

Recognizing Jesus

John 20:19-31

The Second Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

When we encounter Jesus today we encounter Him in His Word. There is really no other way to encounter Him in His fullness.

You can try to encounter Jesus in the creation. When you do, you will encounter Him, but not in His fullness. When you encounter Jesus in nature you encounter a Jesus that is obscured by the fact of sinful nature.

If you want to encounter Jesus in a way that is clear, the encounter needs to take place in His word. Every time you have an encounter with the word of Jesus, you have had an encounter with Jesus Himself.

The Gospels record the words of Jesus. Some editions of the Bible even put the words of Jesus in red letters so that you cannot miss them. When you read those words you are encountering Jesus Himself. Even though He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father in His almighty power and with all authority in heaven and on earth, He encounters you when you read the words of the Gospels. They are His words. The apostles heard them and wrote them down or had them written down.

The apostles are the ones who bring the Word of Jesus to you. Jesus called them to this task. Jesus told them that anyone who was listening to them was really listening to Him. What that means is that the apostles have the authority from Jesus to speak on His behalf. With that authority the apostles record all of words of Jesus that we need. I realize that John's Gospel records that Jesus did other signs which are not written in the Gospel of John. All of the Gospel writers had to edit. If they told everything Jesus did, I suppose not even the world would be able to hold all of the books that would be written. What you have from the apostles is sufficient for salvation. And if you study the apostolic writings closely, you will discover that what we have in fact is far more than we need in order to be saved.

Since Jesus called the apostles to speak on His behalf, not only are the Gospels authoritative records of what Jesus said and taught, the other apostolic writings are also authoritative records of what Jesus said and taught. Therefore the epistles and the book of Acts are authoritative records of the message of Jesus. Whenever you read these writings you are encountering Jesus.

Furthermore the word of Jesus is not limited to a book. The word of Jesus can also be preached by a pastor today and when that happens you are encountering Jesus. When I preach to you the word of Jesus you are encountering Jesus. You encounter Jesus whether you feel it or not or whether you realize it or not. You encounter Jesus.

Furthermore there are others who have vocations in your life to speak the Word of God to you: your parents, etc. When they speak the word of Jesus to you, you are encountering Jesus Himself.

Now, here is the problem. There are other books besides the Bible that talk about Jesus and they are false. They do not agree with the Bible about what Jesus said and did. These books lead people astray. These books convince people that they believe in Jesus when they read the book, but since the book does not contain the words of Jesus, the people who have read those books have not encountered Jesus even though they think that they have.

There are preachers who preach in the name of Jesus, but they say false things. They may say the name Jesus, but what they say about Jesus is false. People who listen to such false preachers think they believe in Jesus when they believe such false preachers, but they really do not. Since a false preacher is

not preaching the word of Jesus even though he says that is what he is doing, some people are deceived into thinking that they believe in Jesus, but they really don't. The Jesus that they believe in is a false Jesus because they believed a preacher that was false.

It would be easy to say, "Well, let's just get rid of all books about Jesus except the Bible. That way we can be assured that we are getting the real Jesus and not a fake one." That would be nice, but Satan is not going to shut down his publishing houses. Plus even the message of Jesus can and has been successfully put into other books and has brought people an encounter with Jesus that they would not otherwise have had if only the Bible were in use. Also even if we did manage somehow to prevent everyone from publishing a book about Jesus except the Bible, there are still the preachers that preach the word of Jesus and the preachers who preach falsehood. And the worst ones of them all are the preachers who preach a little bit of truth and a little bit of falsehood together in order to deceive the people of God.

What are you to do?

The trick is to recognize Jesus when you see Him. Or more accurately the trick is to recognize Jesus when you hear Him.

How is this done?

First of all, the real Jesus is the One who rose from the dead. Anyone who denies that Jesus rose from the dead is preaching a false Jesus even if they claim to preach a true Jesus.

This is perhaps one of the easiest criterion to learn when it comes to recognizing the true Jesus. When I was little Dad taught me this rule for recognizing a true Jesus from a false one. He used this principle to evaluate Jesus movies. If a Jesus movie portrayed the resurrection, then the movie had that right and if it featured other things of Jesus accurately, it was portraying the real Jesus. But if the movie did not portray the resurrection of Jesus, but stopped with His crucifixion, then the movie was presenting a false Jesus.

