

# Recognizing the Lord Our God

An Easter Family Talk by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

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## Readings

*John 20:11-16, 24-29; 21:1-7 (Kempton Translation, modified)*

<sup>11</sup> Mary stood at the tomb weeping outside. Then as she wept, she stooped down to the tomb, <sup>12</sup> and sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. <sup>13</sup> And they say to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She says to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put Him."

<sup>14</sup> And saying these things, she turned back, and saw Jesus standing, and she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus says to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, thinking that He was the gardener, says to Him, "Lord, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have put Him, and I will take Him away."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus says to her, "Mary."

She, turning, says to Him, "Rabboni," (which is to say, Teacher). ....

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> Therefore the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> And after eight days, again His disciples were inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be to you." <sup>27</sup> Then He says to Thomas, "Bring your finger here, and see My hands, and bring your hand and thrust it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

<sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God."

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed; happy are they who have not seen, and have believed." ....

<sup>1</sup> After these things, Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and in this way He showed Himself: <sup>2</sup> There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter says to them, "I am going out to fish."

They say to him, "We are also coming with you." They went out, and straightway went up into the ship; and in that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> But when the morning had already come, Jesus stood on the shore; however the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus says to them, "Little children, do you have something to eat?"

They answered Him, "No."

<sup>6</sup> And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you will find some." They cast therefore, and after that they did not have the strength to draw it in for the multitude of fish.

<sup>7</sup> Then that disciple whom Jesus loved says to Peter, "It is the Lord."

### ***True Christianity 457:2***

With all of us, God flows into our concepts of Him and brings us acknowledgment of Him. He also flows into us and brings us His love for people. If we accept only the first inflow but not the second, we receive that inflow with our intellect but not our will. We keep the concepts of God that we have without arriving at an inward acknowledgment of God. Our state is then like a garden in winter.

If we accept both types of inflow, however, we receive the inflow with our will and then our intellect – that is, with our whole mind. We then develop an inner acknowledgment of God that brings our concepts of God to life. Our state is then like a garden in spring.

## Introduction

- Don't you love these stories of people seeing the Lord and recognizing Him?
- They thought that Jesus was gone forever.
  - And then they see Him again but don't recognize Him at first.
- And then something happens and they recognize Him, and then there's this flood of joy, relief, and love.
- And there's also a different kind of recognition when they realize in awe that, if He died and rose from the dead, He must be more than just a regular person.
  
- Today, we're going to talk about the three stories from our lessons and think about how we can also come to recognize the Lord our God.

## 1. When the Lord Calls Our Name

- In the first story, Mary Magdalene is at the tomb weeping.
  - The Lord died on the cross and now His body is gone and so she can't even care for His body.
- As she's weeping, she stoops down and looks into the tomb again and this time sees two angels sitting in the tomb.
  - In her sadness she doesn't seem to recognize that something amazing is happening – she is seeing angels!
- The angels talk to her and ask her why she is weeping.
  - We might think, why are they asking her this question?
    - They must know why she is weeping – they're angels!
- But Mary is about to turn around and see Jesus behind her.
  - If we picture the scene from the angels point of view, looking out from the tomb, they would have seen Mary weeping about the Lord being dead and gone forever and standing right behind her was the Lord, alive and well.
  
- It's useful to pause at this point in the story and think about times when we are feeling like Mary.
  - Sometimes it feels like the Lord is nowhere to be found, or like He's somewhere far away or just gone.
  - And actually He's right nearby, if we can figure out how to turn towards Him.

- Mary did turn and see the Lord, but she didn't recognize Him right away.
  - She assumed that He was the gardener and she was still so focused on this task of trying to find Jesus' body that she asked this man if He had taken the body somewhere.
  - It was only when Jesus said her name that she finally recognized Him.
  
- In just a minute I'm going to ask you to do something simple.
  - Wait for the instructions and then I'll tell you, "Go!" when I want you to do it.
  - I want you to remember what it feels like when someone who knows you says your name.
  - If you came by yourself today and you're not sitting near anyone who knows you, or if you're participating in this service from your home and you're by yourself, then just think about a person who knows and loves you and what it feels like when they say your name.
  - If you came with people that you know, I'd like you to just quietly say the name of a few people around you and they'll quietly say your name.
  - OK, got it? Quietly say the name of a few people around you. Go!
  
- Now maybe that felt a bit silly but I also hope that it felt good to have people who know you say your name.
  - Maybe it can help you to imagine what it would feel like to have the Lord say your name, because He's the one who knows each of us best of all.
  - We can have that experience when we read the Lord's Word.
  
- Have you ever had someone say something about you that you never noticed before for yourself?
  - We can feel a bit shy, but we also might smile a bit because it's true and we can tell that the person is telling us this thing about us because they know us and because they care about us.
- Reading the Lord's Word can feel like that.
  - We can read certain stories and certain teachings and feel like the Person who wrote those words knows us deeply, understands us, and is calling us by name.
  
- How can we recognize the Lord?
  - [Hand Motions] When the Lord calls us by our name and we feel that He knows us.

