

**"Would You Recognize Jesus?"**  
**Rev. Bill Freeman**  
**Sunday, April 30, 2017**  
**Menifee United Church of Christ**

A man of God, who couldn't swim, fell in the ocean. A fishing boat came by. The fisherman yelled, "Hey, buddy, you need a hand?" The man of God said, "No, God will help me." A little while later, a cruise ship came by. The cruise ship captain said, "Hey, buddy, you need some help?" The man of God said, "No, God will help me." A little while later, a helicopter flew by. The helicopter pilot said, "Hey, buddy, you need some help?" The man of God said, "No, thanks, God will help me." A little while later, the man of God drowned. He went up to heaven. He saw God. He said, "God, how come you didn't help me?" God said, "I sent you a boat and a cruise ship and a helicopter, you fool!"

We don't always recognize God, when God helps us. We don't always thank God when God helps us. I know I don't. If I'm in a tight spot and somebody comes and helps me, I don't always recognize God in that person helping me, and I don't always thank God for that. We don't always recognize God. We don't always recognize God in the heavens and the earth. God created the heavens and the earth and we don't always recognize God in the heavens and the earth. People who pollute the heavens and the earth don't always recognize God in the heavens and the earth. You'd think they'd at least see God in the heavens and the earth and say, "Thank you, God, for giving me the heavens and the earth to pollute." But they don't do that. People don't always recognize God in the heavens and the earth.

Do you recognize God in other people's religions? Some Christians, I believe, don't recognize God in other religions. Other religions don't recognize God in the Christian religion. Likewise, some Catholics don't recognize God in the Protestant religion. Some Protestants don't recognize God in Catholicism. We don't always recognize God. Some people don't recognize God in other people. This usually happens when one country goes to war with another country. All of a sudden, even if they believe that God is in the image of every person, they don't recognize God in the image of the other people whom they're going to go to war with, which makes it, I suppose, easier to kill them, when we don't recognize God in other human beings. We don't always recognize God in other people. Some people don't recognize God in people of other ethnicities. Some people don't recognize God in African Americans, or they don't recognize God in Mexican Americans, or they don't recognize God in Native Americans. They don't recognize them as fully human. They recognize them as sub-human. They demonize them and they don't call them African Americans or Mexican Americans or Native Americans, they call them a racial slur. We don't always recognize God in other people. Heck, some people don't even recognize Jesus!

Jesus was not recognized on that first Easter Sunday, two thousand years ago. Two of Jesus' followers were walking along and talking about what happened on that first Easter Sunday. They were talking about the arrest, trial, conviction, crucifixion, and death of Jesus and the hoped-for resurrection of Jesus. All of a sudden, Jesus walks with them, but they didn't recognize him. Jesus says, "Hey, guys, how's it going?" They don't recognize him. They say, "You don't know what we're talking about? You don't know what's happening? You don't know about how Jesus came and was arrested, tried, and convicted, crucified and killed, and hopefully he's been resurrected, there's word that maybe he's resurrected. You don't know about that?" Jesus said, "You guys are fools and you're slow, too!" Then Jesus pointed out all that the prophets said about how the Messiah would come and would have to suffer before he could enter into his glory. Then Jesus walked them through the Scriptures and explained to them all that was said. (Rev. Bill goes to the Bible on the altar and begins to page through it.) He only had to walk them through about half of it, though, because the New Testament hadn't been written yet! Then they got to where they were going on the road to Emmaus and one of them said, and he still didn't recognize Jesus, "Hey, buddy, you want to have dinner with us?" Jesus said, "Sure!" and then he sat down with them at the table. He took bread and blessed it and broke it and that's when they recognized Jesus. I wonder if they didn't recognize Jesus because they were so intent on where they were going and so focused on what they were talking about that they didn't really even look at Jesus until they sat across the table from him. Then when he broke the bread and blessed it, that's when they recognized him.

