

Sermon for 2nd Sunday of Easter, 7th April 2024

Preached at St Mary's Church, North Marston

By David Heffer

(1 John 1 verse 7 ---St John verse 27)

Last week I met a man I did not recognise---- until he began to talk to me and explained who he was.

Apparently he was someone I had taught 45 years ago. I recalled to mind a cheerful little schoolboy who was now a grown man on the point of retirement. We chatted away about those far off days when I had guided him through the mysteries of mathematics and physics and put him through his paces on the rugby field. Recognition is a strange thing isn't it, at first I had no idea who he was but as we talked so much of the past came flooding back and with refreshing delight. We talked of mutual friends and amusing incidents and parted with such goodwill.

At this time after Easter when the disciples were in a state of bewilderment and sadness no wonder that recognition was an issue. The two followers of Jesus on the Emmaus Road were totally unprepared for the traveller who joined them, to be Jesus. The woman Mary who stood in the garden by the tomb was in shock, as who she presumed to be the gardener, was in fact her Lord. Thomas was (as we all would have been), aggressively unprepared for the appearance of Jesus in the upper room. So today it is all about recognition; "He is risen Alleluia" we joined in the universal cry last Sunday and we now need to recognise how and where we will find Him!

I had to smile when I read an account of a very famous contributor to the Bible Reading fellowship tells how when at the age of ten he was riding on the top deck of a London Bus when it stopped at a zebra crossing. An old lady was struggling to cross and as he looked down he realised that this little old lady was "As important to herself as I was to myself". He goes on to say "It suddenly struck me that I was not the star player in the universe and the rest of the world's population were not bit players in my life. This recognition of the absolute importance of others, is vital in our recognition of Jesus and His resurrection. Have you ever watched a game of, perhaps football or tennis where half the pitch is in shadow the other in bright sunlight. I think you will agree that this is as confusing for both players and watchers alike. The Author of our first reading John, draws this parallel when he exhorts his readers to walk in the light because God himself is in the light and in Him there is no darkness. He goes on to say that although this is no easy path and if we fail, BUT acknowledge our failings, we have Jesus as our advocate. If we can recognise Jesus, as he walks beside us in light, our own walk will be illuminated and it will be a protection from sin. Where ever there is goodness and truth (That is Light) we can be sure that Our Lord is close by and that we are able to recognise it in others and rejoice in the truth together. Thomas struggled to recognise Jesus, but when he did, his commitment was wholehearted and his response was to take the gospel to many places even including India.

His question to Jesus previously "How can we know the way" to which Jesus replied "I am the way, the truth and the life" was to be a better legacy than "Thomas The Doubter" and Thomas that day walked in the Light of His Lord.

Recognition of Jesus takes two forms. Firstly his invitation to walk in the light and when we do so it ensures our safety from sin in death and gives us confidence that he is near.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote "Closer he is than breathing and nearer than hands"
Secondly, he comes to us in many ways to enlist our service--- "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me"

I have tried to illustrate this in the following verses:

"The little boy with curly head and nothing on his feet
Let down his jar so fragile into the muddy leat
The water came up cloudy it was the best on hand
From a ditch that soon ran dry, in that parched and thirsty land
He staggered homeward with his load, could not waste a drop
A long way cross the desert sand there was no time to stop
I do not know his name my friend, to me his cause was precious
But when I think, the name that silent comes to mind: is Jesus

The rain was pouring down in flood as I passed the darkened doorway
The huddled figure crouching there had no where else, no hallway
My loose change clattered in his tin, he looked up with tired eye
As homeward I quickly made my way and others passed him by
Because I didn't know him I hastily forgot
And with my busy schedule blotted out his lot
But now I come to ponder on that individual's status
I have a feeling that I might have, just walked by Jesus

She sat alone upon the bench with sadness in her eyes
He thought to speak, not sure if it was wise
But soon a comment on the weather started a conversation
She poured out all her troubles, unfairness, exploitation
Although he had such little time, he lent a friendly ear
Was able to share her burden and show her support and care
I don't know who they were or what their meetings purpose
But I contemplate, all said and done, one of them was Jesus?

Amen.