

“Hiding in Plain Sight”
John 1:29-42
January 15, 2017
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings
If we look, we can see Jesus all around us, even in us.

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 hundred and hundreds of little figures and the challenge was to find the one who was Waldo, a little guy who wore a 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 read through the verses from John's gospel. 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? Jesus is in heaven on the right hand of God, how do people see him today? 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?

The two dangers of this idea, it seems to me are either to believe it is not true and therefore think that we are just like everyone else, that we have no special calling to serve each other and the world, that the church is just like any social club or service agency; or else the danger is to believe that we are all that. 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 received 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. Maybe the better question is WWJBD? What Would John the Baptist Do? The thing that John does is that he points out where he sees Jesus. He calls attention to him and says to his friends, Look there he is! The Lamb of God. Maybe that's what our role should be, to point out where we see Jesus working and to go work with him. The question then is, do we see him? 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.

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

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