Do we recognize Jesus all the time? If Jesus came to earth today, and said, "Blessed are you who are poor...but woe to you who are rich," would many Christians recognize Jesus, but some would not? (Rev. Bill speaks in an incredulous voice.) "Blessed are you who are poor, but woe to you who are rich?!? Are you crazy? Don't you know that God blesses the rich and looks down upon the poor? No! Where did you get that?!?" Well, of course, Jesus said that in the book of Luke. If Jesus said, "Feed the hungry and clothe the naked," would many Christians recognize Jesus, but some would not? "Feed the hungry and clothe the naked?!? Are you crazy?!? When you feed the hungry and clothe the naked, that just enables them to stay in their poverty! You can't feed the hungry and clothe the naked! Where'd you get that?!?" Well, Jesus said that in the gospel of Matthew. If Jesus said, "Welcome the stranger," would many Christians recognize Jesus, but some would not? "Welcome the stranger?!? Are you crazy? We're supposed to deport the immigrant stranger and we're not supposed to allow in the Muslim or refugee stranger. Welcome the stranger? Where'd you get that, buddy?" Well, Jesus said that in the gospel of Matthew. We don't always recognize Jesus, even if he were to come back today.

Mother Teresa recognized Jesus in everyone she met. Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity, which still exists and has more than 4,000 nuns helping people in need. Mother Teresa, after she died, became St. Teresa of Calcutta. Mother

Teresa looked at the people she helped and saw them as “Jesus in disguise.” Wow. What spiritual eyes must Mother Teresa have had, to see Jesus in disguise in people in need. Can we do that? Do we do that? When we see an unemployed man looking for work, do we see Jesus in disguise, and how do we help? When we see a woman making less money than a man for doing the same job, do we see Jesus in disguise, and how do we help? If we see a teenage girl, who’s pregnant, walking into Planned Parenthood amidst protests, do we see Jesus in disguise, and how do we help? If we see a teenage boy being bullied for being transgender, do we see Jesus in disguise, and how do we help? If we see an elementary student in a public school, who’s hungry because her government-funded school lunch program was eliminated to give a tax cut to the rich, do we see Jesus in disguise, and how do we help? That’s what we’re supposed to do, see Jesus in disguise in everyone.

Do we see Jesus in disguise and help people? Hopefully we do. Individually, we probably can’t do much, but together, as a church, we can. It’s more difficult for an individual, unless we’re Bill Gates or someone, but together, as a church, we can have a food pantry and a clothing closet to help people in need. Together as a church we can have a Missions Fund and a Pastor’s Fund to help people in need. Together as a church, we can help Survival Ministries and Community Cupboard. That’s what we’re supposed to do, because we’re supposed to see everybody as Jesus in disguise. I think of all the Christian hospitals there are, both Protestant and Catholic, like St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, that help people in need. I think of all the Christian charities, both Protestant and Catholic, such as World Vision International, that help people in need. I wonder, what would this world look like, if Jesus had never been born? What would this world look like? Well, there wouldn’t be Christian hospitals, either Catholic or Protestant. There wouldn’t be Christian charities, either Protestant or Catholic. And there wouldn’t be a Mother Teresa. I shudder to think what I would be doing, if Jesus had never been born and I didn’t become a Christian minister. I might be a hit man for the mob! I might be a bank robber! I might be a lawyer! Egads! (No, I shouldn’t make fun of lawyers, my daughter’s going to study law, so I shouldn’t make fun of lawyers.) My point is, the world is much better off because Jesus was born. We need to recognize Jesus in others.

