

## **The Spirit and the Lamb of God**

You have heard me say often, that when Jesus first arrived on the scene, he was not immediately recognized as the Son of God. He didn't look or sound like what they thought the Son of God would look or sound like. He did not arrive on the scene in some pageantry full of pomp and circumstance. He came in simplicity and humility.....and a quiet strength. This young man from Nazareth did not meet their expectations. How is it that the Son of God should be disguised in such common demeanor?

In fact, even John the Baptist, who devoted himself to helping the people prepare their hearts and lives for him, did not recognize him as the Son of God. Listen to what he says in verse 33 of Chapter 1.

“I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” Even John the Baptist

needed some help identifying that Christ was present! it was only after John Baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, and the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, that he knew who Jesus really was! John says, "And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

Does it not surprise you that John and the gathered crowds did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God....He was right there in their midst. John did not immediately recognize that this was the Son of God. He did not immediately see God's face in this stranger. It took a bit of time for it to sink in.

One of the benedictions that I often use at the conclusion of a worship service goes like this.....'When you leave this place and go out into the world, may you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet, and may everyone you meet, see the face of Christ in you.'

Would you say that you have ever seen the face of God or Jesus in another person? Is there anyone, or are there lots of anyones about whom you would say that you have seen the face of Christ in them?

Have you ever been moved by someone who has displayed tremendous kindness, or generosity or humility or unselfishness or compassion, when you had no expectations of it? People with and without faith in God display it all the time. God works in and through people who are faithful believers and people who never acknowledge or even deny the existence of God. God's love cannot be stopped by us, but we can be willing and unknowing conduits for God's love and mercy.

Herb O'Driscoll writes, "It might be our personal prayer that in the encounters of our life, we 'see Jesus coming' **in the disguise** of other people! John sees Jesus as greater than himself. He recognizes that Jesus possesses gifts and grace beyond his own. To acknowledge that we recognize that in another person requires from us - humility, wisdom, and maturity." Can you be humble, and wise and mature enough to recognize the love of God, working through someone else, a friend or family member or complete stranger.....a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a non believer? Are you willing to consider this?

I want you to consider when you might have seen **Jesus in the disguise of other people**? If we were all together, here in the sanctuary I would ask you to respond to that question. But today, and over the course of the next few days, I really hope that you will reflect on that question.

In who's face or life do you see the face or life of Christ? God is love. In who's life do you see love at work?

Visiting with a member of our congregation this week, a member who does not come to church very often, I learned that before Covid his, she and her kids went on a regular basis to a nursing home to do crafts with the residents. I learned that out of appreciation for front line workers during Covid, she often buys candy and chocolate at the grocery store and gives it to the cashiers. She and her kids went on line and found a stray cat adoption organization. Even though she is very allergic to cats, they became a foster family and now take in stray cats through this agency and prepare them for adoption. Sometimes she

bakes cookies or pies and she and her kids take them to the local fire station. Love at work. The love of God, moving through our lives.

Whenever we do theological reflection, such as considering how we see God at work through one another, we often do it in a local context. We ask ourselves how any of this applies to us, or our church, or our neighbourhood. But we can also consider things globally.

Let's take a moment to consider ways and places where God is at work, where Love is at work, disguised as other people around the world-

- in the lives of educators, social workers, medical personnel.....working in the slums of Nairobi, and in the sex trade industry of the Philippines, in refugee camps in so many countries around the world, in the orphanages throughout Africa....dedicated people in those places...
- God at work in and through them!

Consider the work of the **Stephen Lewis Foundation**.

Since 2003, 1,700 initiatives have been funded. They have partnered with 325 community based organizations in 15 African countries....those hardest hit by the AIDS pandemic. They have had made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many people through home based care, grandmother support, orphan care, feeding programs, music and art therapy.

God at work there. Love at work there. My hope is that the face of Jesus gets recognized there!!

The **World Food Organization** is the food assistance branch of the United Nations. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization.

God at work.

Most religious denominations have agencies similar to Presbyterian World Service and Development, ministering globally to the needs of the hurting people around the world. Love at work.

**Doctors without Borders, Water Can, Amnesty International, Compassion Canada, ...** Jesus, disguised in the faces and talents of caring men and women.....the list goes on and on..... charitable organizations that seek to have a positive and sometimes life-giving impact on the lives of those in desperate need.....doing all the things that Christ calls us to do and which He modeled in his own lifetime. The hands and the feet of Christ are everywhere. The face of Christ, almost always disguised, can be seen locally and globally.

We must not confine our image of Jesus to our homes or our neighbourhoods.....God is a global entity. And one of the important lessons we can learn from John the Baptist is that we are not always able to identify the face of Jesus immediately. John was right there with him. He could talk with the man, look at him...but it was not until he heard the magnificent voice of God from heaven, that he knew that in fact this was the Lamb of God upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rested.

You and I don't have that luxury to be physically with him, or to hear that audible voice from heaven. But as O'Driscoll says, if we are willing **to humble ourselves, to be wise and thoughtful**, you and I will be able to see Jesus in the disguise of other people in our homes and throughout the world. Hopefully, someone at one time or another has seen the face of Jesus disguised as you and me.

May you continue to humble yourself, that you might become aware of the presence of Jesus Christ, in the many and varied disguises of people all around you, and around the world. And that others might see the face of Christ in you.

God bless you on the journey

Amen