

In us, the world sees a picture of Christ.

In your bulletin this morning is an insert which is a simple bunch of dots a kind of randomly-shaped, computer-generated blob.

Now try an experiment. Stare at the four dots right in the center of the blob for about thirty seconds. Concentrate all your attention on them, don't look away and let the dots be all you see....(wait 30 seconds.) Now let's all of us together close our eyes.

See anything? Do you see it? Did you suspect it? Isn't it amazing how a seemingly meaningless collection of little dots can actually be leading up to such a startling image?

All of us are always seeing a lot more than we think. Under hypnosis, people can remember the license numbers of cars that passed them in the street or the eye color of a salesclerk who had waited on them three weeks ago. Even when we're not consciously aware of it, our minds are taking in thousands of little pieces of information, processing them and creating from these fragments our general impressions of life, our basic concepts of reality.

When Jesus rose to read the Scriptures in his home synagogue in Nazareth, the people gathered there were seeing a lot more than they thought. Even though these worshipers were impressed with Jesus' learning and reacted to Jesus' words with amazement, they could not take to heart what he was saying. In Luke 4:22, immediately after Jesus announces, *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled ...,"* the synagogue murmurs, "Is not this Joseph's son?" Jesus could not be the Messiah. He was just the boy down the street now grown up. **Because this congregation could only see a "dot," one tiny aspect of Jesus' being, they could not see his true image as the Son of God.**

Try looking at the pattern of "dots" that makes up the image you present to the world as yourself. Consider that each time you respond to anything you encounter in life, your reaction is just one tiny "dot" on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. Over the course of a lifetime, your paper becomes filled with dots. **If every experience you had in life was registered as a dot, what kind of pattern would those dots begin to form?**

We need to take steps to help us make sure that every "dot," every response we make, reflects the living presence of Christ in our lives. If the church is the body of Christ, then each one of us is a "dot," a part of the composite image of Christ that the church presents to the world. **Do people see Christ in you?**

Try some of these amazingly simple ideas on for size and SEE IF PEOPLE DON'T COME TO SEE CHRIST IN YOU!

#1: Make every stranger you meet glad to have met you.

Have you ever known a person whose presence in any group made everything else different? Someone who, when he or she entered a room, made the spiritual and moral climate of that room better, who lifted the mood and spirit of that meeting? **Why not make it YOUR WAY OF LIFE...WHEN EVER SOMEONE COMES INTO YOUR PRESENCE, THEY WILL ALWAYS LEAVE IN A BETTER STATE BEFORE THEY ENGAGED WITH YOU**

One night, Mark Ralls, a minister in North Carolina, was leaving his church at the same time a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous was adjourning. He found himself in conversation with a man standing next to his rusty, worn-out Ford, and introduced himself as one of the pastors of the church that had hosted his group. The man sighed and told Mark how long he had intended to "get back to church." So Mark invited him to worship. Immediately, the man launched into a story of his life.

It was, as Mark puts it, "the familiar string of regrets and loss that accompany addiction." Mark prayed with him, and they parted ways.

As he walked to his car, the man called after him with a sense of urgency. "Did you mean what you said?" "About what?" "Did you mean that I could come to this church?"

Mark says that as he drove home, he realized the man had told his life story as a way of explaining why he couldn't come to church. He felt he was not "clean enough" to be included in that **kind** of congregation.

How clean does someone have to be before he or she is accepted by Jesus? How clean before someone is accepted by you and me?

In this inhospitable world of ours, Jesus would have us – I think Jesus would have us – throw caution to the wind. You can't do that without opening your heart to the stranger. **And when you do, you might just find Jesus standing in front of you dressed as the next stranger who is lonely or in need.**

Also, We Need To Bring PEACE to every Meeting We Have With Others.

Medical doctor Gerald Jampolsky wrote a book a few years ago called Love Is Letting Go of Fear. In it he asked this question: *"Have you ever given yourself the opportunity of going through just one day concentrating totally on accepting everyone for who they are and making no judgments"* (97)?

Try *"not keeping score of wrongs"* (Paul's phrase) for one day. Dr. Jampolsky adds: *"Everything we think, say or do reacts on us like a boomerang. When we send out judgments in the form of criticism, fury or other mean thoughts, they come back to us. When we...send out only love, it comes back to us."*

JUST LIKE THIS EVENT DURING WORLD WAR I.

Christmas Eve in 1914 was all quiet on France's Western Front, from the English Channel to the Swiss Alps. Trenches came within fifty miles of Paris. The war was only five months old, and approximately 800,000 men had been wounded or killed. Every soldier wondered whether Christmas Day would **bring** another round of fighting and killing, but something happened:

British soldiers raised Merry Christmas signs, and soon carols were heard from German and British trenches alike.

Christmas dawned with unarmed soldiers leaving their trenches as officers of both sides tried unsuccessfully to stop their troops from **meeting** the enemy in the middle of no-man's-land for songs and conversation. Exchanging small gifts—mostly sweets and cigars—they passed Christmas Day WITH SIGNS OF PEACE along miles of the front. At one spot, the British played soccer with the Germans, who won it did not matter.

In some places, the spontaneous truce contained the next day, neither side willing to fire the first shot. Finally, the war resumed when fresh troops arrived, and the high command of both armies ordered that further "informal understandings" with the enemy would be punishable as treason. **YES, THERE IS A TIME WHEN WE MEET WITH OTHERS THAT PEACE TRULY MAKES A DIFFERENCE.**

Also we also Need to Try and Say only nice things about people.

There is a lot to be said for the old saying, *"If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."* When you become conditioned to look for some good quality, some strong suit and admittedly sometimes it's a bit of a challenge it is surprising how much easier it gets.

The pastor of a small southern church was on his way home when he met an acquaintance from town who was not a member of his church. After chatting a while the man asked how many members he had. The pastor responded, "Fifty active members." The friend said, "My, that certainly **speaks well** for you." But the preacher responded, "**Well**, I wouldn't say that. All fifty are active—but twenty-five are actively working for me and the **other** twenty-five are

actively working against me!" *Sometimes you are better just saying, I have a great congregation that are "working well for God!"* With that Attitude amazing things could and would take place in the Kingdom of God!!

But Finally, we must realize how important it is that we Daily Look for the image of Christ in all of Creation.

Ignatius once observed: *"Consider how Christ works and labors for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth."* **If Christ labors in all creatures, then Jesus can be found in every aspect of creation:** The family cat who awakens you in the morning; the birds who sing on the fence; the flowers that spread their fragrance over the garden; the rain forest of South America and the mountains of Colorado; the child playing in the schoolyard; the homeless man fumbling for aluminum cans. **ALL ARE SHARING IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST...ALL ARE SHOWING BOTH YOU AND ME THE JOYS WE HAVE AS WE SHARE CHRIST WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THIS WORLD.**

THE BODY OF CHRIST IS BROUGHT INTO FOCUS FOR THE WORLD, ONE DOT AT A TIME.

For each of us who can manage to reproduce the image of Christ through the way we *"love and serve the Lord"* in all we do and say, that picture of Christ grows a little clearer, a little sharper each day for us and for others.

WHAT KIND OF 'DOTS' ARE YOU MAKING? Are you producing dots that lead people to see Christ, or is your life and lifestyle painting a different picture for the world?

What are people seeing in the dots YOU ARE PAINTING WITH YOUR LIFE TODAY?

Amen.