

"HE IS WHO HE SAYS HE IS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
106 East 86th Street  
New York, New York 10028  
April 26, 1992

## "HE IS WHO HE SAYS HE IS"

### INTRODUCTION

They say that Hubert Humphrey loved to meet people. And that, of course, made him a much-loved politician. One time on a fishing trip in northern Minnesota, Hubert Humphrey and Federal Judge, Miles Lord, were browsing around a sporting-goods store. The judge happened to notice that a tour bus from California had broken down outside. The judge sneaked out to the bus and introduced himself as the mayor of this little Minnesota town. He said to the people who were standing around,

"Folks, I'm so sorry to see you're having trouble. If there's anything that we can do for you...just stop by my office. And by the way...there's something you can do for us. We have a fellow here in our town who looks a lot like Hubert Humphrey. He sounds like Hubert Humphrey and he even thinks he is Hubert Humphrey. Now, if you should run into him...don't give him any money. But please be nice to him, because we kinda like him and he doesn't do us any harm..."

And with that the Judge went back into the sporting-goods store and said,

"Hubert...there's a bus load of California tourists out front...and they're just dying to meet you!"

And with this, Hubert Humphrey reared out and proceeded to shake hands with all the people standing around the bus. He even got on the bus and shook hands with those who hadn't gotten off. Afterward he had a puzzled look on his face and he said to his friend, the Judge:

"You know....I just don't understand those California people. Every time I shook hands with one of them, somebody started to giggle...they acted strange...."

I'm sure that no one loved that gag more than the late Hubert Humphrey. Mistaken identities often bring a chuckle, a smile, a laugh and sometimes a bit of a red face. They can be a source of embarrassment at times.

### IDENTITY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

This morning I would like to deal with an identity that was not mistaken, though many have claimed otherwise. It is the identity of the Risen Christ.

As you know, after His resurrection, the disciples of Jesus devoted their lives to proclaiming to the world that Jesus was the Living Lord. When the religious and civil authorities sought to silence them, those authorities found that they had their hands full. If they threw them into jail, these audacious people converted their fellow prisoners and sometimes even the prison guards. And if they martyred them, they discovered that they died with such radiant confidence that the people who witnessed their ordeals were often won to their cause. One thinks of Stephen's witness to his faith and the profound effect it had on the Chief Prosecutor of the early Christians in Jerusalem - Saul of Tarsus - who later became Paul. His disciples and followers insisted that He is who He says He is and their witness rings loud and clear across twenty centuries.

THE TESTIMONY OF THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM

For one thing, we have the testimony of those who were closest to Him.

It was difficult even for those who were in the select company of the twelve to deal with the resurrection of Christ. Such things don't happen in this world. Thomas, in particular, found it very hard to accept. Remember he wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus made His first appearances. And when the other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" he was very skeptical. He said something like this,

"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will NOT believe it!"

A week later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them this time. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then He said to Thomas,

"Put your finger here. See My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting. Believe." "My Lord and My God" said Thomas.

Jesus did not reveal Himself to the world at large...only to those who believed. But appear to them He did...in ways which left no doubt that He had conquered the grave. And then they went out to tell the story. And against all kinds of opposition they told that story. "He is risen". And nothing could stop them. No power on earth could block them or defeat them.

I read recently about a door-to-door salesman who had the worst kind of luck. I liked what I read...it sort of brought back some tender memories of the Summer of 1950...I got laid off as a postal carrier (a substitute)...and answered an add to sell Fuller Brushes. Back to the salesman: Day after day, he'd walk up and down the streets with his product. No one would buy a thing. Every day he knocked on the same woman's door. And every day she turned him away. Finally, he appeared on her doorstep for the umpteenth time. Just to keep the man from ever returning, the woman made a purchase. But the next day, the man rang her doorbell again. "What are you doing here?" she asked him...feeling very exasperated. The man replied,

"Well...now that you're an established customer....."

The disciples and the early followers of Jesus had a persistence to their witness that would not be defeated. In the arena with lions...burned as human torches in the gardens of Nero...suffering the vilest kinds of humiliation and bodily pain...they stayed faithful to what they had experienced. They had met the Risen Lord and they wanted the whole world to know it!

AND LIVES WERE CHANGED AS A RESULT

This brings us to the second reason "we know who He says He is" and it has to do with the changed lives of those who experienced His resurrection.

It's been said many times before, but we need to affirm it and hear it once again this day. People do not die defending a deliberate lie. People do not die defending a deliberate lie.

The men and women who walked with Jesus daily and who experienced His resurrection knew without any question that He was what He said He was! Why in the world would they lie about it, particularly when their lie could cost them their lives? And what could they possibly gain by holding fast to some fictitious account? Heaven? Why would they look forward to heaven if the resurrection never occurred? It's absurd and yet - they told their story!

