**August 28, 2022 Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16**

 ***Would You Know Him***

**Scripture: *Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 NRSV***

*(1)Let mutual love continue. (2)Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (3)Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (4)Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. (5)Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (6)So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (7)Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (8)Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. …(15)Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. (16)Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*.

**Notes:**

1. We do not know what ***Jesus*** actually looked like
	1. I have to think ***children*** see Jesus better, because they see him with their heart.
	2. The ***righteous*** see Jesus in need, and supply what is needed.
	3. They do not know it’s Jesus and are just as ***generous***.
2. Jesus comes to us in a way we ***least*** expect.
	1. In as much as you did it unto the ***least*** of these, my friend, you did it unto me.”
	2. The writer of Hebrews urges, his readers to show hospitality to ***strangers***;
	3. With God, all things are ***possible***.
3. We tend to ***judge*** others by their outward appearance,
	1. Do we ***patronize*** the beautiful, handsome, and well-dressed, while we ***ignore*** those who not.
	2. “…*the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the* ***outward*** *appearance, but the LORD looks on the* **heart***. 1 Samuel 16:7 NRSV*”
	3. We give ***preferred*** treatment to those who measure up to our expectations. This is a reflection of our ***sinful*** nature.
4. Jesus was also ***overlooked*** and under-appreciated.
	1. You don’t have to ***recognize*** Jesus when he comes to you.
	2. Treat ***everyone*** you meet as if it were Jesus.
	3. Never become so engulfed in ***appearances*** that we forget who we are to be ***ministering*** to.
	4. Welcome ***all*** who come as if they were ***Jesus*** himself.

**Script:**

Have you ever seen someone and feel as if you know them from somewhere. I do this all the time; I catch myself staring at them trying to think of where I know them from. And then I wonder, what about Jesus, would I recognize Jesus if he walked into the room? I remember pictures of Jesus from when I was a child; pictures I saw hanging in my grandma Davis’s house. The picture of Jesus from the shoulders up; it almost looks like his senior picture from high school. Then there is the picture of him praying in the garden of Gethsemane, this picture always breaks my heart because I know his burdens on this night were very heavy. One of my favorites is the picture of him standing at the door and knocking, if we would just open the door and let him in, oh the relationship we could share with him. But my favorite picture of all is the picture of him leaning down over the cliff, reaching for that one lost sheep who had strayed away. You may ask, why is that your favorite? And I will tell you; if you look closely, I am that one lost sheep, and Jesus left all the others to come after me.

These pictures may be symbolic but they are not real images of Jesus. After all, photography wasn’t invented for another 1800 years and to the best of our knowledge, Jesus never sat long enough for somebody to render a painting of what he really looked like. So, the only image we have of Jesus are the ones we conjure up in our own mind.

We imagine Jesus looking just like us, only better. I wonder if Jesus would show up in your life in a real way, would you be able to recognize Him? If he sat down on the park bench next to you, would you know him? Would we know Jesus if we met him face to face. This seems to be an age-old question: If Jesus were to show up for church this morning, would you recognize him – other than by a process of elimination? Probably not. There are several reasons why. The most obvious is we don’t know what Jesus looked like, so how would you recognize him if you saw him?

We like to picture Jesus as an attractive thirty-something-year-old man with flowing brown hair, soft brown eyes and a neatly trimmed beard – something on the order of the pictures I mentioned earlier; Warner Sallmon’s painting, Head of Christ, found in just about every church in the country. But is that really what Jesus looked like? Today as we look at our sermon passage from Hebrews 13, we get a glimpse of what to look for.

***Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 NRSV*** *(1)Let mutual love continue. (2)Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (3)Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (4)Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. (5)Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (6)So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (7)Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (8)Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. …(15)Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. (16)Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*.

We do not know what Jesus actually looked like but there is a story of a little girl in Sunday school drawing a picture. The teacher looked over her shoulder and asked, “*What are you drawing, Mary*?” “*A picture of Jesus*,” she said, without looking up. The teacher thought for a moment and said, “*Well, Mary, it’s like this: We didn’t have cameras back then and, as far as we know, no one ever painted Jesus’ picture, so we really don’t know what he looked like*.” Mary said, “*You will when I finish*.” We laugh, but when children imagine who Jesus is and what he looked like, I have to think children see Jesus better than most of us adults do, because they see him with their heart.

