

Sermon for Sunday, April 13, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"HAS ANYBODY HERE SEEN MY OLD FRIEND JESUS?"

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

A song that has been popular in recent years has lyrics that talk about men considered by many to be great Americans, but who were killed because of their leadership. The song asks, "Has anybody here seen my old friend Abraham--my old friend John (referring to President Kennedy)--my old friend Bobby--my old friend Martin(referring to Martin Luther King). Each of these persons has, in his own unique way, made a contribution to the American scene and to the American way of life. Every person in this sanctuary this morning has been influenced by those men. But there is another man who was also assassinated and who has influenced the the world more than any other person or any collection of persons. He has had impact on the whole world for more than two thousand years and he will continue to have an impact long after you and I are gone. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. The question I want to ask this morning is this: has anybody here seen my old friend Jesus?

In our scripture this morning we read about two men who were traveling to a little town called Emmaus, which lay just outside of Jerusalem. Most Bible scholars believe that these men were two of those 70 men that Jesus once sent out on a mission. In St. Luke, chapter 10, we read, "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place." Then the Bible goes on to tell us that when the seventy returned, they came back with joy and reported to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." (verse 17) So the two men on the road to Emmaus were not strangers to Jesus. Apparently they had worked very closely with him. Yet, the fact is, they walked seven miles with him and did not recognize him or know who he was.

Does it strike you as rather strange that those men didn't know their old friend Jesus? Well, has anybody here seen our old friend Jesus? Does it occur to you that we may also be walking through life in the presence of Jesus but fail to recognize him as they did? Yes, has anybody here seen our old friend Jesus? And if not, why not?

Like the two men on the road to Emmaus maybe we haven't seen our old friend Jesus because we are not expecting to see him. That happened to them. They had probably seen his crucifixion and perhaps had watched as his body was taken down for burial. They had heard those first wild rumors that swept through the believers that he had risen, but the Bible tells us, "but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." (St. Luke 24:11) For them everything had come to an end out there on Golgatha when Jesus died. They never expected to see him again.

Do you ever expect to see Jesus? Tomorrow, as you begin your day, do you expect to see Jesus? Will our young people see him at school? Will our business people see him in the office or the busy market place? Will homemakers find him when they do their daily chores? Do you really expect to see Jesus tomorrow?

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 ruler, King Charles, whom she helped to put on the throne, impatiently exclaimed, "Why don't the voices come to me? I am king, not you!" Joan answered, "They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the fields in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings (that's the bells from the

church at evening) 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."

Is that your problem? I think it must be mine. We have not listened for the voice of Jesus with our hearts. He speaks but we do not hear him because we really don't expect to. But do you remember what St. Paul said? He wrote, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." (I Cor. 15:14) That's pretty plain, isn't it? If Christ has not been raised--if he isn't alive--than nothing matters. But if he is alive, than shouldn't we expect to meet him? Will you see our old friend Jesus tomorrow. If not, will it be because he isn't alive and he won't be there, or is it because you don't really expect to see him?

Perhaps there was a second reason the men on the Emmaus road didn't see Jesus. Perhaps it was because they didn't know him very well after all. See how it works! There is an old legend that goes something like this: in a certain valley the word got around that the Lord was coming to visit the valley. 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, he thought, when the Lord had visited all the rest he would have a moment to see him. However, he was never able to get ready for the coming of the Lord. 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 Jesus himself came to the old man's house! When the rich man heard about it, he could hardly believe his ears! Hurrying there he addressed the Lord, "Jesus, why did you come here instead of coming to my fine home where I have made great preparations for you?" "But," replied Jesus, "I have been to your home three times today and each time you turned me away."

Does that make sense to you? Jesus comes to us in the faces of all sorts of people. And we don't recognize him because perhaps we don't know him very well after all. Kagawa, that great Japanese Christian, once 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..." Then Kagawa concludes, "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 I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (St. Matthew 25:35-36)

Has anybody here seen my old friend Jesus? For example, have some of you parent been upset about the prospect of a change in our school system to get a better balance of intergration? I have. But I've been thinking lately, maybe Jesus will be in the face of those little children. Laura Simmons, in a little poem entitled, "The Trimmed Lamp," puts it this way, "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 those disciples didn't see their old friend Jesus was because they really didn't want to see him. Had they been following Jesus for all of those three years? Had they wandered from city to city and place to place with the words of Jesus ringing in their ears, "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor script, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way." Maybe they were tired of all that serving. Maybe they were tired of sacrifice and giving and serving and wanted to go home. They could forget such things as, "take up your cross and follow me." They could now ignore such things as, "No man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Does that ever happen to you? It does to me. Sometimes I get weary of tithing when I would like to use the money for something else. Sometimes I get tired of trying to love people when I would really like to lose my temper and cut them down with ugly words. Sometimes I get tired of counseling people and comforting people and encouraging people. Sometimes I don't want to spend my afternoon visiting in the hospital, or my Saturday evenings writing a sermon. Do you ever get tired of being a Christian? I suspect you do. I suspect we both reach those points when we are weary of doing the Lord's will and would like to do our own thing for a change. We don't see Jesus at times like that because the fact is we just don't want to see him.

Perhaps a fourth reason the men on the Emmaus road didn't recognize their old friend Jesus was because he had changed and they had not. As Jesus moved through the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, he had moved to deeper spiritual levels. But those men had not grown spiritual; they had not grown with Jesus. Are your spiritual perceptions growing? Are you more mature spiritually now than you were a year ago? Or, are you falling behind spiritually? Do you pray any more now than you used to? Do you read the Bible and know more scripture now than you did a couple of years ago? How in the world can we know our old friend Jesus if we stay behind in spiritual kindergarten? The story is told of two men riding on a train (actually it was a bar, but I've cleaned the story up this morning) and they got to discussing religion. They began to argue about who knew the most and finally one man bet the other he couldn't even say the Lord's prayer. The man took the bet and then repeated, "Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." "By golly," said the first man, as he paid off the bet, "I didn't think you could do it!"

Well, the fact is, unless we keep on growing spiritually we are not going to be able to recognize Jesus very well. Let me tell you the story of Fred, a man who worked for the Post Office in the dead letter section. He handled letters with bad addresses. Fred lived with his wife and his two children, a girl Marian and a boy named after his father. 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 little Fred was gone. Because Fred was spiritually immature, his 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.

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 this is what he read:

"Dear Santa. We are very sad at our house this year, and I don't want you to bring me anything. My little brother Freddie went to heaven last spring. All I want you to do when you come to our house is to take his 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 need not leave 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 mother 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 hardships and heartaches. And God calls us to deeper and deeper levels of spiritual maturity and growth. When we are growing spiritually, whatever life brings us, in the middle of it we will find always our old friend Jesus. Are there hurts and heartaches in your life? Are you finding--in the midst of it--your old friend Jesus? If not, do you think it is because he is not there or that you just can't see him?

Let me close with this thought. Jesus is coming again. The Bible promises that. Earlier we sang a great song, "The King is coming." Yes, Jesus is coming again. When he comes, if we do not know our old friend Jesus now, do you think we will know him then?