If we followed their example, we could turn this world upside down. But unfortunately, most Christians prefer what Bishop Michael Marshall has called "Decaffeinated Christianity" - it promises not to keep us awake at night.

Now witnessing to our faith does not have to be offensive. A North Carolina friend and colleague writes of an interesting event that occurred to him and to his wife on their honeymoon a number of years ago down in Savannah.

They felt like having Chinese food for supper one evening. They had noticed a little Chinese restaurant across the way from their room. It didn't look "Five Star" and it seemed a little tattered at the edges, but they decided to give it a try and once inside, they were treated to a fantastic meal.

As they went to the door to pay their check, the lady behind the cash register noticed that they were newly weds. She asked if she could give them a present and when they nodded, she reached under the counter, pulled out a little porcelain Chinese house and handed it to them with these words,

"Always keep Christ in your home and marriage.  
This house will remind you of keeping Him in  
your lives. This is my gift to you...."

How do you think they responded to this kind and warm witness? Can you think of anyone who would ever be offended by such a gentle and sincere token of love? Of course not! In other words, our witnessing does not have to be offensive. Pressure techniques are not effective. Our witnessing can have a beautiful and caring touch. A note. A call. Such a witness travels!

We know He is who He says He is because we have the testimony of those closest to Him. They testified not only with their lips, but also with their lives.

We also have two thousand years of observing the changes He has made in the lives of other people. Look around you in this Church. Or think of the church in which you were reared...you'll see people and find people who will tell you of crises they have gone through. And they will say to you in so many words, "I couldn't have made it without Him....it was as if He were there at my side.". Look at the good friends and the good neighbors on every side who will tell you that everything they have and are they really owe to Him.

Millard Fuller tells about a man who stopped his car in front of a house that Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter had helped to build for Habitat for Humanity. A little boy was standing in the front yard.. He was probably six or seven years old. The little boy ran out and put his hands on the side of the car and said, "Man...you sure drive a pretty car."

The man in the car replied,

"Well, son....you've sure got one pretty house. Which one of these houses is yours?"

The little fellow said quite proudly, "That one". The man in the car then asked him, "Young man...who built your house?" He thought the boy was going to say, "President Jimmy Carter and his wife built my house", but instead he gave a big smile and said, "Jesus. Jesus built my house!"

I think the boy was right on target. And I believe that if Jimmy Carter were here among this morning that he would gladly testify that he does those good works because once-upon-a-time Jesus Christ touched his life. We cannot deny the worth of such a testimony. We know of others who have touched our lives who would say the same sort of thing. Give Christ the credit. He's the one who did it. "Jesus built my house" said that seven year old!

TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Long ago a Gospel writer gave a witness for many of us.

"You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

Yes, said the words of our second anthem, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" And that is the experience of so many of you. "He lives...within my heart."

Granted, such a subjective experience can be misleading, but when you combine such an experience with the testimony of those who walked with Him and who died for Him two thousand years ago...as well as the testimony of all others since the First Century who have experienced His healing and His life giving and life-changing power in their lives, then we are led to cry out with Thomas, "My Lord. My God".

And if you have not had that kind of experience of Christ in your life, I invite you to "open" yourself to that possibility here today. A simple prayer of faith...of surrender...is a good way to begin. And then support it with some action. Karl Malone, the power forward of the Utah Jazz said something recently about his least popular opponent in the NBA.

"When I see Bill Laimbeer, my whole outlook on life changes!"

I hope that you can say - in a positive way - that when you see Jesus Christ coming to you in the pages of the New Testament, ~~for~~ in these high spiritual moments of prayer, of worship...that "my whole outlook on life changes!"

CLOSING

An elderly woman walked slowly into a Life Insurance office in Minneapolis back during the worst days of the Great Depression. She wanted to know if she could stop paying the premiums on her late husband's life insurance policy. She said,

"He's been dead now for sometime, and I don't believe I can afford making the payments any longer."

The clerk behind the desk looked up her husband's policy and discovered it was now worth several hundred thousands of dollars. This poor lady was wealthy, but she didn't know it. No one had ever explained to her how life insurance works.

Perhaps no one has ever stepped to explain to you that as a disciple of Jesus, you, too, are rich. And that He is available to you - His love, His power, His peace, His joy. It's there - for you. And you can have some of that in your life, beginning today, now....why? Because "He is who He says He Is". There's no case here of any mistaken identity. For some, He may be a Saviour. For still others, He may be a Redeemer. For Thomas, long ago, He was Lord and God. So may it be for all of us.

PRAYER

Come to us, in these quiet moments, O God....wrestle with each of us in the dark and hidden corners of our lives. Take our faith and strengthen it. Help us to see Jesus more clearly, to love Him more dearly and to follow Him more nearly, that His Risen Life may be in us. In the name and spirit of the Risen Christ, we pray. Amen.