

Recognizing Jesus

Breathe

PRAY

Picking up from Ben's message on resurrection Sunday, about resurrection Sunday and its implications. I am going to pick up quite literally from when the disciples have just found out that Jesus is no longer in His tomb.

Luke 24

¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their

sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

And if you believe that this is the encounter also the one mentioned in Mark 16, the rest of the disciples did not believe them.

There are two things I want to draw out of this text this morning really.

The first thing I want to talk about is the waiting. The time between God has promised, you have obeyed and..... the something happens.

You could be forgiven for thinking

"Mike, isn't that a Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday type message. Jesus is alive, He is not here, He is risen, Hallelujah. We don't need no waiting anymore."

But, of course that is not the case. Not the Jesus is risen and alive part. That's true, but the falsehood that now that Jesus is risen from the dead and I've given Him my life, now everything will work perfectly.

A while back I actually took a poll of hands to show who in this room that was the case for and it was zero. Despite Jesus being risen and amazing, we still face problems, some big, some small, sometimes they all come at once like the car needing £450 worth of repairs, the washing machine breaking down, the utility room sink exploding all over the floor, Ezra having to go into hospital overnight and the whole family getting a vomiting bug in the space of four days. It's been a great Easter holiday, I feel so rested.

So let me ask some questions of you, you do not need to answer me, just think about them for yourself:

What are you expecting from God right now?

Are you expecting to see break through this week?

Are you expecting that person who you've been at odds with for the last year, turn around and apologize tomorrow?

Are you expecting God to break through in your financial situation? In your job? In your children? In your wife, your husband?

Are you expecting God to show you the next step of what He has called you into?

Are you expecting something miraculous?

I don't know the answer to all of that for you.

My next question is: How is that going for you?

I do know the answer for that one, it sucks doesn't it. When we take a step of faith and God instantly moves it is the best thing in the world, I know that much.

But when we take a step of faith and God "puts it on pause". That's a tricky period of our lives. Sometimes its hours, maybe days, maybe months or even years. But it sucks.

Here we have the disciples in the same situation. We have hindsight and we, in our heads, have portioned up this bit of the bible to post resurrection Jesus where everything is shiny and Pentecost is just around the corner and the book of acts is gonna be so awesome. But remember that these are real dudes, walking down a real road having watched their leader been brutally murdered; only they didn't actually see it because they didn't have the guts to stick around with the disciples once Jesus got nabbed, they scarpered.

But then they heard He is back to life and.... what does that mean for them? What are they supposed to do with this information? What is the next step? Is there a next step?

They are waiting. They are all waiting. We are all waiting.

There are things that God has spoken to us all, promises we have been given, that we are waiting for. There are instructions in the bible that we have been obedient to and yet, we are waiting to see the fruit from them.

You did the thing God told you to do and now you are looking around you thinking: 'I've done my bit Lord. I've tithed, got the calculator out and worked out 10% of my income, gave it in to the basket at church. Even added a couple of quid on to show You my generosity. Could really use that opening of the windows of heaven right about...now. I'll just check my online banking app here while Mikes speaking and pretend I'm looking up a scripture on my phone bible. Nope, nothing yet God. So much I can't contain it would be very useful...it can wait till tomorrow, but we're cutting it tight. Wednesday at the latest I'm waiting.'

I'm expecting you to move God...You haven't yet...Any minute now would be good!

In the waiting. What do we do in the waiting?

We have options at this point;

In the waiting: We can choose to believe that God actually did not want us to do that. We misunderstood.

We can pray about something, act upon some belief.

'Lord, I'm gonna go talk to this guy and I believe that he will see you.'

'Lord, I'm gonna show this person some love and believe that you will turn the whole situation around.'

And we go and do it, but then a week goes past, a month, a few months and we start to allow doubt in.

'Maybe it wasn't God's will. Maybe He isn't going to act.'

That's one option.

