

You Will See Me

John 14:15-21

May 21, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

“Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”

The house we lived in before we moved to our current home was kind of out in the woods. We had bird feeders hanging all over the place. One of our nearest neighbors, from a couple hundred yards down the dirt road, stopped by. A bird happened to fly up to one of our feeders. He asked, “Do you know what kind of bird that is?” All I could say was, “Ah...a reddish purple one?” He told me what kind of bird it was...and then gave me a little lesson in ornithology.

See...he would know. He is a bird watcher. Not just a backyard bird watcher. He has watched birds on six continents. It's a passion with him. So when he sees a bird, he sees more than a reddish purple one.

It's always kind of intrigued me how when people know just a whole lot about a subject, they get just a tad bit irritated when someone like me doesn't even know the first thing. A reddish purple one.

There are folks who are trained or gifted or whatever who can see or hear things that others cannot...certainly see and hear things I can't. I'll use myself as the one who cannot see or hear. A lot of you have insight I don't have...and so can see things I can't.

Laurie plays the flute. She plays quite well in my opinion. We often listen to MPR when we are driving along. A little classical music. We like some jazz, too. We might hear a flute being played. I hear a flute. That is about it. I can pick out a flute solo. But she hears things I can't even begin to hear. She's been trained and has a gift, and she practices. I'll compliment her, and she might say how she

messed up a measure here and there. I certainly didn't hear that. I'm impressed that I even know what a measure is.

Kay and Beth and others here are artists. They paint. They look at a blank canvas and a palate of colors. They make brush strokes. They see a picture long before I can. They look at other paintings and see stuff. The best I can do is see a picture...a pretty picture at that.

Terry is a doctor. Now I look at a sick person, and I see a sick person. A sick person tells me how they feel and where they are hurting. I say, “Wow! That's too bad. Maybe you ought to see a doctor.” Because, you see, a doctor can see stuff and hear stuff and diagnose stuff.

I think you see the picture here. People are wired in such a way or trained in such a way or gifted in such a way to see what others can't...what I can't. This can be said of each one of us. We are all gifted differently. I know the difference between a smallmouth bass and a largemouth bass and a spotted bass. Might be some here who don't. It's a gift I have.

We picked up our reading in John's Gospel right where we left off last week. This fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel begins with Jesus comforting his disciples and assuring his disciples and letting them and us know that he is the way and the truth and the life. In what we read today, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit.

Jesus begins by saying that our love for him will be evident in our doing what he asks us to do. Then he says he will give us a Counselor to be with us forever. The Greek word translated “Counselor” is the word

“paraklete”. Para. We know what a “para” is. A “para” is one who helps another...who comes alongside to help another. In the school there are paraprofessionals. There are paralegals. You know.... So the paraklete is one who will come alongside of us and help. Some translations use the word “Helper” instead of “Counselor”.

This Counselor or Helper is the Spirit of truth. We are talking about the Holy Spirit here. Jesus says that the world cannot accept this Counselor because the world does not see or know him. Jesus assures us that we do know this Helper. Jesus says we know the Spirit because the Spirit lives in us and is with us. This is key. The Counselor—the one sent alongside of us to help us—is with us...is within us.

Jesus then repeats an assurance he gave earlier in the chapter. He will come back for us. Then he says the world will not see him anymore. But we will see him. We will see him. Many cannot see Jesus. But we can see him.

So I got to thinking about this. Just what did Jesus mean? He said the world would not see him, but his followers would see him. What was he talking about?

Well, Jesus rose from the dead. Right? He appeared to his followers. The empty tomb alone was not quite enough evidence that Jesus rose. He appeared alive. That was the clincher right there. And it is important to note that it seems he appeared only to his followers. He did not go in to Jerusalem and appear to the religious leaders and government officials and say, “I told you so!” No...he appeared to his followers. Paul writes in First Corinthians that Jesus rose and appeared to Peter and then to the twelve and then to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters and then to James and then to him. Paul says nothing about Jesus appearing to his enemies.

Why did Jesus appear only to his followers? It was to encourage them. Remember how we saw in John that at first the disciples met behind locked doors. They were afraid. We read at the end of Luke’s Gospel

that Jesus met with his followers and then he was taken up to heaven. Luke’s Gospel ends with, “Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” No longer afraid. Great joy. Praised God in the temple. Why so joyful and filled with praise when a few days earlier they were scared to be seen in public...let alone the temple? They had seen Jesus...that’s why.

Have you seen Jesus? There is an old gospel chorus that asks, “Have you seen Jesus, my Lord?” Then it says, “He’s here in plain view; take a look....” So...take a look. Do you see Jesus? I see in Scripture where God was seen in some unique places. A burning bush. A desert. A manger. A prison cell.

So what do we want to take away from this? Well...there is that clichéd lesson: seeing is not believing; believing is seeing. Oh, but there is some frustration in that.

I was attending an evangelistic crusade. I was there as a counselor. Actually, I was more of a counselor to the counselors. At the close of the service, the evangelist gave the invitation for people to come on down to the front and make a commitment of their lives to Jesus. At the front were counselors. The role of the counselor was to talk with the people coming forward to repent and to make that decision to follow Jesus. The counselors would meet with those folks and talk with those folks and pray with those folks. If the counselor was with someone who was proving to be a bit difficult...well, then they would call in some reinforcements. That’s where I came in.

A counselor was having a difficult conversation. She brought her counselee to me. Now I tend not to do much stereotyping or profiling...but come on...we all fall victim to that once in a while. I could tell just by looking at this guy that he was looking to pick a verbal fight. I was right. He had all kinds of objections and questions. It all boiled down to basically one thing. He needed for me to prove to him the existence of God. He said—and I am paraphrasing, but not too much—but he said he had never seen Jesus. He needed to see

Jesus with his own eyes. Then he would believe. He looked at me, almost daring me to enter into verbal warfare with him. I didn't have time for that kind of thing then. I still don't.

I gave him my answer. I told him flat out that given his point of view and his attitude at that moment, he would, in fact, not be able to see Jesus. I want to tell you: that caught him off guard. I went on to tell him that if he would first put his trust in Jesus, then he would have my personal guarantee that he would see Jesus. I have not seen him since that day, but I have a feeling he left that place and has seen Jesus a few times.

Nothing profound here. But the world is full of people who need to see before they will believe. These are the people about whom Jesus said, "The world will not see me..." But we have seen Jesus. We have.

I've seen Jesus. Now, not Jesus in the flesh, but I've seen Jesus. I've seen Jesus in the prison...when men have fallen to their knees and wept and confessed that they have messed up and were sinners and asked God to forgive them. I've seen Jesus at the bedside of an ill person who trusts that they will be fine because of Jesus. I've seen Jesus in the funeral service where people are grieving but grieving not as the world grieves because they know their loved one is home and they are thanking God for life eternal. I've seen Jesus when God's people have reached out to the hungry with a meal or have repaired a home for someone without the means to repair their own home or loaned someone a walker or wheelchair. I've seen Jesus in the birth of a child. I've seen Jesus in those moments out in creation when the beauty just took my breath away. I've seen Jesus when it has felt like I am in a wilderness of confusion or doubt or whatever. I've seen Jesus. I believe you have, too.

He is right here. Why is it we can see him? We can see him because God has kind of wired us to see him. God has given us a gift. God has given us the gift of faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are wired and gifted to see Jesus. If anyone here has not seen Jesus, then

I would invite you to first believe. Believe in him. Then you will see.

"Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."