

John 1:1-25

Recognizing the Presence of Christ

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord

There's a strange kind of irony in the opening verses of this 21st chapter of John. The irony is that very early on in the ministry of Christ the disciples had left their nets to follow him (Mt. 4:20). In this chapter in John's gospel we find them returning to their nets. *I go a fishing* Peter says in v. 3. *We also go with thee* the rest of them say.

They had seen the risen Savior twice already but it seems that they were somewhat in doubt about what their mission was to be so they go back to what they had always done and enter into a ship and launch out into the night and catch nothing. The next morning they see a lone and solitary figure standing on the shore somewhat distant but obviously within earshot and v. 4 tells us that *they knew not that it was Jesus*.

It would seem, wouldn't it, that even at that time when the risen Christ was with them in his bodily presence that they still, like we today, were seeing through a glass darkly. This becomes evident again in v. 12 where we read *And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord*. Isn't that an unusual statement for John to make? Why would John bother to say that none of them dared to ask him? It leaves me with the impression that they knew but that they had perhaps an inward desire to confirm it nevertheless that this was indeed Christ. It's as if they knew it but had to suppress their desires to say *Is it really you, Lord?*

What I'd like to draw your attention to this morning, however, is the very positive affirmation that John makes to Peter in v. 7 when he says to him *It is the Lord*. This is tantamount to John saying – *I recognize him now – it's the Lord*. We know, of course, that this is an affirmation that John is making from a heart that is filled and thrilled. He's not simply making a factual declaration but he's emphatically declaring a glorious truth – *It's the Lord!*

This is the kind of declaration we should desire to make and with the same kind of heart that is filled and thrilled. Wouldn't it be great in the course of your worship as you bowed in solemn reverence and saw the people of God bowed in humble worship and beheld the communion trays and heard voices being raised in praise and thanksgiving to Christ and saw and heard the word of God – wouldn't it be great if in the midst of these things you would find yourself able to exclaim – *It is the Lord! Christ has come into the sanctuary. I see him with the eye of faith and I hear him with a hearing ear and I perceive him saying to me "come and dine."*

He does extend that invitation to us around his table. He has promised to be in the midst of his people. We should be able to know his presence in our worship today. But I wonder – will you see him? Will you perceive his presence? Will you be able to say when you leave the place of worship today that you know you've met with him? Will you find yourself able to say, as John said – *It is the Lord!*

I want to look at John's resounding declaration of recognition this morning. And I want to do so with the hope and prayer that you'll be able to say the same thing and say it not only here in the place of worship but that you'll be able to say it in your daily walk with Christ so that in all his providential dealings with you you'll be able to perceive Christ's hand.

It is The Lord!

In looking at this declaration I would have you consider first of all:

I. What This Declaration Presupposes

Simply put – It presupposes familiarity with Christ. He was not a stranger to John or to the other disciples. Indeed the miracle that was performed by Christ in this chapter was not the first time such a miracle had taken place. In Luke 5 we have the account of the same miracle performed at an earlier stage of Christ's earthly ministry.

So when Christ performed that miracle again the disciples were not found scratching their heads and wondering among themselves who this man was that had demonstrated his power over the sea and over the creatures in the sea. They had asked at an earlier stage *what manner of man is this that even the winds and the seas obey him* but now in Jn. 21 they knew what manner of man he was. They knew that he was the Christ, the Son of God. They knew that he was risen. Verse 14 tells us that this was the third time that the risen Christ had manifested himself to his disciples.

They not only knew him by the miracle he performed but we may surmise also that they knew him by his voice. It was while he conversed with them that John made the statement *It is the Lord*. And I say they knew him by his voice because Christ himself had said earlier in earthly ministry back in Jn. 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*.

And so is it by these same things that you and I should be able to exclaim this morning *It is the Lord!* He's no stranger to me. I know him by the miracles he's performed. And what I mean by that is not simply that you believe in the account of his miracles that are recorded in the gospels but you know him by the miracles he's performed on you.

