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April 18, 2021- Easter 3B
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4 ; **1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48**

**“When He is revealed, we be like him,
for we will see him as he is.” †**

I cannot help but share how strange today's Gospel passage seems to me. It follows the great story of 'the Road to Emmaus' when 2 disciples walked many miles with a *stranger*, who appears to know nothing about Jesus of Nazareth and his crucifixion, or the absurd claims by some of the women about his resurrection... only to discover that the stranger was Jesus, who explained the Scriptures and was made manifest in the breaking of the bread. These two disciples were so taken by this experience— they had recognized Jesus, they heard his voice, they realized him resurrected, and there was no ambiguity, no doubt— that they ran several miles all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles of this fact. They had seen the Risen Jesus! And the Apostles confirm his resurrection, for Peter has also seen Him, 'indeed, He is risen!'

It's at this point, when they have reached the Apostles, that today's passage continues. As they are telling their story, Jesus again appears, and in that same voice and in that same manner he says: 'Peace be with you' ... and their response? 'They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.' [Similar to what we heard last week in John's Gospel.] This is where I get confused. They had *just* seen him and were telling everyone the story... *and they still* didn't know who it was? This is such an odd passage. Somehow, they didn't recognize him; Were they stupid?

As I prayed and reflected over it this week, about this strange Gospel passage, I began to consider how often it is that *I don't get it*. How often I don't recognize Jesus when he's right in front of me. How often most of us don't recognize Jesus *when he's right within our midst*. Why is it so hard? Well, perhaps because we get caught up in 'the world.' Remember, as I've said in the past, Jesus warned in the Fourth Gospel, 'Now is the judgment of this world; now the power of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

'The World,' in Greek, *Cosmos*, 'The System'/'The Man' has its own agenda. The system wants us to buy into its plan, *not God's!* And we hear adamantly in the 1st Epistle of John, 'The reason the World does not get it, is that it never knew him.' And the Johannine author (that person or persons who wrote this Epistle) is certain that one day we Christians will attain the ultimate goal, that we *all* have the ability to know Him and even more, become like Him: 'We will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' For this evangelist, there is no doubt, we are children of God: 'That is what we are.' He says it over and over... and we must live into this.

This Easter season, we must come to recognize that life is only just beginning. Like the disciples who had those first experiences of the Risen Christ, we must see that after His resurrection, *everything became new*. And so, this week, I have prayed... About what may be new for me...about what it means to be a disciple, and I've considered what it might mean to be a child of God. This Epistle is clear: 'when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' There is a lot of word play here in the original language. It's a conditional statement in the Greek (*hoti*): *because we will see him, then we will be like Him*.

Consider again, those disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize him... well, at least not at first. Those disciples and the Apostles who were so terrified and thought they saw a ghost, and who could not recognize him, so much so that even Jesus asked what was wrong, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look, it is I myself. Touch me and see...' 'What more can I do, but show myself to you?'

'When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' The Greek word translated as 'revealed' here (*phaneroo*) means 'to be set in clear light' to be 'manifested,' 'to be *recognized*.' We will be like Him, when we see Him as He is, when we *recognize Him*. Many scholars and commentators have surmised that the author of the 1st Epistle of John was speaking of the Second Coming of Christ, of the End Times, but I believe that the author was speaking to the Christians of his day, and to us *now*, not about some distant time. The present Kingdom is revealed in this world by Jesus. Jesus made clear to his disciples, through his teachings and example, what it means to be a child of God. He told them where to find God, how to 'see' and 'recognize' God in our world. Recall his words from Matthew 25: 'When I was hungry, you fed me; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was naked, you clothed me; when I was homeless, you took me in.' Our God *is* present, Jesus *is*

present, here and now, all around us. 'When he is revealed (recognized)...then we will truly see him as he is, and then we will be like him.'

How many times have I made the same mistake those disciples did? How often have I met Jesus on the road and failed to recognize Him? When have I missed an Easter moment of God's revelation? For Jesus is in our midst... in those less fortunate than us... in those innocent children caught in limbo at our borders... in those people shot on our streets... in those people who live on the street and underpasses, who may be smelly and uneducated... in all those who are suffering & dying from COVID 19... and often, in those who annoy us, in many of those persons we'd rather not be around. I've reflected this week about those times *I've failed to recognize* and failed to see Jesus right in front of me. And I've begun to understand what the evangelist is saying— When he is seen, once he is recognized... we become like Him.

There's an old aesthetical theology tradition that holds, 'Whoever looks at Jesus long enough, must become like him.' Whoever seeks Jesus, and recognizes Jesus in this life, will truly become like Jesus. This is consistent with the teaching of today's Epistle—whenever Christ is revealed, however he is revealed... whenever/ however we see Him, we become like him... and we take on his life and his actions, as a model for our own. We are warned, 'don't let anyone deceive you... don't let anyone divert you from the truth... for the one who *sees* rightly, *is* right, and *acts* rightly.' The one who sees Jesus in the less fortunate, in the marginalized, in the weak, in the unwashed, and in the outsider... the one who sees God in his children, is a true child of God!

And so, this strange Gospel story teaches us that Easter moments are somehow more than simple recognition—its not just about the color of skin, the shape of an eye, or a personality trait—the Disciples experienced true revelation from God, discovering that the stranger standing right in front of them was somehow divine.

As we come to the altar on this morning, consider: When have I failed to recognize and see Jesus in my life? And when have I seen Jesus? When and through whom has He been revealed to me? When have I followed him and modeled my life on his? In the coming week, where might I encounter the Risen Lord?

Let us pray to see Him and become like Him!

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