A preacher that denies that Jesus rose from the dead is a false preacher presenting to you a false Jesus no matter how much the preacher may say His name. But the most dangerous kinds of preachers are the ones who acknowledge that Jesus rose from the dead if you ask them, but then go and preach without ever mentioning His resurrection. Such a preacher is false even if he claims to be true.

If you have a preacher that preaches that Jesus rose from the dead, then you have had an encounter with Jesus. If you are reading a book or looking at other media that portrays a Jesus who rose from the dead, then you have had an encounter with the real Jesus.

Second, the real Jesus is crucified. Even though He rose from the dead, He has the marks in His hands and feet and in His side.

You can blame Thomas for His faithlessness and it would be right for you to do so, but at least Thomas knows the criteria to look for when it comes to looking for the real Jesus. He is looking for a risen from the dead Jesus and just to make sure it is Jesus and not someone pretending to be Jesus, he will examine Jesus to see if He was crucified. He wants to put his finger into the nail marks and he wants to put his hand into Jesus' side. When Thomas does exactly that, he exclaims, "My Lord and my God."

If you are reading a book or listening to a preacher that denies that Jesus was really crucified, then you are not encountering Jesus. You have encountered a false Christ. There are a number ways in which this is done in our own day and age. People claim that God fooled people into believing that they were crucifying the Christ. People claim that God fooled people into crucifying someone else in Jesus' place. Most often Judas Iscariot is the candidate. Others will claim that Jesus was crucified, but that He

did not really die. They will say that He passed out or oddly that He fell asleep on the cross. Such preachers and media are presenting a false Christ. The real Christ was crucified.

The worst problem of them all is those preachers and presentations who if you ask them acknowledge that Jesus was crucified, but then never talk about it. They pretend like it never happened. The most common way this is done is by preachers or media that claim that the Bible is God's word, but then never mention the crucifixion of Jesus. They will sometimes talk about His resurrection, but are not real clear on what He was resurrected from.

When you encounter a preacher who preaches that Jesus was crucified, then you have had an encounter with Jesus.

Third, you encounter the real Jesus when you encounter the Jesus who sends out His disciples the way the Father sent Jesus out. The real Jesus is a Jesus who sends other people to speak for Him and to forgive on His behalf.

If you are listening to a preacher who does not claim to speak on behalf of Jesus, then you are not listening to the real Jesus. If you encounter a preacher who claims that the apostles do not speak in behalf of Jesus, then you have encountered a false preacher, preaching to you a false Jesus. If you have found a preacher that claims that Jesus will speak to you directly in your meditations and prayers without the apostolic word or the word of a preacher sent by Jesus or at the very least, the Bible, then you have encountered a false Jesus. There will be no full encounter with the risen Christ unless such an encounter is mediated by the ones that He sent. At bare minimum, the Bible, because it was written by the apostles and prophets who were sent by Jesus.

The real Jesus sends forth His disciples in the same way that the Father sent Him forth. The Father sent forth the Son to speak the Fathers' word with the authority that the Father gave Him, which means that if you listen and see Jesus, you have heard and seen the Father. In the same way Jesus sends forth the disciples. So when the disciples of Jesus bring you His Word, you have encountered Jesus and by encountering Jesus, you have encountered the Father as well.

Fourth, the real Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit.

False Christ's cannot bestow the Holy Spirit. Only the real Jesus does so. Only a false Jesus would withhold the Holy Spirit from you. False Christs bestow the Holy Spirit in increments or parts. They do not give the Holy Spirit all at once like the real Jesus does.

If you have encountered a preacher or a portrayal of Jesus that instructs you on how Jesus bestows all of the Holy Spirit and not fractions of Him, then you have encountered the real Jesus. And by the way, it does not matter in what way the real Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit. If He wants to do it in water baptism, He is the Son of God, and who are we to dispute Him?

These are some of the main pointers in order to recognize the real Jesus from a false Jesus. That way you will know when you have encountered the real Jesus and that way you will know what He has to say about you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.