You may ask – what miracles has he performed on us? Are you kidding? If you're familiar with him then you know that he's performed many miracles on you. When you look at the spiritual counterparts to the actual miracles he performed you're able to conclude that like the blind man who was healed and regained his sight you have gained your spiritual sight and have been healed from spiritual blindness; and like Lazarus who was dead and laid in the tomb and came forth to life from death, you too have heard his voice and come forth from spiritual death to spiritual life. You've gained spiritual hearing and you've gained spiritual deliverance from the bondage of Satan.

Indeed you have gained so much by way of his miraculous power that you find yourself agreeing with Paul's statement in 2Co 5:17 *Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* The person that can make such an affirmation that old things have passed away and all things have become new is the same person that has come to know Christ. You're familiar with him. You commune with him and you follow him and you have a heart for him.

To you who are not familiar with him you might find yourself saying this morning, not *It's the Lord* but rather: *it's just another Sunday. It's just another communion service. It's just another time that I have to be in church.* You look at church as something that more or less has to be endured and you feel perhaps even an inward dread of a communion Sunday because you think that communion services drag on for so much longer (even though they don't really).

The problem is that you're not really familiar with Christ. You know him only in theory but not in truth. You know about him but you don't really know him. You can't really relate to what those Emmaus road disciples said when they asked: *Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* (Lk. 24:32).

How I pray that you'll come to know him instead of just know about him. You should make it your prayer that his word will come to your heart with power. You shouldn't be satisfied with anything less than a true and genuine acquaintance with him. To those that do know him they can hardly stand not meeting with him. They want to be able to exclaim *It is the Lord!* Like the Shulamite woman in the Song of Solomon they've known intimate communion with him and they confess because they know that he is altogether lovely; and if he's withdrawn himself (as he sometimes does) then they set out to find him again. *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I [am] sick of love* (Song 5:8).

This is tantamount to saying that they long for him because they know him. They've experienced the blessing of his presence and they've been won over by his love. Have you been won over by his love? Do you see and sense in your heart the extent of such condescending love that is portrayed in these communion elements? Does your heart burn within you at the remembrance of his becoming a man and his atoning death on Calvary's cross?

If your heart has been won by him then you'll find yourself saying this morning in the time of communion that *It is the Lord! He's come among his people and he's drawn near to me and my heart is filled to overflowing.*

So the declaration presupposes familiarity with Christ. But let's move on to consider not only what the declaration presupposes but next I want to consider:

II. What Prompts Such a Declaration

Look again at vv. 5-7 and you see that it was something very specific that enabled John to say what he said:

Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. 6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.

The specific thing, of course, that prompted this declaration by John was the bountiful catch they made of the multitude of fishes which followed a night in which they hadn't caught anything. For a fisherman to go from nothing to a multitude of fishes is to go from barrenness to great blessing. And so you can say that it was the recognition of great blessing that prompted the declaration *It is the Lord!*

You and I, as Christians, have gone from barrenness to great blessings. We've gone from being spiritually impoverished to becoming spiritually rich. You were destitute of righteousness at one time. And it didn't matter how hard you strove for it. You had no more righteousness than the disciples had fishes by their own efforts the previous night. But what you lacked the Lord provided.

Christ has provided righteousness for you and it's a bountiful righteousness because it's his righteousness. The thought of what you lacked and what Christ has provided should prompt you to exclaim *It is the Lord!* And when, on the day of judgment, you are openly acknowledged and acquitted before that throne you will certainly have cause to say then – *It is the Lord!*

In similar fashion you were once alienated from God – *without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world* (Eph. 2:12). *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God* Paul says again in Eph. 4:18.

The empty to full contrast comes out in 2:13-15 where Paul writes: *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;* (Eph. 2:13-15).

From strangers to the covenants of promise to joint-heirs with Christ; From far off from God to being made near to God by the blood of Christ; From being at enmity with God to being at peace with God; From being an alien to God to being brought in to the very family of God; From being defiled to being cleansed; From being sinful to becoming righteous; From being dead to being made alive.

