

# SERMON – How Do You Recognize Jesus?

Sunday April 15, 2018

EMMANUEL

By Joanne Nugent-Ward

Place yourselves with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Try to picture yourself dressed as they are with none of the modern conveniences we enjoy – GPS, cars, cell phones. It is just you with them talking on the road about their horrific loss of Jesus. These particular disciples have not experienced the resurrected Jesus and are unaware that He has appeared to the Marys or the other disciples hiding in the room. You walk along a dusty road. It is hot and humid and a tough 8 hour walk to Emmaus. You and your companions are full of grief and you have no idea where your life is going to take you now. How can you spread the message of Jesus when he is now dead and his death takes away your credibility? You could go back to fishing and caring for your family by the sea. That does not hold a candle to what you thought you would be doing – sharing the teachings of Jesus, the Messiah. Then a stranger joins

you and asks what you are talking about as you walk along. Incredulous, you ask him how he does not know all that has happened with Jesus of Nazareth. He then kind of rebukes your lack of faith and gives a mini lesson in salvation history. As he speaks, there is a spark that you cannot identify that lights up your spirit. He seems to have an understanding of what you are going through. AS you listen, you remember that Jeremiah said the Messiah would come from the House of David, he also states that God promises to enact an everlasting/eternal covenant through the Messiah. A reference that the lamb would be lead to slaughter – referring to the Messiah also helps you to see more clearly that this is part of a greater plan that God has in store. While you still do not recognize him, you are taken by his words and none of you want to see him leave your little group. As a result, you encourage him to stay with you in Emmaus. He agrees to do so while some of you prepare for dinner after such a long walk, the others continue to listen to your new companion. AS you begin the meal, your new friend takes the bread and breaks it. It is during the breaking of the

bread that you realize that this is Jesus. At that moment, Jesus vanishes from your sight. What are your thoughts and feelings at this sudden revelation and disappearance? As you speak among yourselves, you recount how you felt when he was speaking with you on the road, the parts of Jeremiah that you were recounting as he spoke and that even though you didn't recognize him, that your hearts burned within you as he explained the scriptures to you. Imagine the hope and elation you feel, realizing that Jesus is **ALIVE!**

This was the beginning of a new way of recognizing Jesus – he makes their hearts burn within, but they were not recognize his physical appearance. Last week, when he visited the disciples in the room, Jesus was able to come through a locked door to talk to them. This week he is able to eat food! Both divine and human behaviors! Certainly this is a new way of existing for Him. Jesus has gone through a complete transformation and now he can use his supernatural and natural abilities to help his followers to believe that he is risen! Have you ever had a life altering

experience? Probably most of us have, perhaps as the result of the loss of a loved one, or because a conversion experience resulting from an illness that makes us take stock of our lives, maybe the transformation was because of a tragedy that turns out to be our greatest blessings. My greatest experience of transformation came when I went into long term treatment for alcoholism in 1991, I went in a very broken and bruised person and came out knowing my brokenness was being healed through a program I wanted nothing to do with at first. Along with the change came a great deal of responsibility. I had been given a second chance at living and I needed to step to the plate and make the best of my life. The things I learned about myself and the changes I needed to make in order to have a new life of recovery and health, as difficult as they were to work through, molded me into the person I was to become upon leaving treatment. These changes did not end upon leaving treatment, however, if I was going to continue to grow and be well, I also had a responsibility to do the work required to live a sober life as a contributing member of society and church. This is the kind

of experience the disciples were having after the death of Jesus, before the resurrection and after his appearances to them. The resurrection, as hard as it was to understand then and is **still** hard for us to comprehend, except as a divine action, changed them in their ministry of the Gospel. It was as transformative for them as it had been for Jesus! It is also transformative for us – even though we know the whole story! Jesus death on the cross wiped away our sin, but his resurrection opened up eternity and gave us a direction in which to live our lives as his followers!

How do we recognize the presence of Jesus in our lives today? Do we recognize him only in the breaking of the bread, or does his presence permeate all that we do? I have a friend who was driving home one night in a terrible ice storm and she could not see to drive. She had the experience of being taken from behind the wheel and Jesus guided her home. Now, this woman is not the type of person who would imagine this type of experience or make it up. This gives a new meaning to the song that says “Jesus Take the wheel” We might laugh at this, and this is because it makes us

uncomfortable. We tend to doubt that others can have such an experience unless they are delusional. So it is easier to laugh and doubt than to believe that something like this could really happen. Patty used to talk about a thin veil that separates us from the next world, from those who have passed to the next life. There is so much we do not comprehend in our limited human understanding. So, it is quite possible that Jesus could reveal himself to us in such a dramatic way. Perhaps it depends upon what our need is at the time. So again, how do we experience the presence of Jesus in our lives, or maybe it is better asked – what makes our hearts burn within us when Jesus is near? We have insights and revelations that come to us either in prayer or in circumstances in our lives that seem to come from nowhere – I'd like to think that is a way to experience Jesus presence in our lives. Sometimes when we are feeling alone, a peace will come over us – I believe that this is Jesus sharing his peace with us. I am sure that you can come up with some examples of your own when you know that what just happened had nothing to do with you! I was in a Bike MS ride in

Penn Yan one year and hit something in the road that sent me completely out of control. I was headed into the other lane of traffic, almost on my side and full of terror! Suddenly, I jerked the handle bars the other way and then became upright and in total control. I know that I did not do that by myself! A power greater than myself was there with me!

I have often heard people say, I knew people were praying for me because there is no way that I could have gotten through that situation on my own! It takes a different way of sensing and thinking to recognize the Holy in our lives – often times, there is no human explanation that is adequate to describe our experiences. Nurturing our relationship with God and others can help us become more sensitive to the workings of Jesus in our lives.

Just as the disciples, who knew there was something about the stranger who was walking along with them on the road to Emmaus, we too can recognize the peace, comfort and presence of Jesus with us. It takes faith and willingness to believe that we are not the only

ones who have an impact upon our lives. Let us take some time this week to be sensitive to the cues that Jesus is with us in our daily lives. This is another result of the resurrection – his invisible, yet very close presence to us. Take some time to ask yourself – “How do I recognize Jesus?”