

3rd Sunday of Easter
Sunday, April 22, 2007
“Do You Recognize Jesus?”

Texts: Acts 9:1-19, Revelation 5:11-14, John 21:1-14

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Would you recognize Christ if you saw Him? On the road to Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around Saul and Jesus spoke to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” But Saul did not recognize Him. “Who are you, Lord?” He asked.

Early one morning, after Jesus had appeared to His disciples a second time in the locked room, He stood on the shore as Peter and others were fishing. But the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Seems rather odd that they wouldn’t recognize Him. After all they’d spent 3 years serving under Him and had seen Him resurrected from the dead just a short time earlier. Why didn’t they recognize Him?

I mean, my two year old son can recognize Jesus. It’s true.

(Tell story of Augie saying good-bye to everyone in the hospital. Then saying good-bye to “Jesus” – a man with long hair and a beard).

Obviously, we can’t rely solely upon long hair and a beard to recognize Jesus. Jesus is who He is, not because of how He looks, but because of what He has done and continues to do for His church.

I.

In our reading from Revelation, John heard the angels sing in a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain!”

Recognizing this truth about Christ is crucial to the Christian life. First and foremost, Christ is the Lamb of God who sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world, thereby reconciling us with His Father in Heaven.

This was a point that the disciples were reminded of over and over again throughout Jesus’ ministry. Such as what Luke records in chapter 9 of his Gospel, where Jesus tells His disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

And now, for the disciples fishing in the boat, all of this was a reality. Something that they’ve all witnessed firsthand!! And so, what do they do? They go fishing? After hiding for a time for fear of the Jews, Peter and the others decide to get back to work. Being creatures of habit, they decide to go fishing. Well, what would you do after your teacher died and was seen raised from the dead? After being out all night, they caught nothing.

In a manner reminiscent of their first encounter with Jesus (cf. Luke 5:1-11), they are instructed, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” And Jesus once again provides this miracle of a great catch of fish! By this action, the disciples recognized him and when they reached the shore, nobody dared ask Him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. And when they got to the shore, Jesus had breakfast waiting for them on the shore.

All of this seems rather low key, especially in light of all the excitement immediately surrounding the Resurrection of Christ. In fact, if it weren’t for the final verse in our reading for today - which says, “This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead” - we might not even recognize this as a post-resurrection text!

But what's the significance of all these things? The narrative is specific, particular, and human. Sure, He is risen from the dead, but what does that mean? After His resurrection, He has not transcended beyond the fleshly realm and become so enlightened that He no longer has anything in common with the *hoi polloi*. This low key gesture of providing breakfast for His disciples and sharing this meal with them assures these men (once again) that He really has risen from the dead. He really is alive! He is not a ghost or an apparition.

There is a connection between Christ and people that has not been severed by the resurrection. Actually, Christ's connection to His church and our connection with Him is sealed by the resurrection – your salvation is proclaiming boldly, loudly, and absolutely by Christ's victory over death!

II.

We see this connection or unity with Christ even more clearly in our first reading for today. To be sure, Saul did not believe that Jesus had truly risen from the dead. He was persecuting Christians, or as Luke puts it, "He was . . . breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." Probably the very last person that Saul expected to see on that road to Damascus was the risen Lord who's Way he was persecuting.

But Christ *had* risen. Not only that, but at this point He had ascended. Nevertheless, this man who is speaking to Saul is intimately aware of what Saul had been doing and intended to keep doing to threaten the disciples of Christ.

Notice, however, what Christ says. He could have said, and quite correctly, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting my people . . . or my disciples?"

Instead He asks, expressing and even more intimate connection with these people that Saul is threatening, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute *me*?"

To which Saul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" And that is a very logical question for Saul to ask. Who is this man speaking to me. He couldn't figure out who in particular would have the power to knock him to the ground and flash a light from heaven all around him.

Jesus tells Saul, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Extraordinary that Jesus would so identify with His people that their sufferings become His sufferings. Even now in the post-resurrected Christ!!

Luther once put it this way, when he wrote, "Now just as God and man are one indivisible person in Christ, so Christ and we also become one inseparable body and flesh. His flesh is in us, and our flesh is in Him, so that He also abides in us with His essence.

"And yet it is devised so that Christ, with His flesh and blood, becomes one body with us, that I am His, as all the members of the body belong together. For it is self-evident that my hand, arm, foot, and mouth are parts of my body and together form one body. Similarly, every drop of my blood belongs to my body. Whatever ails one member also affects the other. If one member experiences honor, evil, or good, the whole body shares in this (1 Cor. 12:26).

"Thus we, too, have been joined with Christ into one body and being, so that the good or the evil that happens to me happens also to Him. When I strike you or harm you, or when I show you honor, I strike Christ, I do Him harm, I show Him honor; for whatever happens to a Christian happens also to Christ Himself; He has a stake in it. The tooth cannot bite the tongue without pain to the entire body. An injury to hand or foot flashes pain through the whole body. Yes, even if someone pulls out one of your hairs, the entire body feels it.

“In brief, whoever scourges or imprisons Christians imprisons Christ’s own body. For the Christians are His members. He has their interest at heart and is as displeased by any harm done them as if it had been done to Him.”¹

III.

We, together with the whole church, are the body of Christ. So what does that mean? Well, I began this sermon by asking the question, “Would you recognize Christ if you saw Him?” And I ask you a similar question now, “Do others recognize Christ in your life when they see you?”

They should, because Christ has joined Himself to you through Holy Baptism. He’s made you a new creation in Him and given you blessing upon blessing in this life and a promise for complete victory and fulfillment in the next. This ought to motivate us to live lives that are pleasing to Him, and it does – for the most part – I am sure.

But even our union with Christ in this life does not spare us from the suffering caused by the sinfulness of our flesh and wickedness of this dark world. If we’re honest with ourselves, we know that the light of Christ doesn’t always shine so brightly from within us. People don’t always know that we’re part of God’s family. In your words, in your actions, in the way you treat your family, in the way you conduct yourself at work or school, you will fall short, fail, provide opportunity for other to ridicule you and call you a hypocrite, or a phony Christian.

¹Luther, M. (1999, c1959). *Vol. 23: Luther's works, vol. 23 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Jn 6:58). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

Each one of you – whether you’re a father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister, board chair, school teacher, student, voting member, parishioner, or church worker – each one of you has failed and continues to fail day after day. You have all fallen short! What’s wrong with you?

Well, we know that there’s something seriously wrong with us, with our sinful nature. And that’s what makes the driving compassion of the Lord even more remarkable. Knowing everything there is to know about you. Knowing all the dirty laundry that you would never want anyone to know. Knowing how much you despise Him and the gifts that He gives, God chose you to be part of His family. Christ became man for you, to take your place under God’s wrath and intimately unite Himself with you.

In the water of Holy Baptism He delivered this gift of salvation to you. In that Baptismal font, your sins were drown and put to death with Christ and the Holy Spirit came and rested upon you, raising you to new life in Christ our Lord.

Conclusion

Why does God do all of this for us poor miserable sinners? Not just all the gifts of His creation, but especially the greater gift of eternal life in His kingdom for the sake of His Son. Why? Only out of Fatherly Divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in me.

Without any merit or worthiness in you, Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother. This, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is how you recognize the work of Christ in yourself. Identifying your sin, you repent, confess it, and receive from Christ the eternal blessedness of life in Him – joined together with Him in His kingdom for all eternity. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.