As I said before, we don’t know what Jesus looked like, but, if we take seriously what he told his disciples, we have a pretty good idea of what to look for. He said, “*(34)Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; (35)for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36)I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'* ***Matthew 25:34-36 NRSV***”

If we stop here it makes perfectly good sense. The righteous are rewarded for their generosity and good works. They saw Jesus in need, he was hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. and they supplied what he needed; they came to his aid. But we are missing a big point here; the whole point is that they did not know it was Jesus and they were generous just the same. Listen at the next verses; “*(37)… 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? (38)And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? (39)And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' (40)And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* ***Matthew 25:37-40 NRSV***”

Jesus comes to us in a way that we least expect, often in surprising ways, appearing in the lives of those who are less fortunate. I read a story of a pastor who welcomed a couple of migrants that knocked at the door of his parsonage and said they were hungry; in fact, they were starving. They had been on the road for many days without much in the form of food and water, so they were in dire need. The pastor welcomed us into the dining hall of the mission and got out items to make sandwiches. After two or three sandwiches and a few glasses of water, they told them where they were coming from and where they were going. As they talked one of the travelers noticed the picture hanging on the wall. It was a print of Eric Enstrom’s photograph called “Grace”. I am sure many of you have seen it before. It is of an old man sitting alone at the table with a large bowl of food, a loaf of bread and knife, a large book resembling a bible, with a pair of glasses folded on top of it. Many refer to it as a classic.

One of the travelers shared that his grandfather in Mexico had a similar picture hanging in his home. When he was a kid, his grandfather told him that this old man was praying to God, asking him to join him at his table, when he heard a knock at his door. It was a homeless man begging for food. The old man scolded him for interrupting his prayer and sent him on his way. He went back to the table to pray, but again, someone knocked at the door. This time, it was an old widow woman asking for a handout. He told her to go away and not bother him. Again, he went back to pray and, again, there came a knock at the door. This time it was two little children asking for something to eat. He shut the door in their faces. He went back to the table and said, “Lord, when will you answer me and join me in this meal?” The Lord said, “Three times you have asked, and three times I have come to your door, but you sent me away empty-handed. In as much as you did it unto the least of these, my friend, you did it unto me.”

The men finished their sandwiches, thanked their host repeatedly, and continued on their way; never to be seen again. I wonder; Could it be? Perhaps this young man…could it have been him; could it have been Jesus?

The Lord comes to us in the form of those we least expect. That’s why the writer of Hebrews encourages, or should I say urges, his readers to show hospitality to strangers; they might actually be the Lord’s messengers in their midst, angels in disguise. If this is the case, perhaps they are there to extend an extra portion of God’s blessing to you.

That’s what happened to Abraham so long ago in Genesis 18. He is sitting outside his tent during the heat of the day when three strangers pass by. He rushes out and greets them, he bows to the ground and insists they allow him to give them water to wash their feet, while he prepares them something to eat and drink. Sure enough, they were messengers of God. As they were eating, one of them said, “*I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.* ***Genesis 18:10 NRSV***”

Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. This was the answer to their prayers. Sarah would have a son, and Abraham would be the father of a great nation, as God had promised. Never mind the fact that Abraham was ninety-nine years old at the time, and Sarah was ninety. With God, all things are possible.

The problem we have with showing hospitality to strangers is that we often find strangers to be … well, strange … at least to our senses. They often look different, and talk different, and, let’s be honest, smell different, and that can be off-putting, even offensive. I remember once people came to visit here and they were different, they looked different, they smelled different, they even acted different. Nobody objected to them being in our church and attending our services; but I wonder how many people rushed to welcome them into our place of worship. I wonder how many people extended a welcoming hand. I wonder if anybody attempted to become their friend. They came a few times and then stopped.

And there was the time that a man in dirty ragged clothes came to our revival services asking people in the back row for help paying for gas. In that case, I distinctly remember one gentleman from our congregation not only helped him with gas money, but took him down to the store and filled up his car’s gas tank. Many looked at this man with disgust, upset that this man came to the church during a service and proceeded to panhandle during the service. But it took only one person with compassion, with mercy, with God’s grace, to take this man down to the store and fill up his car. Who am I to judge the actions of some people? Who am I to ridicule somebody when they are desperately in need of assistance? If not for the provision and grace of God that dirty raggedy man could have been me.

