

## **"Mistaken Identity"**

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Sunday, April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunday

Texts: Psalm 118 and John 20: 1-18

"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away'" (John 20: 15). "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24: 15-16). "Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus (John 21:4)" Three times, three different individuals or groups of people failed to recognize Jesus standing before them. All of them surprising, but to me, the most surprising of the three is Mary Magdalene. She was perhaps closest to him of all, and yet even she did not recognize the Risen Christ. Meanwhile, many Christians believe that we'll know him when he comes. You know, he could be

sitting right here among us, and we might never know it, because we fail to see him.

We've all seen pictures of Jesus. What if he doesn't look like any of them? What if he does and we still don't recognize him? These people had met him in flesh and blood and STILL they could not recognize Jesus. If there is a case of mistaken identity with Jesus in the flesh, in his time, with his best friends, could it be the case that we wouldn't recognize him?

That's okay. Many of us believe would know him by his voice, so sight wouldn't matter. Do you suppose that Jesus changed his voice that first Easter to *disguise* himself to Mary? Did he wear a mask or costume to disguise himself to all these people? Did he dress up like some kind of gardener? How will we know? How come they didn't know? Why was Jesus mistaken for someone else?

Think about it. Not recognizing someone, especially amid great grief and sadness is not a surprise. In fact, the other day, although I wasn't grieving anything, I was in the store and got

behind a person that I thought I recognized. Then it dawned on me that the person I thought I recognized was out of state, and therefore could not be in Meijer! Perhaps it works the other way around. We see somebody who could be there but rationalize that they cannot. Maybe Mary Magdalene and the others thought they recognized Jesus, but then said to themselves, "It can't be him. We saw that he died. We watched him be buried."

Regardless of how it happened, the Gospel writers are clear to point out that there were many who didn't recognize the Risen Christ. And if they didn't, it's quite likely that we wouldn't recognize him as well. A case of mistaken identity may arise when we think someone is Jesus who isn't, or perhaps even more likely, we think someone is not Jesus who is.

Jesus told us in Matthew 25 that it is quite possible that we would not recognize him. But he did give us a clue as to where to look. He told us to look among the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked. In the stories of mistaken identity, he is the gardener, the fellow traveler, or the one serving lunch. True to form, Jesus is not found among the elite, or in a palace, or with a

great crowns and robes on him. He's found among regular people – people like you and me. I think it's quite possible that we'll not recognize Jesus among us simply because we'll be looking for the wrong person, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. This Easter, I invite you to consider where it is you do find Jesus among us. He just might be mistaken for someone else.

From the moment of his birth, throughout his ministry, through the trial, death and resurrection, Jesus is found among the common, the ordinary, or even more likely on the margins. Want to find Jesus this Easter? Maybe try looking with different eyes, in a different place, among people where you might not expect him to be. He never hid from anyone. Instead, people weren't able to recognize him.

May people not only recognize Jesus when he is among us, but may they also see Jesus in people who call themselves Christian. May they see us among the stranger, the naked, the fellow traveler, or the one serving lunch. For this is exactly where we, who gather in his name, are called to be. Meanwhile, most Christians avoid the stranger, the naked, the fellow traveler

or the one serving lunch. Instead, we spend our time looking up to the sky hoping he'll see us, show his face, and exalt us! It's the other way around. He looks to us, to see himself in us, so that he may be exalted.

As Father Richard Rohr reminds us, "[Jesus] seems to look just like everybody else after the Resurrection, even with his wounds on full display!" (Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, c2014 Richard Rohr). There is something profound here.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.

