

Sermon for Zion, June 30, 2019 - Rev. Douglas Rollwage

Hymns: The Island Hymn; 350 – To God be the Glory; 445 – Open our eyes, Lord;  
376 – Shine, Jesus Shine

Scripture: John 14:5-11; 1 John 3:1-3

Sermon Title: To Be Like Him

*John 14:5-11 (New International Version)*

*Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

*Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”*

*Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.*

*1 John 3:1-3 New International Version (NIV)*

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

Most of you have picked up your Photo Directory photos, and I have to tell you, you look marvelous! And isn’t it wonderful what modern technology can do – 5 minutes with the guy working the photo-retouching software on the computer, and suddenly, we all look years younger. I don’t mean to brag, but after working on mine for a couple of minutes, Steve, the photo-retouching guy, said he couldn’t do anything to improve the way I look. I took that as a compliment.

When I showed my picture to my sister, she remarked, “I thought for a moment you were your Father.” Personally, I don’t see it. He was mustachioed but unbearded, somewhat more svelte, and while no less physically imposing, most people could easily and instantly have told us apart at a good long distance. But there’s something about me which reminds my sister of my father. What is it? Eyes? Nose? Forehead? Or is it something else – a reflection, somehow, of something inside – attitude? Character?

Have you ever had this happen to you? Someone tells you that you remind them of your father, your mother, your Aunt Sally or your Uncle Fred? And you wonder what on earth it is about you that sparks this recognition? Most of us don't think we look anything like our Aunt Sally or Uncle Fred. Most of us don't want to. Aunt Sally and Uncle Fred are old! But there's something...

Jesus is talking with his disciples, and they are worried, concerned, because Jesus is telling them he is going somewhere, somewhere they are not sure of, despite his reassurances. He is going to his Father's house, he says, and there are places there for them as well, places Jesus is going to prepare. "But we don't know the way," says Thomas, "so we can follow you?"

"I am the way," Jesus said to him, "and no one comes to the Father except through me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life," he said, and you could just imagine the faces of the disciples, straining to try to understand. It is not an easy thing to figure out what God is all about, it is not an easy thing to figure out how to get to God's house, and despite Jesus' reassurances, you just know that Thomas, for one, would have been happier with a road-map.

But instead, what Thomas got was something else altogether. What Thomas and the rest of the disciples got, what we get, is what comes next. "Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to understand God, do you want to get to God's house? "If you know me, you will know my Father also," said Jesus. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. From now on you do know him *and have seen him.*"

But wait a minute – isn't God an old man in white robes and long flowing beard? Jesus wasn't an old man in white robes and long flowing beard. He might have been eventually, but he never got the chance. Besides, even though we conjure up these images of God, all of us (I hope!) understand that God doesn't really look like that; we know that the "Immortal, Invisible God only Wise, in Light Inaccessible Hid From Our Eyes" is not really constrained by human form. Until Jesus.

Somehow, to see Jesus is to see God. To know Jesus is to know God. To encounter Jesus is to bump into God, the very nature of God, the way God is, the way God acts. Jesus is God revealed to us in the way we are best able to understand and apprehend. To see Jesus is to be reminded of God; the resemblance, somehow, is uncanny. And we are called to resemble Jesus.

Now, there are not many among us who look like Jesus - I think. Who knows? The New Testament tells us a lot about Jesus, but is completely silent on his appearance. You'd think the Bible would have mentioned, at least once, at least in passing, what on earth Jesus looked like. But it doesn't. What colour were his eyes, his hair? Was he tall

or short? Did he smile a lot? We just don't know. We don't know much about his face. All we have to go on, according to the Scriptures, is that he was Jewish, from the Middle East, and didn't have any remarkable distinguishing characteristics. Could blend right in. Traditional religious imagery has him pictured with long hair, for some reason; we really don't know if he had long hair, short hair, brown hair or black. And you can't really go by the movies; one of the big Jesus movies has Max von Sydow, six feet four inches of Swede, playing Jesus. I think Jesus probably looked a lot more like Andrew Hutchinson than Max von Sydow. But even Andrew looks more like the guy in our stained glass window of the Emmaus story, than like Jesus.

