

Reflection – April 23, 2023
“Recognizing Jesus”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Luke 23:13-35

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, filling open hearts and anointing the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that continues our transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Welcome to Eastertide, the season between Easter and Pentecost. Today is also the day when we seek to grow our awareness of Native Americans' involvement in the Church. I want to thank Marlies Derby at Fairfields and Nokie Lemons and Sequoyah Fortune at Afton for sharing with us. It can be challenging as we encounter aspects of another culture's worship and approach to God, and so we give thanks for their willingness to come and share with us this day that we might witness God through their eyes and hearts.

As we have had this opportunity to catch a glimpse of Jesus through the eyes of believers with different backgrounds and heritages from our own, so also the two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus had an opportunity to catch a new glimpse of Jesus when they encountered our resurrected Lord. I love the idea of Jesus himself coming near and walking with these two disciples. It makes me ask myself questions like, "At what point would I recognize Jesus if Kay and I were out walking in our neighborhood and 'Jesus himself came near and went with us?'" I

wonder at what point would I recognize Jesus. And I also wonder if my eyes, like the eyes of these two disciples, would be kept from recognizing Jesus if he came near and went with me as I walked. We need to ask ourselves the same question, “If we were walking and Jesus came near and went with us, at what point would we recognize him?”

Think about the statement in today’s text that the eyes of these two disciples were kept from recognizing Jesus. These two men had walked with Jesus for some part of the last three years. They had eaten meals with Jesus, they had heard him teach, they had seen him heal, they had witnessed his death, and now their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus. We need to ask ourselves if our eyes can recognize Jesus. We have not walked with Jesus in his incarnate form, yet Jesus is among us in the hearts of all who believe in him. Are our eyes able to recognize Jesus in the hearts of other believers? Do we know Jesus well enough from reading and studying the Word that we recognize the Word made flesh when we encounter him in the hearts of others?

The idea that the eyes of these two disciples are kept from recognizing Jesus could be that they are looking for a different Jesus. They had been and are looking for a “Jesus” who would become a mighty ruler, one whom they now know as crucified and buried by the chief priests and leaders. The “Jesus” these disciples seek would be a mighty warrior and conquering king. Instead, the Jesus they see is one who suffered and died. Their eyes are kept from recognizing Jesus perhaps because they are no longer looking for Jesus. They are not looking for a resurrected Jesus. They have been seeking a Messiah who is not at all like Jesus. If we are not careful, our eyes also may not recognize Jesus. We may give Jesus attributes that he does not have and we may not give him others he does have. If we are not careful, we can create a Jesus whom we are seeking to recognize that bears little resemblance to the Jesus the scriptures testify to and the Jesus who loves us enough to suffer and die in our place that we might live. We have to ask ourselves if our eyes can recognize Jesus. Do our eyes look for Jesus as he truly is or do our eyes look for him as we hope or have decided he is?

These two disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus talking with the resurrected Jesus whom they call a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. They are walking along with Jesus, and they miss seeing who they are walking with and talking about. We need to ask ourselves if we come to church and hear the Word proclaimed or sit in a Bible study and learn about Jesus but then go out into the world and struggle to recognize the risen Lord as

he truly is by searching for a Jesus we have created. Are we those who know about Jesus, but are not able to recognize him in the hearts of those with whom we worship, work, and interact?

These two disciples speak about the suffering Jesus experienced on the cross, his death, and those who killed him, but don't connect Jesus' suffering to their idea of a Messiah. They were expecting a Messiah who would restore Israel to its former glory away from Rome. Their idea of a Messiah did not include suffering and death; their idea only included living and conquering. Their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus as he is, one who suffers, dies, and rises from the dead, conquering death and restoring them to God. We need to ask ourselves if we can't recognize Jesus because we think of him wrongly. We need to ask ourselves if we are seeking one to make right our perceived wrongs and are missing the true image of Jesus who transforms us and restores us to God, giving us victory over death.

