

**FINDING JESUS**  
**April 10, 2005 – Grace Church, Haddonfield**  
**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

“Dear God, as we go along our life’s way, help us to be aware of your presence with us. Open our eyes, make us expectant, eager to be met by you. Give us open minds, open eyes, and open hearts to receive your gracious presence. You are the Resurrection, the way and the life. Amen.” (Pulpit Resource, William Willimon).

The Risen Christ comes to us even today, much like he did to the first disciples. Luke’s Gospel tells us of a stranger joining two disciples on their way to Emmaus. But something is different. They don’t recognize Jesus. We too suffer from the same affliction. We fail to see Jesus when he is in our lives. Why? Why can’t we recognize him?

Too often, for many of us, we come to Church Sunday ... but we don’t see or experience Jesus in worship. We become bored, distracted or frustrated. Because of this, we don’t think religion is important. Partly this may be the fault of the church, but a larger share of the fault is ours. It’s hard for us to accept mystery, or miracles. We have become skeptics. Perhaps we have to relearn how to look at the world, Scriptures and worship. Jesus is there ... can we find him?

There’s a song that comes to mind for me, it goes like this: “Have you seen Jesus my Lord? He’s here in plain view. Take a look, open your eyes, he’ll show life to you ...” There is a promise for us in looking for Jesus. If we can do so, we will discover new life! What it takes is our approaching life with our eyes wide open. We might even have to start by asking ourselves if we really want to find the Risen Lord!

There is a story that comes to mind today too. I have shared it before, but it fits today as well. It’s about an Abbot and a Rabbi. Once upon a time there was a monastery that was declining. The grounds and building had fallen into disarray. No one visited the monks any more. Inside the monks quarreled and fought with each other. The community’s prayer life was a disaster. The exhausted monk was at a lost as what to do. He had tried everything, but nothing worked.

The local rabbi came to visit his friend the abbot. He was glad to see him and poured out his heart. After he shared his woes, the rabbi sat back and reflected for a moment. He scratched his beard, and said, “My brother, one of you is the Christ.” The abbot was astounded at the news. When he pressed his friend, the rabbi refused to elaborate. The rabbi parted with the grateful thanks of the abbot.

The abbot immediately called the monks together for a chapter meeting. The men grumbled as they came into the room. He waited patiently until they quieted. The abbot rose and said, “I have great news for all of us! It has been revealed to me that one of us is the Christ!” The brothers received the news with deep shock and silence! Next, they began to murmur among themselves! “Who is it? Is it he? Is it I?” A noticeable change began to overtake the entire community. The brothers began to treat each other with renewed kindness and respect. Everyone contemplated who the Christ might be as they

**FINDING JESUS**  
**April 10, 2005 – Grace Church, Haddonfield**  
**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

carried out their daily tasks. The worship and prayer life took on a profound and exciting vigor. Christian love became the norm rather than the exception.

One day, a weary visitor came to the gates of the monastery. He asked for shelter and food. The monks responded with enthusiasm. The visitor was amazed at what he saw. He had never seen such a caring and welcoming community. He asked if he could return in a week. The monks said yes. He returned and requested to become part of the community.

Soon, others were coming. The fame of the monastery grew and grew. Seekers from all over the world came to this place. The community grew and grew. What changed? It's simple; they became men looking for the Christ. They expected to find him. The monks opened their eyes, minds and hearts ... and were transformed. It is the same when we can look for the Christ.

What is the purpose of our worship each week? It is to create a moment for others that they might have a glimpse of God! All our efforts should be directed towards making this happen for everyone. Professor Reginald Fuller, my New Testament teacher in seminary, used to say that our pattern of worship presents to us multiple modes of Christ's presence. In the word and sacrament, we are on our own road to Emmaus ... and the Christ comes to join us.

The sacraments contain those outwards and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace of our Risen Lord. In Baptisms, the water points us to the new life, cleansing and community of God through the work of the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit. In Communion, the bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed for us that the way to the Resurrected life might be secured. Through these acts, Jesus comes to make us part of him and to sustain us. He is present over and over with us.

Robert Webber says ("Ancient Future Talk", Synthesis) that there are four distinct actions in worship by which Jesus is present: gathering; the word; communion and sending out. The Jesus story is another way that the Christ is present to us. We reenact it everything we gather. We gather in the presence of Jesus as a faith community. We see the Christ as we come before God together for the story. We hear the Word through prayer, creeds, sermons, scripture, confession and more. Jesus comes alive and present to us in the story spoken. The Communion relives part of the story. In this action, God redeems and saves us. The Christ is present in the bread and wine. It is here that we become part of the story. Finally, with the dismissal, we take the story and the Christ out into our world to live and share.

We see Christ, we share Christ, and we take Christ out into the world. He is present to us in so many ways. Now we need to ask ourselves the question of the song, "Have you seen Jesus my Lord?" Two instances come to my mind from this past week.

**FINDING JESUS**  
**April 10, 2005 – Grace Church, Haddonfield**  
**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**

For me, it was serving at the homeless shelter housed at the Baptist Church this past Thursday. This shared ministry tries to help men struggling to get their lives together. The churches provide food, shelter and fellowship. I got there to find Grace Church people providing dinner. One man said about dessert, “These are the best brownies we’ve had the whole time we’ve been in the program!” I saw Christ in the care given these men and the sense that someone cares. Christ was there.

For me, it was going volunteers to Woodlynne Methodist Church to work with children as part of Kids’ Alley on Thursday. We went to help with homework, work on a religious craft and serve a meal. One of the little girls clung to me. She asks if I minded being here dad that day since she had no father! Of course I didn’t mind! Pastor Vivian, who runs the program, said to me, “I’m always happy when Grace Church comes! You guys make a difference. No other Church does it as well as you do.” Christ was there, too.

Have you seen Jesus, my Lord? Where? When? How? Come to worship and experience the God moment! Brings others to do the same! After you have been here, go back out into the world and share the Good News! Find Christ out there as well! Jesus is here in plain view. He’ll show life to you. May we see the risen Lord in our midst ... and be transformed!