

## **“A Face-To-Face Encounter with Jesus”**

Will you pray with me?  
May the words of my mouth,  
And the meditations of our hearts,  
Be acceptable in your sight,  
Oh, Lord our Strength, and our Redeemer.  
Amen

So, how will you respond when you encounter Jesus face-to-face?

My message this morning is from the story of a woman who, in the first century, had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. I believe that we can use her story as model for a face-to-face encounter with Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's also a model for a Christian response to such an encounter.

Before we read this story, I would like to comment on its context. First, when I read through Mark's Gospel, I find it remarkable the number of occasions when Jesus encounters his disciples, and ends up almost saying, and surely thinking: "How many times do I have to tell you? You just don't get it!" This story is such an occasion.

Second, you should know that Mark sets this story in Holy Week. Mark tells us that on Palm Sunday, Jesus entered into the City of Jerusalem riding on the back of a colt. There he was received with a royal welcome. People lined the street, cheering and shouting hosannas, waving palm branches, and laying the branches in his path as he passed by. It was a welcome fit for a king! I'm sure that you can imagine how this royal welcome endeared Jesus to the hearts of the temple authorities.

Mark then tells us that on Monday, Jesus entered the temple. There, he overturned the tables of the money changers, and wreaked havoc on the economics of the temple that day. Now the temple authorities were really upset, and were plotting about how to get rid of this guy Jesus.

Mark tells us that on Tuesday, when Jesus returned to the temple, he was met by a succession of agents for the temple authorities. Each agent was armed with a question which was designed to entrap Jesus, and to discredit him in the eyes of the crowds who followed him everywhere. One by one, Jesus met the agents and their questions. And, one by one he turned their questions against them. And so, at the end of the day, it was the temple authorities who were left discredited, and looking corrupt. With this performance, Jesus pretty much signed his own death warrant.

Now we all know what happened on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. But, what happened on Wednesday? On Wednesday, Jesus threw a party! This story from Mark's Gospel tells us what happened at that party. As I read the story, I would ask you

to listen for two things that Jesus tells his disciples are hallmarks of discipleship: two hallmarks of discipleship.

A reading then from The Gospel According to Mark, the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses one thru nine.

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Well, what happened? Here we have a woman who I believe was a follower of Jesus. She undoubtedly followed Him around the highways and byways of Galilee, where He taught, preached, and healed. She undoubtedly followed him up that dusty road to Jerusalem. And, she was there when He entered into the city to a welcome fit for a king. She was there when He overturned the tables of the money changers, and she was there when He turned things around on the agents of the temple authorities. After all of this, she became convinced that Jesus was to die, and to die soon. She felt great compassion for Jesus, and she did something about it. How did she respond? We're told that she spent the equivalent of more than a year's wages to buy a jar of perfumed ointment. On Wednesday, she brought it with her to the party, where she found Jesus reclined at table with his disciples and friends. She opened the jar and started anointing Jesus with it, in preparation for his burial. And what was her reward for this great act of compassion? Criticism. Yes, criticism. Listen:

“Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages, and the money given to the poor. And they rebuked her harshly.”

And what was Jesus' response to this criticism? Well, can't you just hear him thinking: “How many times do I have to tell you? You just don't get it!” But what He says is:

“Leave her alone! The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want”.

What is he telling them here? He is telling them that the poor will always be the main focus of their ministry, and the poor will always be in need of their acts of compassion. And then He goes on to say:

“But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.”

What is He telling them here? He is telling them that He is in need of compassion, and will not always be with them. And they will meet others in their ministry who will not ALWAYS be in need of compassion, but are, like Him, SOMETIMES in need of compassion. They must be aware of these folks also, and be prepared to show them acts of compassion, for disciples are the servants of all. So, what is Jesus telling His disciples are two hallmarks of discipleship: compassion for all, and do something about it! Compassion without action is not discipleship.

In addition, I believe that Jesus is telling US something. I believe that when He says that he will not always be with us, he is telling us that he represents ALL people in need of compassion. And so I tell you that when you meet someone in need of compassion, you are face to face with Jesus.

And so, how will you respond when you are face-to-face with Jesus? Some who have not yet encountered Him should now realize how to respond: do something about it! For many in the congregation, you have already encountered Jesus. How DID you respond? Let's find out!

