John 1:29-42, Colossians 3:1-17
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Do you remember "Where's Waldo?" There were a series of books published in the late 1980s which were really just illustrations, cartoons of people at the beach or at a mall or a sporting event, anywhere that the author could draw hundered and hundreds of little figures and the challenge was to find the one who was Waldo, a little guy who wore and red and white striped sweater, had glasses and a stocking cap. And the thing about it was that Waldo wasn't hiding, he was just there in the midst of all the people. But it wasn't easy to find him. I remember wasting way too much time looking at those pictures trying to find Waldo. I always thought it shouldn't be that hard, but it was.

I thought of that this week when I looked at the verses from John's gospel that Bethany read. Twice in this passage John the Baptist says, "I myself did not know him." Wait. How can that be? Jesus was right there. These two, John and Jesus knew each other. They were related, second cousins or something. Their mothers knew each other, they must have known each other growing up. How could John say he did not know him, that he did not recognize him. It shouldn't be that hard, right? Jesus was right there, in plain sight. How hard was it to see him? Sometimes it's very hard to see that which is right in front of us. I heard a story of a woman who volunteered at an art museum as a docent. And so she was very familiar with all the paintings and sculptures in the museum. The museum had a particular collection of statues and this woman was used to describing and giving the history on all these sculptures. One of the statues she walked by, and even told others about, countless times. But on this particular tour, the docent was leading a group of blind guests. A young girl was among those invited to touch the statue that she could not see. The docent said,

> "She ran her hands down the body of this female figure, and her first remark was: Oh, she's pregnant. And I had never thought about that. But in fact, the figure does look like a pregnant woman. Here was a kid really showing me something that I had been looking at for 35 years, probably, and had never noticed."

Had John the Baptist looked at Jesus for 30 years and never noticed who he actually was?

The Incarnation, that radical idea of our faith that proclaims that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, means that God became one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was right there with us, human just like all of us. And how many recognized him? John eventually did and pointed him out to Andrew and the other disciple saying "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." But John had to point him out. Jesus was there in plain sight, but was one of us, hiding in plain sight.

And what about today? Instead of playing Where's Waldo, let's play, Where's Jesus? Can he be seen today? Is he lost in a crowd somewhere? As St. Teresa of Avila has said,

"Christ has no body on earth but yours, no feet but yours,

Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world;

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good;

Yours are the hand with which he is to bless people now."

We are supposed to be the representatives of Christ in the world today. We gather here to worship God and to proclaim our faith in Jesus but then we are supposed to be Christ, to each other and to the world out there. That's a disturbing idea to me, I don't know about you. How can we be like Jesus to each other? How can we be like Jesus to the rest of the world?

That's what this passage is about, it seems to me. Especially to those of you who picked up stars that said compassion or humility or meekness—The passage from Colossians talks about getting dressed, about what kind of clothes we put on. Now I'm not talking about pants and shoes and blouses, we're talking about other things that we put on. To the Colossians who heard this letter, this is all about baptism. In the early church, it was often the case that adults were being baptized, converts from other religions or from no religion at all. After these converts had received instruction in the Christian faith, they were baptized, often on Easter Sunday. But the process of the baptism itself had a lot to do with their clothes. See they would normally have a baptismal pool, with steps leading down one side and

then more steps out of the far side. And the one to be baptized would stand at the steps, take off their clothes, go through the waters of baptism and when they reached the other side, they would step up and the elders of the church would be there with a new white robe with which to clothe them. So as they are clothed in this new robe, as they are clothed in this new Christian life, what are they putting on? Well, aren't they putting on Jesus? We are to be growing up into the likeness of Christ, we are to begin at least, to look like Jesus. And Paul tells us what that looks like in this passage from Colossians from which we took our stars.

We are to be compassionate, that's a word that means to feel with "com-passion." Can we, like Jesus, feel what another person is feeling? And are we humble? Humility is another of the words that Paul uses when he talks about the clothes we put on. Humility doesn't necessarily mean thinking badly of yourself, it actually means not thinking of yourself very much at all. That's hard for us who live in a culture of self actualization. Loving ourselves is a good thing, as long as we love others as well. Remember that one of the greatest commandments is to love your neighbor as yourself. Are we just as pleased when something wonderful happens to our friend as we are if the same thing happened to us? That the beginning of humility.

Meekness. That's another of the qualities that we should try to put on. Meekness is what I have on my star, it's something that I will think about for this year. Meekness is sometimes translated as gentleness or courtesy. Where humility is how you feel about another, meekness is how you act. It is treating another person as if they are valuable. Humility is believing that they are valuable. In many ways meekness is the opposite of self-aggrandizement. It is not building yourself up to look good. That's why this is a good one for me. I like to look good, I like people to think that I'm smart, that I'm the expert on things. Meekness means I try to build up another. We'll see how I do.

On the wall of my office there is a framed diploma for all to see, proclaiming that I am a "Master of Divinity." I don't think so. Our dear friend Elizabeth Kutsche, who is now with Jesus and knows better, used to be convinced that I could explain things to her or that my prayers worked better than

hers because I was closer to God than she was. Master of Divinity, master of the divine? Even on my best of days that is rather an audacious claim. Rodger Nishioka, the Presbyterian scholar and educator who teaches in one of our seminaries commented, "the great majority of our students, when they finish their academic work, are conferred the Master of Divinity degree. . . . Some of them, I can tell, actually believe it. They are the ones who make me the most nervous. If I had my way, as soon as they reveived the parchment with their name and the degree and the gold seal on it, I would like to be standing there to scibble something like "in process" or "by the grace of God" on the edge of their diploma."[1]

We are not Christ. But we show Christ to the world around us. Remember the WWJD craze? When we were all encouraged to think to ourselves "What Would Jesus Do?" Before we made a decision we were supposed to ask, what would Jesus do? That was supposed to guide us in our thoughts, our actions, our decision making. I guess I was always a little bit uncomfortable with that because I do know that I am not Jesus. But maybe we are together. Maybe that's what it means to call us the Body of Christ. Where is Jesus today? He's here—anywhere we are when we love and care for each other, Jesus is. He's here—anytime we speak up for what is right, Jesus is. He's here—anytime we give of our abundance for someone who doesn't have as much, Jesus is. He's here—anywhere we speak words of encouragement and love to someone who needs us, Jesus is. He's here—anytime that we've already been there and done that, but we volunteer again and again because our discipleship is never ending, Jesus is. He's here—whenever we feed the hungry, visit the sick, clothe the naked, and call on those in prison because we know Jesus is there too, Jesus is. He's here--on this weekend that we remember Dr. King and we remember that he acted because he was a disciple of Jesus Christ, and that means we can stand up for justice as well, Jesus is. Anytime we put on compassion and humility and meekness, he's here.

Where's Jesus? Right here. And right out there. Where you are, he is too.

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1 Nishioka, Rodger. *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1. p. 264.*