In all these night to day contrasts you should find yourself prompted to say – *It is the Lord!* It is the Lord that has paved the way for these blessings and has secured them. It is the Lord that has applied these blessings to your soul. It is the Lord that became a man and

shed his blood in order to secure these blessings. In all these bountiful blessings and many more besides we are prompted to say *It is the Lord!*

I think it's worth pointing out here that in the narrative of Jn. 21 it was the immediate impact of the miraculous catch that prompted John to say *It is the Lord*. But it is not always in the context of immediate provision that the child of God is able to recognize the Lord's hand. Some, you see, are tempted to see the hand of God only in their bountiful material provision. If the cupboards are full you're able to say *It's the Lord*; If you're able to buy a new car you're happy to say – *It is the Lord*; Or if you receive a promotion at work you may find it easy to say – *It is the Lord*.

But what about the harsh providences of life? What about the times when losses are suffered? What about the time when you lose a job or a position or a ministry? What about the time when you lose your health? Can you say in those cases – *It's the Lord?*

Job certainly saw the Lord's hand as a given in all his afflictions. He says to his friends in effect that they are only stating the obvious when he says in Job 12:9 *Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?* It's an easy thing to say in the midst of great blessings that it is the Lord. But what is it that can prompt us to say in the midst of a frowning providence that this too is of the Lord?

The elements of this communion table provide the answer for us. The broken body and shed blood of Christ, you see, are meant to remind you that there is no condemnation to your soul. And so you never make the declaration *It is the Lord* with regard to his providence being a manifestation of judgment. Judgment has already taken place. *This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which is shed for you.* You see your judgment in the broken body and shed blood of Christ. And because he came and lived for you and died for you, you are also taught to conclude that nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.

So you can affirm in every providential dealing of God that it is the Lord but it is the Lord out of his love for you; and it is the Lord working that which is for your good and his glory. It is the Lord leading, guiding, providing, protecting, chastising and conforming you to the image of his Son.

So we see what this declaration presupposes – it presupposes familiarity with Christ. And we see what prompts the declaration in any and every circumstance of life – it's prompted by the realization that we are bountifully blessed. It remains for us to consider finally:

III. Where Such a Declaration Leads

What happened when John declared to Peter *It is the Lord*? We read in the same verse (v. 7) *Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. 8 And the other disciples came in a little ship;*

In the case of Peter he couldn't get to Christ fast enough. If this is indeed the Lord, you could say, then Peter demonstrates that he must commune with him. He's thrilled to know that Christ is with them again.

And when the others arrive behind Peter, knowing as they do, that this is the Lord then they are happy to respond to Christ's invitation in v. 12 to *come and dine*. This is the same invitation that Christ extends to us this morning – *come and dine* – come and dine spiritually speaking by eating the flesh of Christ which is meat indeed and by drinking the blood of Christ which is drink indeed. Come and dine by entering into communion with your Lord.

Come and affectionately meditate on his sufferings and contemplate all that you've gained as a result of his atoning death. Come and appropriate anew and afresh the glorious truth that your sins are forgiven and that they've been removed from you as far as the East is from the West. Come and bask in his love. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn. 15:13).

Come and consider that this communion feast has been ordained by him. This is not an invention of men. This is not something that the church simply made up to be a part of its ritual. This is the Lord! And if you perceive this to be the Lord then you'll be as anxious and excited about it as Peter was when he cast himself into the sea in order to get to Christ.

This declaration also leads us to one more thing. We read this morning those verses which beginning with v. 15 give us the account of Christ's heart searching examination of Peter. *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* Christ asks Peter 3 times. I think it would be fair to say that there was no doubt about Christ's love for Peter. He had, after all, been crucified and laid in a tomb. And he laid down his life out of love – first for his Father but also for the his followers, the ones that his Father had given him.

So there's no place in our heart examinations to question the love of Christ. He's proven his love with the greatest display of love conceivable to Divine wisdom. But alas, we know only too well that we have constant need to examine our love for him. Aren't you glad, this morning, that Peter wasn't set aside. His denials had not cost him Christ. Christ had died even for the sins of those denials.

So even in our practice of examining ourselves we are able to say – *It is the Lord!* It is the Lord who deals with us in love. It is the Lord who restores us when we sin. It is the Lord who commissions and recommissions us to serve him. It is the Lord – whose love is steadfast and sure who will never leave us or forsake us.

I trust that as we distribute these communion elements and remember and think upon his broken body and shed blood, and all the blessings that have accrued to us by virtue of his life and death that you'll be able to say as John did to Peter – *It is the Lord!*