But physical appearance aside, what we do know about Jesus, is that there was something about him that made knowing Jesus be like meeting God. Face to face.

To live life as a Christian is to resemble the face of Jesus. To live life as a Christian is to be the face of God, to a world hungry for a glimpse of hope. Again, I don't mean that we are to physically resemble the Biblical model, although I find a beard helps. Nor do I expect of us what people saw in Stephen, the first person to be killed on behalf of the faith of Christ; it said about him (Acts 6:15): *"And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."* No, that might be too much to hope for.

But we are called to live in love, in peace, and in mercy, for it is through this, says Jesus, that people will know we are the children of God. There is no greater mission than to live for God, to live as the brothers and sisters of Christ, and through the works God empowers us to do, to help people recognize God through us. To help people catch a glimpse of the face of God, which is the face of love, which is the face of hope.

There's the key: When people see our face, what do they see? Who do they see? Do they see a face offering sadness or joy? Condemnation or welcome? Judgment or understanding? Impatience or peace? Coldness or warmth? Indifference or care? Apathy or enthusiasm? Self-importance or humbleness? Cynicism or appreciation? Rejection or welcome? Misery or delight? Greed or contentment? Anger or forgiveness? Hatred or love? None of these things have anything to do with our physical characteristics, but each one has everything to do with the spirit that shines through. I have seen people judged to be beautiful who have reflected a shocking inner ugliness of spirit; I have seen people judged to be unattractive who have radiated light into the world through a spirit which glowed with the presence of God. It isn't about your face. It is about what shines through it that counts.

People looked at Jesus. Maybe he looked like anybody else. Maybe a little taller, a little shorter. Maybe there was something instantly memorable about him, or maybe he had a face which called to mind the words of Isaiah (53:2): *"He had no beauty or*

*majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*” In terms of eyes blue or brown, nose big or small, beard full or sparse, hair black or brown or wiry or smooth or long or short, I can’t tell you what they saw. But I can tell you this: When they looked at Jesus, and when he looked at them, by God, he looked like his Father. Just like his Father. They saw in his face, shining through his face, joy. Welcome. Understanding. Peace. Warmth. Care. Humbleness. Appreciation. Welcome. Delight. Contentment. Forgiveness. Grace. Mercy. Love.

What’s shining through your face? When people look at you, what do they see? Is there, anywhere in there, a reflection of your Father? Is there, anywhere in there, something that might bring Jesus to mind? The Apostle Paul, who was, by all accounts, not much to look at – he is described in one ancient writing as *“A man rather small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, with meeting eyebrows, a large, red and somewhat hooked nose,”* was described in the very next sentence as, *“full of grace, for at times he looked like a man, at times like an angel.”* I don’t know about you, but I have seldom thought of angels as *rather small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, with meeting eyebrows, a large, red and somewhat hooked nose.* Put one of those on top of the Christmas tree, and you’ll frighten the children. In Paul’s case, it must have been the grace of God shining through the unbrow and red hooked nose that brought an angel to mind. Maybe that’s what Paul was thinking when he wrote, *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*

My prayer for you, my prayer for me, is that the light of God would so shine in our hearts that it might illumine, in our face, through our actions, the very face of Christ. And until we reach that point, let’s help the process along, and work on expressing in our faces, joy. Welcome. Understanding. Peace. Warmth. Care. Humbleness. Appreciation. Welcome. Delight. Contentment. Forgiveness. And love. Try it out on somebody today. It might hurt; your face might not be used to expressing such things. You might have gotten stuck on one of the negative expressions, and like my mother said when I would make a face, *“If you keep doing that, it will stay like that.”* But it is worth a try. And above all, let the light which God has placed in your heart, shine through whatever face you’ve been blessed with. As you do, no matter how you look, people might think you have the face of an angel. Or better, the very face of God.

John, in his letter, writes something amazing. He says, *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* We shall be like him. That’s the future promise. But the time to start cultivating that resemblance is now. *“I thought for a moment you were your Father.”* May it be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.