

"WE ARE IN GREAT COMPANY!"  
by Rom A. Pegram (3/5/17)

If we would've met this past Wednesday, I would've made you aware of someone famous attending our church service today. And if some of you are trying to guess who is here with us today, let me just give you a few tips...

- It's not a famous Christian recording artist...
- It's not a famous contemporary speaker, although he's held his own...
- It's not someone who's on television or radio...
- And, it's not the author of a best-selling book ... although he appears quite often in a best-seller...

I need to add this to our equation: the guest who is gracing our presence today is planning on being with us throughout the next several Sundays, too—throughout the entire season of Lent. Who is it? **Jesus, the Christ—the living Son of God**. And, we're going to reserve a space for him in the front of our church (pull up a chair/point out a pew)! So, do you know what you have to do if you want to set closer to our 'special guest?' You got it! *Get here early ... and sit in the front!*

I'm sure some here are wondering if I'm really serious about Jesus being with us. I'm most sure some of you have said to yourselves already, "I've attended church all my life, and I have yet to really see him."

*Well, here's one way to look at it: Maybe it's **fortunate** that we can't see him!* In the book of Revelation when the Apostle John saw the risen Christ standing among the golden lamp stands that represented the seven churches, he "...fell at his feet as if [he] were dead...." (Rev. 1:17, NLT). *Actually seeing the risen Christ can be an overwhelming experience!*

*But, here's the flip side of the coin: Maybe it's **unfortunate** that we can't see Christ.* What do I mean? Well, we live in a society that says we can't believe in anything that we cannot see! Therefore, when I say Christ is in our church on this first Sunday of Lent, you may hear what I say as a "pretend" truth ... or, should we say a "far-removed" truth? Is that better? 'A truth that is so far-removed from your life that it doesn't really matter anyway; it won't really affect the way that you live. But is *that* true?

Let's say Jesus was physically here during all the Sundays of Lent. He wouldn't have to preach; he'd just be here. What difference would that make? What adjustments would we make as a congregation? Personally, I think it'd make a '*huge*' difference! Consider these things...

- I sense *any problems some might have in arriving late* to worship would all but disappear; with Jesus here, we'd be motivated on a different level, wouldn't we?

*It's not just Rom and the usual; Jesus is here!*

- I sense *the public reading of Scripture* would take on a whole new sense of importance; we'd probably be hanging on every word ... because the Living Word is here with us!
- *The preaching of God's Word* would not only be a solemn responsibility for me to deliver, but also for YOU to receive!

Do you get the idea? And what's the one thing that would bring all of these components in our worship service to life? *The simple awareness that Jesus is actually here!*

As you can just imagine, *having Jesus physically attend our church would create a real problem for the rest of the churches in town ... not to mention the rest of the world!* You see, the excitement would be missed in those places because of Christ's presence *only* here. And that wouldn't be right. That's the very reason Jesus was released from his physical body when he left this earth and by his Spirit is now able to be present in all places where people gather in his name! So, what does that mean? He's not really with us? No, it means *he's can really be with ALL who gather together in his name ... wherever they're at ... at the same time (Omni-present)!*

Look with me, if you would, at today's scripture (Matthew 17:1-13, NLT): This begins to explain where the Church might be today in it's realization of the presence of Christ ... and why...

**Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. <sup>2</sup>As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. <sup>3</sup>Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup>Peter blurted out, "Lord, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I'll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup>But even as he spoke, a bright cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him."**

**<sup>6</sup>The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground. <sup>7</sup>Then Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." <sup>8</sup>And when they looked, they saw only Jesus.**

**<sup>9</sup>As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." <sup>10</sup>Then his disciples asked him, "Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus replied, "Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready for the Messiah. <sup>12</sup>But I tell you, Elijah has already come, but he wasn't recognized, and they chose to abuse him. And in the same way they will also make the Son of Man suffer." <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples realized he was talking about John the Baptist.**

In light of this scripture, folks, I believe these things could happen in our church, during this season of Lent:

**THE DIFFERENCE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE *COULD BE MADE REAL!*** The Apostle John says in Revelation 1:12-13 (NLT), "When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. <sup>13</sup> And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest." My prayer today is this: ***O God, give us a vision like that of the apostle John! Help us to see the 'son of man' that clearly!*** Do you know what would happen? *Something like this...* Everyone would be excited about doing their 'duties' around the church; that's for sure!

- *Our custodian* (Jason) would whistle with joy in the routine of getting the facilities ready for our regal guest!
- *Sunday school teachers* would prepare early and diligently because the King has promised to be present even when two or three are gathered in his name!
- *Worship Assistants and ushers* would do their work sensing the privilege of helping worshipers adore Christ!
- *All our musicians* would rehearse well and do their best to merit his approval!
- He would help *me* to speak the right words on His behalf and what a joy it would be to put a message like that together and share it with you!
- Finally, any time that someone would give *Teresa* a new task to do in the church office, I believe she'd take the time to do cartwheels up and down the office hallway, because she would have yet another way she could serve the King!

