

*6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*

*19This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. 24Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." 28This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.*

Do all the people who think they know you well, know you well? Sister, brother? Do they know you?

Father, Mother? Do they?

Daughter, son? Spouse? Boss, co-worker, subordinate? Teacher, classmates? Friends you laugh with? Friends you cry with? People here?

Now reverse it. Do you know them? Probably just about as well as you think they know you.

When they came to John the baptizer, the Pharisees had some ideas about who John might be. They knew enough about him to know he kind of fit some categories. Maybe they knew John like Sue's cousin and wife know me.

Karen and Larry have been with me six or seven times, usually for a number of days. From the first time I met them they remarked how like a friend and pastor of theirs I was. Each time I am with them they come back to that theme. They have a slot to put me in. They know me, they think. I suspect that what they do is collect those things in me that remind them of him and ignore whatever is in me that is not like him. In this way I am familiar to them. They know me.

The priests and the Levites wanted to do that with John. They knew all about the Messiah, and all about Elijah, and all about the prophet. If they could put John into one of

those slots then they would know him. Like when we put one another into slots called liberal or conservative, lawyer, teacher, preacher, drunk.

“Are you the Messiah,” they asked him.

“I am not the Messiah,” he answered.

“Are you Elijah?”

“I am not.”

“Are you the prophet?”

“No.”

“Who are you? What do you say about yourself?”

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ I baptize you with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

Among you stands one whom you do not know.

To whom is John talking here - to priests and Levites long since dead?

Or to you?

Is he saying to them, “You don't know what he looks like, which one he is.”?

Or is he saying to you, “You may know Jesus' name, lots of facts about him, but you don't know him.”?

Among you stands one whom you do not know.

What is your favorite picture of Jesus? Baby in Mary's arms - windblown Lord of the sea and the waves - gentle shepherd with lambs - kind friend of children - handsome energetic friend - bleeding thorn crowned crucified one - resurrected glowing Lord?

Your favorite picture will say much about who you know Jesus to be - the slot in which you place him. But do you know him?

John's word is spoken to you and to me today. “Among you stands one whom you do not know.”

If you believed that you really did not know yet your Lord and Savior Jesus would you listen to his word? Would you search the stories of his life, his birth, his growing, his baptism, his teaching, his doing good, his suffering, his being raised?

I remember a speaker who said, "The only people we really know are those who have died. They can no longer speak or do anything new; our relationship with them can do no more changing on their side. We can know them."

But those who are alive we do not know. They surprise us; they never fit our little boxes in which we would hold them. The only way we can know them fully is to label them and no longer allow them to be alive for us - no longer listen - no longer curious about them.

We worship a living Lord. He is among us, alive. We are only getting to know him. He is not boxed in some doctrines as if in a coffin. He is not held by pictures we would treasure.

He is among us, his own Spirit in you and the persons next to you.

He is in this word I preach; he is in the bread and wine that will enter you in a moment.

He comes to you in his story - a child born, a friend weeping, a man crucified, a Lord raised to live forever.

Among you stands one whom you do not know, yet.

But as he forgives you, and strengthens you, loves you, gives you hope, and again and again raises you from despair to faith, you will know him more precious than all treasures - your Lord and your Savior - your God.