

Seen Jesus Lately?
Based on John 14:23-29
Easter 6C May 9, 2010
Rev. Craig M. Sturm Trinity Lutheran Church, Sherman, Texas

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

I learned early on in my ministry that people learn just as much theology from the hymns that we sing as from the Bible stories that we read. This is why I spend lots of time and thought each week choosing hymns. Let's face it: the hymns are the take-home material. In a couple of hours, you might or might not remember something about my sermon, but you'll be humming and singing the hymns we sing in worship today all week long.

I've come to terms with that. But I've also learned that sometimes people misconstrue the meaning of certain hymns.

I was once teaching the Bible to a group of junior high kids. And I asked the question, "Where is Jesus?" I got the usual responses: in heaven, in my heart. But one answer caught me by surprise. "Jesus is in Plainview, TX" one boy said.

"Plainview?" I asked. "Yeah," he said, "you know that song." And he started to sing... *Have you seen Jesus my Lord? He's here in plain view.* The boy assumed the lyrics were referring to Plainview, TX. We'll be singing that hymn after the sermon. You won't be able to sing it with a straight face!

So how would you answer that question: Where is Jesus? Truth be told, the kid's answer, "Jesus is in Plainview, TX" might be right on. Let me explain.

The Gospel today is from the 14th chapter of John. We heard just a small portion of that chapter. If we were to read the entire chapter, we would hear a reoccurring theme.

Over and over again, Jesus reassures us that he is with us always. "You will always be with me where I am," Jesus says in verse three. "I will not abandon you as orphans," Jesus tells us in verse 18. "I will make my presence known to you," Jesus promises in verse 19. "I will make my home with you," Jesus says verse 23. Over and over again, Jesus reminds us, "I am with you always."

The promise is clear. But if I were to ask you, "When was the last time you remember seeing Jesus?" I bet you would have to think for a while to come up with a time when, without a shadow of a doubt, you knew Jesus was with you.

So why is that? If Jesus has promised to be with us always, then why don't we always sense that he is with us? If Jesus is truly with us always, then why at times does Jesus feel so far away? Why do we feel all alone at times?

"I will not abandon you as orphans," Jesus tells us in the gospel today. But then why is it that we often live like spiritual orphans in this world – living as if we do not have a heavenly Father who deeply loves and cares for us, providing for our every need? We look out only for ourselves because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. We struggle to find hope in tomorrow because of our present trials and fears. Although God has promised to be with us and to provide for our every need, so often we live like spiritual orphans.

Today Jesus reminds us of the powerful promise he made to us: I am with you always. We are not alone. We have a Savior, one who walks with us every step of the way; one who protects us and provides for our every need; one who dries our tears; one who guides us in the right direction.

A pastor tells about a time when he was going through a mini faith crisis. It's wasn't anything serious; his faith had just become tired and dull. God used a maintenance worker on the church staff to jump start his faith once again.

As you well know, it is not uncommon for Hispanic families to give their little boys the name of Jesus. Of course, they pronounce it Jesús. The name of this maintenance worker just happened to be Jesús. One night the pastor returned to the church after hours to pick up something that he had forgotten. When we reached his office door, he was surprised to find his door ajar. He noticed that someone had recently painted the door, and over to the side there was a handwritten note that read, "Dear Pastor, don't close the door." It was signed, "Jesus."

That sign made the pastor smile. It was a sign from God – literally. As that pastor wrestled with his uninspired period in his faith journey, God was reminding him to keep the door open and once again to reconnect with God. Through a simple note, God was reminding that pastor that he was not a spiritual orphan. He was not alone. God was still there, whether that pastor felt his presence or not.

After Jesus' resurrection, before he ascends into heaven, Jesus informs his disciples that he must leave them. Understandably, this causes a little anxiety among his disciples and they start to ask Jesus the same type of questions little children ask their parents when they are leaving.

“Where are you going?”

“Can we go, too?”

“How long will you be gone?”

“Who is going to take care of us while you’re gone?”

“Where are you going, Jesus?” To my Father, Jesus replies. Jesus is returning to heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

“Well, can we go with you?” the disciples inquire. “Not yet,” Jesus says. “But don’t think I’m leaving you all by yourselves. I will send the Holy Spirit who will protect and guide you. Through the Holy Spirit, it will seem as though I never left.”

Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “I will come and visit you every once in a while.” Jesus doesn’t say “once I get to heaven I will send you a postcard to let you know I have arrived safely.” No! Jesus says, “I will always be right beside you. I will pitch my tent right beside yours. We will always be together.”

Jesus clearly spells out who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does. One of the main purposes of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of all the things Jesus taught us while he was here on earth. The Holy Spirit’s job is to remind us – again and again – of that powerful promise Jesus makes right before he ascends into heaven: “I am with you always. I will never leave you.”

That’s good news! Welcome news! I believe all of us, as we make our daily journey of faith, are longing to feel the true presence of Jesus in our lives.

When we are going through difficult times, we often desire someone to pray with us so that we can be reminded that God is with us, that God is in control. And if after prayer, you have a renewed sense of peace and trust in God, then I assure you that you have indeed seen Jesus.

As we gather each week, many of us dip our finger in the baptismal font and draw the sign of the cross on our forehead. Why do we do that? The wetness of our brow makes Jesus’ presence feel real, tangible. It reminds us that we have been named and claimed by God, and nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. So no matter what life brings, it’s going to be OK. If returning to the waters of Holy Baptism gives you reassurance and hope, then I would say you have seen Jesus.

Perhaps something unexpected happened in your family and you had no idea how it would all work out. But then one day, in the midst of your uncertainties and fears, Jesus showed up. Jesus came and gave you the strength and the courage you needed to take it one day at a time. And with each passing day, you realized that God had

everything under control. You realized that God still had a plan for your life. If you have ever had an experience like that before, then I would say you've seen Jesus.

Maybe you found yourself in a predicament when your friends at school tried to pressure you into doing something that you knew was wrong. "Come on," they said, "everyone is doing it. It's not going to hurt anybody."

But all you could hear was that voice in your head, saying, "Don't do it! You know it's wrong." So you walked away. You stood your ground. If you have ever had an experience like that before, then I assure you that you have seen Jesus in your daily life.

Maybe you missed worship one Sunday and another member dropped by a bulletin and said, "We missed you." If that has ever happened to you, then I assure you, you've seen Jesus.

When I see our faithful lawn crew making sure that this property God has entrusted to us looks its best, I think to myself, "So this is what the presence of Jesus looks like in a faith community."

Or when I see you – young and old – drop coins into our World Hunger jug, or put a canned good on the Key Care Table, I get a glimpse of the Risen Christ standing in our midst doing the will of God.

Jesus says, "God will send the Holy Spirit to aid you in seeing that I am with you always. I will never leave you, for I desire to make my home with you."

Let us take Jesus at his word.

As we go about our daily routines, may we sense those moments when Jesus is trying to make his presence known to us. Because Jesus is always there. Jesus is truly present with us in our daily lives – not only in Plainview, TX, but in Sherman, TX, and Denison, Pottsboro, Whitesboro, Gordonville, Savoy, and in all the towns where we find ourselves.

So be on the look out for Jesus. Cause he's there. I promise. Make that *Jesus* promises.

"I am with you always," Jesus says.

May God grant us eyes to see this promise being fulfilled in our daily lives.

And all God's people said, "Amen."