

Message #1039
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"POWER TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD"
{John 1:10-12}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
December 14, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago American Express ran a series of television commercials that featured people like Bill Miller, Geraldine Farraro, and James Michener. The punch line for these commercials was, "Do you recognize me? A lot of people don't! That's why I carry an American Express card."

The message this morning is about an American Express card moment in human history "Christ was IN the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him!" {John 1:10}

THE ONE WHOM THE WORLD DIDN'T RECOGNIZE

For centuries the Jews had awaited the arrival of the Christ.

...hundreds of years before His birth prophets foretold His coming

...the primary focus of the Jew was the hope of the Messiah.

...then, He came and went unrecognized for who He was--such a tragedy!

They bemoaned that if only God would appear and offer assistance to human tragedy and pain...then they would follow Him.

But our loving, caring, benevolent God did care enough to send His very best to this earth...and He was ignored... and went unrecognized! In his poem, "Indifference," Studdert-Kennedy surmises that if Jesus were to come even today that it wouldn't be any different.

When Jesus came to Golgotha,
They hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
And made a Calvary.
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns,
Red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days,
And human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham
They simply passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him,
They only let Him die;
For men have grown more tender,
And they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street,
And left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them,
For they know not what they do.'
And still it rained the winter rain
That drenched Him through and through;

The crowd went home and left the streets
Without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall
And cried for Calvary."

The world did not recognize Him when He came...it still doesn't 2000 years later!
Even though Isaiah, the prophet, wrote over 600 years before that star shown bright
over Bethlehem...

"For unto us a child will be born, to us a son will be given; and the government will
be on His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..." {Isaiah 9:6}

..."the world did not recognize Him!" {1:10}

How could they have missed Him?

How could they not know by all the signs?

Why doesn't the world turn to Him today?

...acknowledge Him as Savior?

...call Him Lord?

The Westminster Confession of Faith begins by saying that...

"The lights of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest
the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men inexcusable!"

Paul wrote to the Romans...

"Since what may be known about God is plain, because God has made it plain. Since
the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine
nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that
men are without excuse." {1:19-20}

...seek God and you'll find God

...look for God and you'll see Him

...God is recognizable!

...Open your eyes...there is no excuse for not recognizing God!

4 WAYS TO RECOGNIZE GOD--TO SEE HIS WORD

1. Look Outwards

Think of the amazing order of the universe...

...the planets keep to their appointed courses--they do not collide

...the tides observe their appointed times

...the times: planting and harvest...summer and winter...day and night...all come in
their appointed order

...every day the sun comes up and the sun goes down

...every night the moon appears right on schedule

...the stars forever shine in the distance

If in the world there is this incredible unexplainable order, there must
be a mind--beyond what the mind of man--who caused this order.

Look upwards and you will come face to face with the God who made it.

Recognize Him through His handiwork!

2. Look Upwards

Observe the heavens--the movement of the planets and galaxies. Note the stars
which astronomers tell us outnumber the grains of sand upon the seashore.

Look upwards and you will come face to face with the God who made it! The Psalmist
wrote...

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world!" {Psalm 19: 1-3a}

3. Look Inwards

Where did we get the power to think?

...to reason?

...to know?

Where did we get the knowledge of what is right and wrong?

...from where did our conscience come?

It was Kant who said that two things convinced him of the existence of God--the starry heavens above him and the moral law within him.

Where did we receive this power?

...where does the sense of guilt come from?

...why do we feel guilty when we do what we know is wrong?

No one can explain themselves apart from God.

Look inwards...and you can recognize God!

4. Look Backwards

Look at history...

...empires rise...and empires fall

...as George Bernard Shaw said, "The demonstrable fact of history is that moral degeneration and national collapse go hand in hand." All of history is the practical demonstration that there is a God.

So...even without Jesus it would be possible for humankind to see God's Word...God's logos...but, he went unrecognized so...

GOD SENT THE LOGOS TO EARTH TO BE RECOGNIZED

The world did not recognize Jesus. Verse 11 points to even a greater tragedy...

"He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him." He came to His own people, Israel...but Israel's rejection merely typifies the folly of the human heart.

God in an effort to communicate with those whom He had created came into the world in the form of a man...

"...{He} made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...being in the appearance as a man...He humbled Himself..."

{Philippians 2: 7-8a}

...just to communicate to humankind that He cares for them

...just to say...I love you

...just to offer "eternal" life!

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." {John 3: 16}

He came to His own people...and was not recognized for who He was!

...and He was rejected!

...and He's still being rejected!

Our schools no longer give Him place...

...our communities remove His symbols in public places

...our nation displays "in God we trust" on coins...but, we reject Him as Lord!

What a tragedy...Jesus came to His own...and was not recognized. As the writer of the spiritual has penned...

Sweet little Jesus Boy

They made You be born in a manguh (manger)
Sweet little Holy chil'
Didn't know who You wus (was)
Didn't know You'd come to save us Lawd
To take our sins away
Our eyes wus bline (was blind)
We couldn't see
We didn't know who You wus (was)
Long time ago You wus bawn (was born)
Bawn in a manguh (manger) low
Sweet little Jesus Boy
De worl' (the world) treat You mean, Lawd
Treat me mean too
But please, Suh, fuhgive (Sir, forgive) us Lawd
We didn't know 'twas You
Sweet little Jesus Boy
Bawn (born) long time ago
Sweet little Holy chil'
An' we didn't know who You wus (was)

TO THOSE WHOSE EYES WERE OPENED...HE GAVE POWER TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD!

This is the good news...

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God!" {John 1:12}

This is the incredible message of Advent...and Christmas: GOD REACHING OUT TO HUMANKIND...

...inviting them to come...receive Jesus

...acknowledge Him as Savior

...proclaim Him as Lord

God loves you...

...God loves me

...God loves the world

...He sent Jesus so we might recognize Him