The second option is ;

In the waiting: We can choose to believe that He has answered us and said 'No'

That old chestnut- God always responds, but sometimes its with a 'no'. There is truth there, If you're asking for a Ferrari, the answer be 'no'.

In the waiting: We can choose to believe that we have not been good enough or done enough.

I'm waiting for God to move, for God to respond to promise He has given to His people. But I'm not sure just responding to God is enough. I'll try to earn a quicker or better response from God by being a bit more holy, pray twice as much, learning a few more scriptures or serving more in church. I am not worthy enough for God to answer me, that's why nothing has happened. I need to be better.

But there is a final option and this last option is probably the one you want to note down, or highlight or try to remember because this is the one we see most in the bible, and in the lives of women and men throughout history who have seen and done great things done for God.

In the waiting: we can choose to wait.

'I've done my bit Lord. Now I'm waiting. I'm gonna stay faithful in the waiting. I will read my bible and I will continue to talk to you. I will prioritise Your presence, build Your kingdom, love Your people. I will do all I can to walk in Your love. But I do that because I love you and I know that You are faithful. I don't do it to twist Your arm so I can demand from You, or to curry Your favour. I'll wait.'

I'll wait and I'll wait with you, and You'll wait with me, and it will be hard and heart wrenching at times. But I'm here and You're here with me.

The second thing I want to pick out here is something that maybe you looked at as we were reading here and questioned, although I imagine like most of us this passage might be overfamiliar to you that you didn't even notice it.

In verse 16

These guys didn't recognise Jesus. These were two disciples of Jesus, yes they didn't make the top 12 and neither of them are mentioned before or again in the bible, one of them is barely mentioned in this text. But they were disciples of Jesus. They say 'our women went to tomb' and 'some of our companions went to the tomb' so they knew the Marys, Peter

and John. This means they spent time listening to Jesus, possibly travelled with Jesus, spent time with Jesus.

But at a time when they are mourning His loss and also weirdly trying to figure out what they are supposed to do about His resurrection, and they are discussing Jesus and Jesus arrives beside them, but they don't recognise Him.

Some translations saw they didn't recognise Him, some say they were kept from recognising Him. We can all draw our own conclusions about what was going on here and why, but I'm going to float this question your way.

Would you recognise Jesus? I'll personalise that and also ask "Would I recognise Jesus?"

Why do I ask this? Because it does seem from the New Testament that its pretty easy to not recognise Jesus, and I'll just come out and say it; from my experience of multiple christian interactions, conversations with believers, reading christian books and witnessing evangelistic efforts; I think it might be quite easy to fail to recognise Jesus today too.

We see in the New Testament groups of mostly men who study what we call the Old Testament and see the signs pointing to the Messiah and then this guy comes along, fulfilling huge amounts of Old Testament prophecies, brings healing in His wings, inspires the kind of people who would never be moved by a sermon to turn to God. And they don't recognise Jesus.

Why? My thoughts...

Because He's not what they want Him to be. They want Him to be one of them. Keep the system and power dynamic how they like it. Keep out those who don't belong. Keep the Holy of Holies, you know, holy.

We see here two disciples of Jesus being confronted with Jesus and not recognising Jesus.

Why? My thoughts..

Because He's not what they want Him to be. Despite all that Jesus has done and taught and shown them about the kingdom of God and all its majesty, and the reversal of roles between serving and leading; they still were expecting Him to be a political or military leader that freed Israel from Roman occupation. They still think this is a physical overthrow.

We see it a few times in the New Testament:

The 5000 men plus women and children he fed wanted to make him king by force, Paul chopped an ear off an arresting officer, we even see is after this in Acts 1 Jesus is asked "Is this when you are restoring Israel?" and herein verse 21 these men say

²¹ but we had hoped that **he was the one who was going to redeem Israel**

Today we have 2.38 billion people identifying as christians in the world, is there a possibility we could not recognise Jesus if He was here today?