We have a tendency to judge others by their outward appearance, yet we have always been taught to not judge a book by its cover. Yet we are all guilty of this. We cater to the popular people, we fawn over the rich; we clamor over the famous, while we shun those who do not fit into our stereotype or clique. The Washington Post tested this out in 2007. They got Joshua Bell to play his violin at the entrance of a subway stop. In case you didn’t know, Joshua Bell is one of the most gifted and sought-after concert violinists in the world today. He dressed in tattered blue jeans, a T-shirt, sneakers and a baseball cap and went to a subway entrance in Washington, D. C. Without saying a word to anyone, he set his violin case on the floor, took out his instrument – a million-dollar Stradivarius – and proceeded to play the most beautiful music ever written for the violin. He played for forty-five minutes. During that time, about 1,100 people passed by. Of those, 27 stopped to listen, and they, only for a minute or less. Ironically, when he’s on stage dressed in a tuxedo, Joshua Bell performs for sold-out audiences all over the world. People pay big bucks to hear him play. Yet, dressed like a bum standing in a subway entrance, the same people walked right on by as if he wasn’t there.

When it comes to people, we judge the book by its cover, assuming the beautiful, the handsome, the well-dressed are deserving of our praise, while feeling free to patronize or ignore those who are, well, not. Scripture would have us think otherwise. Check this out; God told the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem where he would find the one he had chosen to be king. Samuel went to Bethlehem to the home of Jesse, who had seven sons, all of whom were big and handsome, witty and wise. Any one of them would have made an excellent king of Israel. Jesse introduced them to Samuel, one by one. As each came before Samuel, he thought to himself, “Surely, this is the one,” but, each time, the Lord said, “No, not this one.”

After Samuel had turned down the last of the seven sons, he asked, “Do you have any other sons?” Jesse said, “Well, yeah … there’s my youngest son, David. He’s out in the field tending the sheep … but I don’t think you’d be interested in him. He’s just a boy, ruddy in complexion, who likes to write poetry and play the harp and sing.” Samuel said, “Bring him to me.” David was brought before Samuel, and Samuel took one look at him and God said, “Arise! Anoint him, for this is he.” (1 Samuel 16:12) “How can this be?” they wondered. “Why, David is just a kid. Compared to his brothers, he’s a runt.” Samuel told them what the Lord had said to him: “*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature … for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 NRSV*”

We not only judge others by their outward appearance, we go to great lengths to give preferential treatment to those who measure up to our expectations. James makes no bones about it “*(2)For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, (3)and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," (4)have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (5)Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? (6)But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? (7)Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? (8)You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (9)But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:2-9 NRSV*” This is a reflection of sinful nature.

If there’s a word of consolation for those who are overlooked and under-appreciated, it’s this; the same thing happened to Jesus. Jesus was overlooked and under-appreciated. John says in Chapter 1 verse 10 and 11, “*(10)He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (11)He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him*.” But the good news is what came next in verses 12-13, “*(12)But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, (13)who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*.”

If Jesus were in our service today, would you know Him? If He were to come into our service and take your seat, how would you respond? You would be surprised at the number of times I see the reactions of people who come into the sanctuary and see somebody sitting in the seats they normally occupy. I will say we are getting better with that. If Jesus were to come into this sanctuary in need of a shower, clean clothes, and a breath mint, would you welcome him? Would you invite him into your home for lunch? You see, the best news of all is this; You don’t have to recognize Jesus when he comes your way; all he asks is that you accept him by faith, look for signs of his coming, and treat everyone you meet as if it were him. If you’re willing to do this, he’ll give you the gift of his peace, joy and love; plus, he’ll bless you in countless ways through the people you meet along the way.

As a church, I pray that we never become so engulfed in appearances that we forget who we are to be ministering to. Jesus calls the church to make disciples of all people, to make sure each and every person hears the word of Jesus and has an opportunity to decide for themselves if they wish to follow him. This means that we should not be looking at the outward appearances, we should not be looking at the wealth or status of a person. But we should be looking at the heart of each person we encounter and we should be welcoming all who come as if they were Jesus himself.