Is this just imaginary thinking? Folks, if we were convinced that Jesus was here for the duration of Lent in bodily form, I believe everyone would say, "I'm happy to do my share around here; it's no burden at all. It's the very least I can do. The *King* is going to be here, you know!" *Are we then unrealistic to expect the same thing when Christ comes in Spirit each and every Sunday throughout the year*, as well as during this very special season of Lent? What if we were to worship like that year 'round—different than other churches in our area?

Now, I could tell the skeptics who are present that Christ really *wasn't* going to be here during Lent, but I'd be lying through my teeth, because HE IS! And, because he *is*, I believe this:

**THE DIFFERENCE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE *CAN BE MADE NOW!*** In today's scripture—the story of the Transfiguration, we see what happened when the disciples finally woke up to whose presence they were in! Let me say a couple of words about this story and I think you'll see what I mean...

First off, Jesus took with him—up the mountain—Peter, James and John ... his '*leadership team.*' He had three whom he trusted, could fellowship with, and could count

on! Yes, he had twelve to choose from, but even Jesus had an inner circle to help strengthen his own ministry; that's who he took up the mountain on this day...

Then, Jesus decided to *shake the disciples up ... didn't he?* Perhaps even his closest followers had become complacent; they were too used to having him around and began to take him for granted. They'd become too accustomed to the *human* Jesus, their buddy, and had forgotten just who it was that they were hanging out with—the *divine* Jesus! So, *Jesus let them see the divine side of his nature.* I seriously believe that Jesus 'pulled out the stops' (an organ term) to *impress* the disciples for their own good! He gave them a preview of his resurrected body in what he did. And he did this because he knew they'd soon be in need of *this* vision of him...

So, Jesus was 'transfigured' before them (Def. = His image was radically transformed)! Scripture says (V. 2), "...Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light." Folks, how long can you look directly into the sun with human eyes? Not long, can you? This transfiguration was *that* radical!

Then, after he was 'transfigured,' he then met up with a couple of religious heavyweights! You've got to understand, here, that Peter, James and John were *Jewish* converts, as disciples of Christ. Who would *they* be more impressed with? THE religious heavyweights from *their* culture/tradition were *Moses and Elijah.* I'm tellin' you, Jesus really pulled out the stops to impress them! And, I believe, in this scenario we're given, *Moses and Elijah were not just 'hanging out with Jesus';* I believe *they were worshiping him too,* because *he was **their** Messiah too!*

Now, what would this do to *your* faith—to see the *divine* side of Christ? *Have we become too complacent with the Jesus of our childhood faith—the one we've come to know throughout our years in Sunday school? Have we hung out with Jesus so long that we've begun to take him for granted?* Folks, just like Peter, James and John, we need to be *shook up ...* by the wonder of *who Jesus really is!* What am I telling you? *The one who is here among us today, and will be throughout Lent, is not just some special human being who walked the earth 2,000 years ago!* Our special guest, folks, is *God Almighty!* And he is here in the person and Spirit of Christ!

If we come to grasp Jesus very real presence today, let me tell you something else it's going to do for our Church! **Being aware of the presence of God in our midst causes renewal and revival.** Now, don't be afraid of those words. I'm not talking about an event where an evangelist comes to your church for a series of special services; I'm talking about *real* revival, the changes that being aware of the presence of God can really make in a local congregation like ours!

You see, *the presence of Christ* is, historically, the outstanding characteristic of all times of *authentic revival.* During such periods of *awakening* in the Church, it's as though the

veil that normally hides Jesus is drawn back and people see him, not totally, but *more fully than ever before*...

I'm trusting that *this* will be the case with Trinity during Lent 2017. And I'm praying that even in a small way we'll sense what we read about in Revelation 5, where the 24 elders fall before the Lamb and sing a new song:

"You are worthy ... because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased [people] for God from every tribe and language and people and nation... Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom And strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Worship, folks—*true worship*, has consistently marked past times of *revival* in the church! What are the signposts for this type of worship?

- An overwhelming sense of the Love of God present among us...
- Reconciliation between warring parties; we become one big happy family again...
- Sorrow for past wrongs, repentance, and the asking of forgiveness *within* the Body of Christ...

These, folks, are signs of true worship where the presence of God is known and acknowledged and lived...

Let me close with this statement, today: **WE ARE IN GREAT COMPANY!** The Jesus you've heard taught about, preached about, and you've read about in the Bible is here among us now. And He's with us for the duration! My prayer is that, during Lent, *we will be touched in a special way* by the same Lord who's touched His Church in special ways before, and that we'll know *renewal* and *revival* in our personal lives ... and in our church as well...