I recognize Jesus in the late Konrad Reuland. Konrad Reuland was a pro football player. Konrad Reuland had a brain aneurysm and died last year. Konrad Reuland, before he died, had checked the organ donor box on his driver’s license. But I’m getting ahead of myself. When Konrad Reuland was 11 or 12 years old, he got to meet another pro athlete. He got to meet Rod Carew, a pro baseball player. Konrad Reuland’s mother said he was so excited to meet Rod Carew. They would never meet again, at least not in person. A year ago, Rod Carew had a massive heart attack. It was such a massive heart attack that he needed to have a heart transplant. He got the heart of, you guessed it, Konrad Reuland. The story I saw about it on TV, the reporter did a wonderful, touching job, but he said that Konrad Reuland and Rod Carew coming together was “sheer coincidence.” That’s okay. If you believe in sheer coincidence that’s okay, too. But I believe Konrad Reuland and Rod Carew coming together twice was sheer Providence. I believe that God brought Konrad Reuland and Rod Carew together. I don’t know the religious beliefs of either Konrad Reuland or Rod Carew, but I recognize Jesus in Konrad Reuland and in Rod Carew.

Do you recognize Jesus in others? Jesus told us to love our neighbor, to love our enemy, to love our self. Do you recognize Jesus in your neighbor? Do you recognize Jesus in your suffering neighbor? Do you recognize Jesus in your ill neighbor? Do you recognize Jesus in your lonely neighbor? Because when we recognize Jesus in our neighbor, I think it’s easier to love our neighbor. Do you recognize Jesus in your enemy? Do you recognize Jesus in the family member who abused you as a child? Do you recognize Jesus in your co-worker who lies about you? Do you recognize Jesus in your enemy? I think when we recognize Jesus in our enemy, it makes it easier to love our enemy. Do you recognize Jesus in yourself? Do you recognize Jesus in your younger, inexperienced self? Do you recognize Jesus in your older, and hopefully wiser, self? Do you recognize Jesus in your imperfect self? Because I think when we recognize Jesus in our self, it’s easier to love our self. We’re supposed to love our neighbor, love our enemy, and love our self.

There’s a Christian song that speaks about this. The song is by a group called Mercy Me. The song is entitled “I Can Only Imagine.” Mercy Me sings, “Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for you, Jesus, or in awe of you be still? ... I can only imagine.” I can only imagine, also. I imagine something a little different when we die and go to Heaven. I imagine that Jesus will be like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus will see us off in the distance and run to us, and hug us, and kiss us, and tell us he loves us, and welcome us to Heaven. Then I imagine that Jesus will give us a tour of Heaven. Jesus will show us colors that are so beautiful that we’ve never seen them on earth before. Jesus will introduce us to music that’s so wonderful that we’ve never heard that music on earth before. Then Jesus will introduce us to people we’ve been dying to meet – so to speak. Thomas Jefferson, Dr. King, Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, Will Rogers, as well as friends and loved ones who’ve gone on before. Then I imagine Jesus will take questions from us. I imagine Jesus will answer our questions, like: Why is there suffering? Why do children die? Why do bad things happen to good people and why do good things happen to bad people? Jesus will answer those, and we’ll recognize him in Heaven, just as I hope we’ll recognize him in people on earth.

Do you recognize Jesus all around you? Do you recognize Jesus in your neighbor? Do you recognize Jesus in your enemy? Do you recognize Jesus in your own life? I hope so. I hope you recognize Jesus in the cashier at the grocery store. I hope you recognize Jesus in the driver on the way to Los Angeles who cuts you off. We’re not just supposed to recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we’re supposed to recognize Jesus on the road to Los Angeles! We’re not just supposed to recognize Jesus

in the beautiful painting of him on the wall, we're supposed to recognize Jesus in everyone. We're not just supposed to recognize Jesus in the blue-eyed, blond-haired actor who plays him on screen, we're supposed to recognize Jesus in our self. I believe we can recognize Jesus in our loved ones, in our neighbor, in our enemy, and in our self, and that that pleases Jesus and God. But whether we recognize Jesus in our neighbor, in our enemy, in our self, I have no doubt that Jesus will always recognize us.

Let us pray:  
God of love,  
Help us to recognize Jesus all around us.  
Help us to recognize Jesus in others.  
And help us to recognize Jesus in ourselves.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit,  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes  
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*