

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

December 21, 1998

Scripture *1 John 4:2-3*

Sermon: *Somebody Like Us;
Somebody Different*

“This is how you can recognize the spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”
- 1 John 4:2-3

During an athletic contest the Roman guards began to rush to their barracks to get all of their battle gear on because they always had a fear that it would happen at that time of the year. You see, this was Passover time in Jerusalem. Normally about 250,000 people lived in metropolitan Jerusalem, but at Passover time, when the Jews celebrate their freedom from slavery, about 2, 500,000 were there. The Romans always thought this would be the time when all of the Jews would come back home and decide that they were going to overthrow the Roman rule. When the guards got to the middle of all of the commotion, they looked out the East Gate. What they saw was a very unusual sight. They saw people attacking palm trees, tearing down the branches, and laying them on the road. They saw men taking their bright-colored cloaks and laying them on the road. When they looked, they saw a man riding on a donkey. With all of those people present, the question that the Bible said kept bouncing from group to group was: who is this? That was the most insistent question that the world has ever known. Who is he?

Fast forward 2,000 years--satellites are circling the globe, men are putting stations in space in which to live, computers are sending messages through cyberspace. Today 500,000,000,000 people live on the face of the earth. During this week more of those people are going to celebrate one event than celebrate anything else in any other time in all of our year. The question that is going to keep on being asked is the question those earlier people asked on Palm Sunday. The question is: who is this? Why would all of us gather together this morning and sing praises to this person called Jesus? Who is He who could cause this kind of commotion all the way around the world? When you read through the Bible, it gives you a sentence that helps us to understand. At times it seems to be contradictory, but it is a sentence that helps us to understand the question: who is He? The statement is this: *He is somebody like us; but He is somebody different.*

The passage of Scripture I read today from the Book of First John tells about one of the first heresies that Christianity had to overcome. The first heresy was: He is not like us. He couldn't be like us. Some of those people actually coined a little phrase out of their language called *docetic*. *Docetic* simply means *somebody who looks like a person but is not really one*. What the *Docetics* were teaching was this: Jesus just looks like a person. He was like a phantom that went around--I mean, God could not come and be a person, so it just seemed like He was a person. And the word that comes in the Bible says that *anybody who denies that He is not like us is the very opposite of what God has said. He is like us*. We still have problems with that. We still want to somehow make Him so different that He is not like us.

There are books that were written about Jesus about 200 years after he lived. They primarily focus on Jesus when he was a little child.

They would tell stories like this. Jesus would take mud and He would shape it in the form of birds. Then He would say a word and the birds would fly away. What they kept on saying was: He can't be like us. He just looked like a little boy, but He really wasn't a little boy. We even sing it sometimes in our Christmas carols: "...the little baby asleep on the hay. The little baby, no crying he makes." Somehow we can't believe that Jesus would wake up in the middle of the night and cry for milk from Mary. We just somehow so fantasize Him that we can't believe He is like one of us. But the Scripture says that if you are ever going to understand Him, you are going to have to understand that He is like you. He is human and went through every experience of life, just like us.

Listen to another passage of Scripture in the Bible. The Bible says in the Book of Hebrews, "...children have flesh and blood, so He, too, shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all of their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death." He doesn't help angels, but He helps Abraham's descendants. *“This is the reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order to become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, so that He might make an atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”* The reason that He became like us is that He wanted to be able to say, "I understand. I know what you are going through." If you are here today saying, "Well, you know, I am going through something and nobody understands," I have good news for you: Jesus does. He knows the hurts. He knows the sorrows. He knows the difficulties. And you are able to say, "Lord Jesus, here are my needs and here are my desires." Jesus says, "I know that. I know how you feel." You see, if He hadn't come, we really never would have been able to understand about

God. Jesus came to be like us so that when He lived among people, we could look at Him and say, "Oh, that's what God is like."

I love the old story of the missionary who had been working for years and years; and finally got a young missionary to come and help him. So he gathered all of the tribe together. He said that the young missionary would like to speak, and he would translate. The young missionary got up and said, "We mortals must always remember that there is an infinite and qualitative distinction between the eternal gospel and all of the historical manifestations of it under the various contingencies of human experience." He stopped and waited for the old missionary to translate. After a while the old missionary translated, "He is glad to be here and he loves you." What God wanted to tell us in all of the things that come is that He loves us, and He is glad to be here, and that He walks in the same conditions that you walk in.

One of the men in our church was with me this week at a Christmas party. He told me a story, and I fell out of the chair laughing. He said there was a man who had come to faith in Christ, and he really wanted to share his praises to God. So he decided to join the choir, but he didn't know anything about music. So he came to the Christmas carols. He didn't know that he had the music upside down. He started singing what was written as *Noel, Noel*, but he was reading it upside down, so he was singing *Leon, Leon*. Do you understand that most of us, if we have never seen God in the face of Jesus, are singing *Leon*? We don't understand this. We don't know who He is. But when He came and walked among us, then He became like us; He is like us. Did you know the criticism they made about him? He can't be the Son of God,

He is having too much fun. He went to parties. He went to weddings. He walked in all of our needs and all of our problems, and He was what most of us are not; that is, He was balanced and He enjoyed all of life. He was like one of us.

