of an irrepressible desire to talk about Jesus?

Ian Maclaren in his book Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush, tells the story of Donald Menzies who was seeking God. He writes, "Janet sent for the minister and he was very kind, and spoke about my sickness and my farm, and I said nothing. For I was hoping he would tell me what I was to do for my soul. But he began upon the sheep market at Amulree, and I knew he was also in the dark. After he left, I turned my face to the wall and wept."

A lot of the people you and I know and even love have their faces against the wall crying. Underneath they are often desperate to know what to do for their souls. They, too, are hoping someone will tell them. Are we in the dark, too, or have we been with Jesus so that we have an irrepressible desire to share him with others?

So, that's how you spot a Christian--by his indisputable good works, by his indisputable loyalty to Jesus, and by his irresistible desire to tell about him. Those who weep with their faces against some dark wall need to be able to spot a Christian. If you and I have been with Jesus, they can spot us. And if they can't--what do we more than any one else?