I'm not talking about the revelations 1:14 Jesus

⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

That would be hard to miss. I mean a thought experiment Jesus. If Jesus decided to arrive here today, unannounced would we recognise Him? We might not.

Why? My thoughts...

Because He might not be what we want Him to be. Are all of those 2.38 billion people expecting the same the same guy? That's unlikely and if not, how do we know we are expecting the right one?

It would be arrogant to think that we are immune to the same false expectations that the pharisees and Jesus' disciples fell foul to.

In this country alone some say "to be a proper christian you need to be anti- alcohol, you certainly can't smoke or swear. Avoid sex at all costs, don't ever touch a deck of playing cards. Avoid the queer community too, also Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses and in fact while you're at it all those other denominations of christianity have it wrong, watch yourself around them. Don't listen to rock music, especially not DC Talk. Never dance, show any emotion other than anger and make sure you vote for a unionist party. Then my child, then people will know you are a christian!"

Honestly, if that were the truth, I would run from Jesus not to Him. If that's what we're expecting from Jesus, then we won't recognise Him when we see Him.

To truly recognise Jesus just look at what is Jesus' number one attribute, His USP, what is the mark that He leaves everywhere He goes that makes Him definable, what does He prize above all else, what does He tell His followers to prize above all else?

Love

In Matthew 22 when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is He says

³⁷ "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.

Throughout all He did Jesus accepted all people who came to Him.

5000 men plus women and children came to Him and He fed them, anyone really believe that all those thousands of people had all prayed enough, read enough Torah, put their full trust in Jesus. Were those thousands of people up to mark to be blessed by Jesus?

Actually, yes they were because His acceptance is total.

Jesus went to the margins of society to speak and spend time with people that the religious system was at that time failing.

How many people felt unwelcomed by Jesus?

How many people feel unwelcomed by the church today?

Jesus told us how we would be recognized by the world as His followers in John 13:35

³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

The most important commandments are in order:

Love God and love your neighbour as yourself and we are supposed to be recognisable as disciples of Jesus by our love.

I'm going to get up on a high horse and say that I've always shown love in my life, that would be a lie. We've all met, probably know and might even be good friends with christian who we feel wouldn't know love if it hit them in the face, and we might be tempted to hit them in the face with some love from time to time.

It's my honest conviction that when we the church move away from love onto any other priority we become next to useless, just another group of people sort of trying to help people, but not all people because some of them aren't good enough.

It's not just my opinion the apostle Paul holds the same view, just read 1 Corinthians 13 if want to hear more on that.

James talks about worthless religion being defined as someone who talks too much but doesn't look out for those who can't look after themselves.

Jesus prioritised love above every other commandment. He did not say top commandments are love God with your all and other people as much as you love yourself but make sure they don't drink, smoke, change their pronouns or live with their partner. We added those parts.

Here's my grand statement to end on:

Let's remove those parts again. Let's just love. Let's just love them all. Everyone.

Let's show love to them all. Let's be recognisable by the world, not by our morals, but by our love. Let's love them so much it costs us.

And, I know its not easy, and I know we will all fall into the head spin of sin and sinfulness and many of our upbringings will rebel against simply loving when we could be telling them how wrong they are.

I'll do you a deal, and of course, I'm not in charge of anyone or anything outside a P7 classroom in Claudy, so you can ignore all of this if you want. But, my deal is this:

We get to tell people exactly how wrong they are once we are 100% sure they know we love them. We get to do one minute of telling them they are wrong for every full day we spend exhibiting our love for them. How's that for a deal?

Why love them? Because God does, because Jesus would have shown his love for them.

I like those guys, I'm trying to be like those guys. I definitely don't hit the mark, ever but that's not the point. The point is trying.

Here's my grand statement to end on once more:
Let's just love. Let's just love them all. Everyone.

Because God so loved the whole world that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him gets to live a life eternal with Him. The ultimate all inclusive deal.