I like to read some of the writings of Max Lucado, who is one of the best selling writers in America. He is a pastor in San Antonio. He said, "Let me tell you about this Jesus. The one who made the stars didn't keep his head in them. He owned all of the stuff of the earth, but he never strutted it. He never was a name dropper. He never said, 'Did I tell you about the time Moses and I went up into the mountain?' He could have been a show-off. He could have said, 'Would you like for me to beam you to the 20th century?' He could have been a smart-aleck. He could have said, 'I know what you are thinking about. You want me to tell you?' He could have been a highbrow and uppity. He could have said, 'I've got some property on Jupiter.' But he was none of those. His purpose was not to show off but to show up. He didn't need to study, but he went to synagogue. He had no need for income, but he still worked in the workshop. He had known the fellowship of angels, but he went to parties thrown by tax collectors. He had all of creation, but he took time to walk 90 miles from Jerusalem to Canaan to go a wedding so he could have some fun. *He is like us.* You never understand what this is all about unless you understand that the great God came to be one of us so that we could--when we knelt to pray to him—say, 'Lord God, I know you understand. You have been through what we have been through.'"

The *second part* of this sentence is that *He is different*. Many of you in this room have a resume. A resume has in it the basic biographical information about you, so that

when somebody reads it they can kind of know who you are. Resumes tell when you were born and where you were born. I was born in a college town. My Dad was a minister of music, already had three children. One day the chairman of the deacons called him and said, "Dr. Knight, our pastor, has just been rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. We need somebody to preach Sunday. Will you preach?" When Dr. Knight was operated on, they found that his appendix had ruptured. The poison had gone through his system, so it was nine months before he was able to come back to the pulpit again. Every Sunday the deacons said, "We don't know if Dr. Knight is going to be here. Will you preach?" My Dad preached for nine months. Finally he decided he felt God was calling him to be a preacher instead of a minister of music. So he went back to college. While he was in college, I was born. By a strange fate, I went to that same college; I have been to that hospital; I have been there to the maternity ward. That is where I came into the world. Strange thing--there's no plaque there. But if you asked me, that's where I began. Now, I have been where Jesus was born. All of us know He was laid on a cattle trough. It wasn't in a barn. Around Bethlehem there are lots of hills and very soft limestone. There are all kinds of caves there. Most of the people think He was born in a cave used to get animals in out of the wind. There is a plaque there. But amazingly, that's not where He began. In fact, you can go all the way through the universe, and you can't say of any place, "That's where He began. Because the One who came always has been. He is the Lord, God himself. What we are celebrating today is that *part of God came to this earth to tell us what the rest of God is about.*"

I always ask God to forgive me when I give this illustration. I went to a person's house one day. The family had invited me for a meal. The hostess asked me, "What is your favorite dessert?" I said, "Lemon meringue pie." So after

we ate her delicious meal, there was a big piece of lemon meringue pie. When it was over, she said, "You want another piece?" And I said, "Is there another piece?" She said, "You can't see it. I have it in the kitchen." I asked, "Is it just like this?" She said, "I sliced it out of the same pie. It is just like it." Listen to Jesus. "*If you have seen me, you have seen all of it. I am just like God. Amazingly, He is just like Me! When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.*" The wonderful news is part of the eternal God actually came to tell us how the rest of Him is. When I see Jesus caring for the sick, then I know God cares for them. When I see Him sitting by people who have failed in their moral life, then I know that is how God feels. When I see Him reaching out and touching lepers, I know God touches the outcasts. When I see Jesus letting little children run and play with Him, then I know God is the God who loves little children. When I see Him walk by the side of people who have lost a loved one, then I know God is at every funeral. When I see Him on a cross, I know there is a love beyond my faintest comprehension and it is with that love that God loves me. You see, when I see Jesus, I know what God is like.

The Bible uses all kinds of words to try to help you understand it. It says of Him, you will recall, that *He is the Word*. I have a thought in my mind, but you would never know what it is unless I express it. *Jesus is the expression of God*. The Bible says *He is the image of God*. Men used to wear big rings. They would put the ring in wax and pull it out, thus leaving its impression in the wax. They would call that an icon. The Bible says *Jesus is the icon of God*. He is exactly like Him. Then the Bible says *He is the Son*. The Bible is not talking about big God, little God. When it says He is the Son, it says He is exactly like Him. Simon Peter said, "You are not an Elijah, You are not a John the Baptist, You are like God." That's what we believe.

There is a good friend of mine whom I knew in Germany. He is a most wonderful fellow. He is from middle Mississippi. Somewhere or another he learned how to walk different from the rest of us. If you ever saw Dave, you would have said, "Here comes Dave." If you ever saw his shadow, "Here comes Dave." Things didn't work like they do for the rest of us. Everybody laughed when they saw Dave, but he just kept going. One day I walked into church, going across the parking lot. Here came a man walking. I went up to him and said, "I don't know you, but I know who you are." He said, "How do you know who I am?" I said, "You are Dave's father. He learned to walk from you. You walk just like him.: He said, "He ought to walk like me. He is my son." Then I began to understand. He is the son. He walks just like his father. It isn't a man reaching up to God. It is God reaching down to us. The reason we come in reverence and adoration and thanksgiving on this day is because the Son has come, and He is just like the Father.

There is another question: what are you going to do with Jesus? Jesus has said, "I wanted to come to be like you, but I also wanted to come so you would recognize my difference, and that in love and gratitude you would say, 'Lord, I want to give myself to you.'" The Bible says that there is joy in Heaven. The angels sang on Christmas night. He says they sing again when one person comes to faith in Christ. When you give your live to Christ angels that will sing more beautifully than they did on the night Jesus was born.