If you have ever:

Volunteered at a soup kitchen, and there you have helped to serve the hungry, please stand up, for you have had a face to face encounter with Jesus! (Thank you. Please remain standing.)

Gone on a mission trip either in this country or abroad, where you have encountered people in need, and you have helped them, please stand up, for you have had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus! (Thank you. Please remain standing.)

Volunteered at Camp Hope, Habitat for Humanity, Christmas in April, or any other such ministry, where you have met people in need of the repair or construction of shelter, and you have helped them, please stand up, for you have had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Encountered someone new to our shores who is struggling with our language, and you have tutored them, please stand up.

Made a prayer shawl and given it to someone in need of prayer, please stand up.

Engaged in the planning, development, or administration of Hughes House, for the benefit of the disabled in our community, please stand up.

Delivered food to shut-ins, to families in crisis, or dispensed food from a food pantry, please stand up.

Gathered Christmas presents and delivered them to the needy, please stand up.

I think you now get it, and so I say to you: if you have ever met someone in need of compassion, and you have done something about it, please stand up, for you have had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Look around, my friends. These are your fellow disciples!

Thank you. You may be seated.

This is not the end of the story. We've covered eight verses. We have one remaining. "I tell you the truth", Jesus says, "I tell you the truth." Another remarkable thing I find as I read the gospels is the number of occasions when Jesus is found teaching in parable, or speaking, as I call it, parabolically. People come away scratching their heads and saying: "Just what did He mean by that?" Over the years I've either heard or read a number of opinions on why he spoke in this manner, and I've developed my own little philosophy on the matter. When someone tells me something directly about a subject, I have a number of options for what to do with the information. The options invariably include a filing system. Yes, I can file it away for another, more convenient time. But, when you come away asking: "What did he mean by that?" you're thinking about it. After awhile, you're chewing on it. And then, you're grinding on it. Then, you're wrestling with it, and then you're sleeping on it. After awhile, it comes to you what Jesus meant. But now, it's too late for the filing system. You've spent too much time and too much effort on it. In some cases, it's become a part of you, and it's changed you somehow. Whenever you hear Jesus say "I tell you the truth" get ready to scratch your head and begin the process.

"I tell you the truth" Jesus says. "Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Now, what did He mean by that? I must tell you that I have had a long time to think about it, and I've thought of a number of things that He could have meant. So this is my challenge to you this morning. Sometime later, open your bible to the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark's Gospel. Think about the context of the story. Then, read it for yourself. And, when you get to the ninth verse, read it a couple of times. Then, scratch your head and start the process. At some point you will realize what Jesus is saying to you. If you are correct, I guarantee that you will be able to answer "Yes" to one simple question: Do you get it?

AMEN

## My Face to Face Encounter with Jesus – Marie Muller

Several years ago I took a new job that had me traveling by subway to and from work and walking about 6 blocks from Metro center to my office. Early one morning as I was passing a McDonald's a woman ran up to me and asked if I had any spare change and she said, "I am so hungry." I kept walking, shook my head "No" and continued on to work. I had walked less than half a block when I heard a voice inside my head saying, "I was hungry and you did not feed me." I thought, "What have I done? I have turned my back on Jesus!"

Soon after this happened my daughter Sarah related something that happened to her when she was shopping in Aspen Hill. A woman approached her and asked her for money. Sarah did not offer her money, but told her if she were hungry, she would buy her a meal. So Sarah took her into Boston Market and bought her lunch. The woman looked at her and said, "You must be a Christian". Sarah answered, "Yes, I am".

My encounter haunted me for weeks and I prayed that I would be given another chance because Sarah's story had given me an idea. I went to McDonald's and bought \$5.00 gift cards and then waited to be approached by someone. The next chance I had was when a man standing in front of McDonalds asked if I had spare change so he could buy a cup of coffee. I handed him the gift card and told him to buy breakfast. His face lit up with a huge smile. Another time on a hot August day a woman who seemed very angry charged up to me and demanded money to buy ice cream. I handed her the \$5.00 gift card and her face was transformed from anger to surprise and then joy.

I have had face-to-face encounters with Jesus as I have interacted with these people in need. And I hope perhaps they saw Jesus in me.