## 2. When We Remember What He Went Through For Us

- Now let's move on to the second story – the story of the Lord's disciple, Thomas.
- The other disciples had had the chance to see the Lord and to touch the scars in His hands and in His side from when He was crucified, but Thomas wasn't with them when they had that experience.
- The other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."
- But Thomas said that He wouldn't believe unless he saw and touched Jesus for himself.
  - We might say, "Thomas should have believed what they told him," but it also is true that each of us needs to have our own experiences of seeing the Lord.
- Thomas got to physical see and touch the Lord for himself and then He believed.
  - We don't get to do that.
  - But the Lord actually said that it's better that way: He said that there is happiness or blessing in not seeing and still believing (John 20:29).
    - How do we do that?
- Let's try to picture Thomas' experience, reaching his fingers into the holes in Jesus' hands.
  - Feel the middle of your palms and imagine if there were a scar there.
- Do you have any scars?
  - Do you remember how you got your scars?
- Scars usually show us that someone has been through something hard:
  - Maybe they got hurt.
  - Or maybe they got sick and had to have a surgery.
- It might be that your mama has a scar on her tummy from when you or one of your brothers or sisters was born.
  - Or, if your mama doesn't have a scar from that, she might still have stretch marks in her skin or different looking veins in her legs.
- Sometimes the scars and other marks on people's bodies show what hard things they have been through because of their love for other people.
  - This was definitely the case with the scars on Jesus' hands and in His side.

- Look at your hands and feel them and think about what you've been through.
  - Think about the scars that you have that are visible and the scars that you have that are invisible – that nobody else can see.
  - Think about the scars that other people have and particularly the hard things that they went through because of their love for you or for other people.
  - And finally think about the Lord and all the hard things that He went through because of His love for you and for all people.
  
- The reason that we can go through hard things and that it can still be worth it and good things can come out of it is because of the Lord.
  - If He had not come and done what He did, all of our work and efforts would be for nothing.
  - When we can see how the Lord has helped us get through hard things, and when we can remember all that the Lord went through for us, then we can recognize the Lord for who He truly is for ourselves.
    - Like Thomas, we can say, "*My Lord and my God.*"
  
- How can we recognize the Lord?
  - [Hand Motions] When we remember how the Lord has helped us to get through hard things and when we remember what He went through for us.

### 3. When Something Goes Miraculously Well

- Now let's talk about our last story.
- Some of the disciples decided to go out fishing in a boat, and all night they caught nothing – not a single fish.
- In the morning, the Lord was standing on the shore and called out to them in the boat, and they didn't realize who it was.
- He told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they did and then they caught so many large fish in their net that they didn't have the strength to pull it into the boat.
  - When that happened, John (also known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved"), said to Peter, "It is the Lord."
- The thing that made John realize that it was the Lord was that they were working on something and it wasn't going well, and then it suddenly went very well.
  - Then He knew: it must be the Lord!
  - Because this had happened before.
    - There was another time when they had fished for a long time and caught nothing, and then the Lord got involved and they then caught a huge amount (Luke 5:1-11).
    - And there were other times when there were thousands of people to feed and they only had a few loaves of bread and fish and the Lord gave it to the disciples to give to the people and the Lord made it so that there was enough food for everyone to have as much as they wanted with more left over (John 6:1-14).
- So when John saw something go miraculously well again, He knew that it must be the Lord.
  - We can also recognize the Lord when we're trying to do something useful and things go miraculously well. (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 356 and *Arcana Coelestia* 6073:3.)

- As an example, sometimes we have conversations where it feels like we're fishing all night and catching nothing.
  - We're trying to figure something out with someone else or with a group of people and we're getting nowhere – no good ideas, no progress.
    - And probably plenty of grumpy feelings.
  - Then we maybe take a break – take some time to think and pray and realize ways that we have maybe been unkind or unfair.
  - And then we come back to the conversation with more love for the other people involved, with more sense of patience and compassion.
  - We say, "I'm sorry for how I spoke. Can I try again?"
  - And then it's a totally different conversation!
    - Lots of useful insights.
    - Lots of good ideas for what to try.
      - We have a net full of large fish.
- In those kinds of moments we can learn to say, "Oh! It is the Lord."
  
- This connects to our lesson from the teachings for the New Church.
  - That passage said that what makes us able to recognize and acknowledge God on the inside and to have our ideas of God come alive, is when we are willing to receive the Lord's love for other people into ourselves.
  - When we don't just *know* things about God, but we connect with His love for other people and we act on it.
  - Then our minds go from being like a garden in winter (where it seems like there's nothing alive) to a beautiful garden in spring time, like the ones inside and outside the church right now.

## Conclusion

- How can we recognize the Lord?
  - Let's do all of them.
  - 1. [Hand Motions] When the Lord calls us by our name and we feel that He knows us.
  - 2. [Hand Motions] When we remember how the Lord has helped us to get through hard things and when we remember what He went through for us.
  - 3. [Hand Motions] When we try to act in a loving way and things go so much better because of the Lord.
  
- Those are just three of many ways that we can come to recognize the Lord our God.
  - And when we do, we can experience the same joy, relief, love, and awe that Mary, Thomas, John and so many others have experienced, saying in the words of prophecy of Isaiah,
    - "This is our God;  
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.  
This is Jehovah;  
We have waited for Him;  
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).
  
- *Amen.*

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