These two disciples have heard the testimony of the women who went to the grave and were told by angels that Jesus is alive. Yet they do not believe the testimony of those who speak to a resurrected Jesus. We have to ask ourselves if we also are those who have witnessed the testimony of transformed lives in Christ but do not recognize Jesus in those whose lives are renewed. Are our eyes kept from recognizing Jesus even when we are witnesses to his transforming power in the lives of those around us?

Then we come to one of the most incredible moments in the Bible where Jesus begins with Moses and all the prophets and interprets to these two disciples all the things about Jesus in all the scriptures. Don't we deeply desire that Jesus would walk with us and step through all of the scriptures of the Old Testament and explain to us how they testify to Jesus as a suffering servant who dies that we might live? We have to ask ourselves as we read our Bibles, and hopefully we are reading them and know where our Bibles are, if we understand who Jesus is when we read the scriptures, all of the scriptures? Have we read all of the scriptures with our eyes opened to who Jesus is? Do we read them and find a Messiah who suffers and dies that we may live? Do we recognize a suffering servant who is raised from the dead to reconcile us to God, or are our eyes kept from recognizing Jesus as we read because we don't let Holy Spirit guide us into all truth as we read the Word of God? We have this great gift of the Advocate who comes to guide us, to walk with us through all the scriptures and reveal Jesus to us. Have we walked through our Bibles with Holy Spirit's leading and opening God's word to our minds that we might see Jesus?

The two disciples invite their fellow traveler to table fellowship. He went into their home with them, and he “took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them and then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him and in the moment of their recognition he vanished from their sight.”ⁱ We should ask ourselves if Jesus is made known to us in the blessing, breaking, and giving of our bread. Throughout Luke’s Gospel, when people gather with Jesus for a meal, we receive revelation about Jesus. Many are the meals that Jesus shares with people in Luke’s Gospel where he teaches the host and all who are gathered some aspect of the inbreaking kingdom of God. We might recall the feeding of the 5000 when Jesus blesses, breaks, and gives bread to the thousands gathered. We should also recall the Last Supper when Jesus blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples, a meal we now know as Communion. We as Methodists like to gather together and share meals, to sit around a table and enjoy table fellowship, times of sharing of bread, growing to know each other, and sharing our thoughts about life as a Christ follower. Our challenge for table fellowship is not to get caught up in the eating but in the connections to each other and Jesus. When we come together for Taco Tuesday or a covered dish dinner, are we focused on eating or seeing Jesus in each other? Do we recognize Jesus in those we break bread with at our meals? What needs to change when we gather so that those present recognize Christ when we gather and break bread around a table? How does our presence become an invitation to others to come and join us and recognize Jesus? How does a world hungry for Jesus recognize he is present when we gather? Are we salt and light for the community when we gather in public places? Can those around us tell the difference between us and, say, a car club that is in the same restaurant? Are the tables we pull together to eat a meal in a restaurant as a group an open invitation to others to join us? Do we leave a chair or chairs open for people to stop and join us? Is Jesus drawing people to him through our table fellowship? How do we transform our table fellowship into times when Jesus Christ is lifted up and people are drawn to Jesus? Are the tables in our homes places where Jesus is recognized by us and any who gather with us? The church is the Body of Christ. Is Jesus recognized when we gather?

Notice that when these two disciples’ eyes are opened, they realize their hearts were burning as Jesus opened the scriptures to them. Their response is not to sit around and bask in the afterglow of seeing Jesus, but to get up and go to those who need to hear the news that they had seen Jesus and to share the Good News of his appearing and resurrection. We don’t want to miss

their example. When we recognize Jesus, we should have the same response, to identify those we know who need to know the Good News that Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! And go immediately and share that news with those in our families, friends, and community. So, let us seek to gather in table fellowship in a manner that invites others into the breaking and giving of bread and recognizing Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, and become those who take to all people the Good News that Christ is risen! He has risen indeed.

Pray with me: Jesus, we come as those anxious to see you. Lord, help us to gather at our times of table fellowship in a manner that allows others to see and recognize you. Open the scriptures for us that our hearts might burn with a desire not only to see you, but when we recognize you, to go and tell others who you are. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Go forth into Jesus’ mission.

ⁱ NRSV Luke 24:30-31