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Our Pulpit.

Being With Jesus.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, June 3rd.
"And they took knowledge of them, that
they had been with Jesus."—ACTS IV. 13.

The occasion of the text is about like this: Peter and John, two distinguished disciples of Jesus, were going up to the temple prayer-service held at three o'clock in the afternoon. As they were entering the temple by the gate called Beautiful, a poor cripple lying there asked alms. They were as poor as he was and could give him nothing, but they had what he did not have, and so seeing the sad case the man was in, they healed him in the name of Jesus. The miracle was a striking one. The man was forty, and he had never walked and now he walked and leaped for joy, and accompanied his benefactors into the temple to render thanks to God for his miraculous healing. Every one knew the man, and at once he and his healers were objects of much interest, the centre of attraction. People were curious to know about it, and were in a state of great excitement. This led Peter to speak to the people of Jesus, and he did so with great faithfulness, bringing home to their consciences the crime they were guilty of in crucifying the Lord of glory, the Prince of Life.

While Peter and John were thus discoursing to the people in a part of the temple known as Solomon's porch, they were taken in custody by the captain of the temple. Next morning they were brought before the council to answer for their conduct, and among other things they were asked to account for and explain the healing of the cripple. This opened Peter's mouth, and with great power and eloquence he addressed the council on the claims of Jesus. They were astonished and perplexed. They did not know what to make of it, but this was clear to them, that he owed whatever he was to Jesus. "Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

Now, in further discoursing from the text, we shall first consider what it is to be with Jesus, as Peter and John were with Him, for that is the key-note of our theme.

And we know what it is to be with one. *Being with*, however, may mean very much more with some than with others. Your *being with* may not be like Peter and John's *being with*. You have sometimes been thrown into the society of a great and good man in an accidental sort of way. Perhaps it was not a *being with* that was worth calling a *being with*, and yet, all your life after, you like to say, and make a boast of it, that you were with such a one. You met him on the street, and you brushed clothes with him as you and he passed. You did not know him but some one who did, said to you, "That is the Great So and So." Or, it may have gone a little farther than that. You may have been honored with a formal introduction to him, and exchanged a few words on commonplace matters. Or, you may have heard him lecture or preach, you may have sat on the same platform with him, you may have travelled on the same train or aboard the same boat, you may have stopped at the same hotel and dined at the same table. Something like that is what you may call *being with*, and it is rather a loose *being with*. And yet even such a casual *being with* as that, may not be without its uses, its helpfulness, its inspiration.

I can understand how even a simple introduction to a man high above you in rank and worth, may be a help to you all your life after. You may say: "I must do better after this; I must be what I have not been heretofore, for this right hand clasped his right hand, and God helping me, it shall do nothing base." I can understand, how even the glance of an eye, the tones of a voice, the manner and bearing of a man in our presence, the one sermon we heard him preach, the one brief hour we were near enough him to feel the holy happy thrill of his magnetic words, might do so much for us, in a word, make us what we never could have been without this being with him. And thus being with Jesus, as men were with Him in the days of His flesh, meeting him on the street, eating with Him, jammed up with Him in a surging crowd, hearing Him talk or preach, coming in contact

with Him in the commonplaces of life—even that casual accidental being with Him, I can understand, may have been a help to not a few, may have lifted them up, inspired them, saved them.

But the being with Jesus of Peter and John is a very different and very much better *being with* than that loose casual *being with* that I have been speaking of. Their *being with* had a purpose, an intention in it. It is one thing to be with one intentionally, purposely, and another to be with one accidentally, unintentionally. You happen to meet in with some one, and you are with him. But you are with another on purpose. You intended to be with him, and so you are with him. You sought an opportunity to be with him, you put yourself in his way, you travelled miles just on purpose to meet him and no one wonders you are with him. You do not wonder to see some people with one another. You see them together everywhere. The wonder would be not to see them together. Their first being together may have been more or less accidental, but now it has grown to be a purpose of life with them.

Now, so with Peter and John's being with Jesus. As far as they themselves were concerned, it was more or less accidental—their first being with Jesus; but it came to be a settled life-purpose with them to be with Him, and so for years, wherever He was, there Peter and John were. Is He in Jerusalem, they are there with Him? Is He in Galilee, they are in Galilee? Is He in a boat out on the lake, Peter and John are with Him in the same boat? Is He on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter and John are there with Him beholding His glory. Is He in the garden of Gethsemane, they are there too? Of course there were sad interruptions to their being with Jesus, for they were men, weak men, fallible men, and they were not always faithful. They turned aside from their purpose in the dark hour of temptation, and they were not with Him when it was worst with Him, and when they should have made it their special business to be with Him. Upon the whole, however, they carried out their purpose not so ill, as well perhaps as it is ever carried out by weak men.

Then again their being with Jesus was habitual, not occasional. It grew into a habit with them to be with Him; it came to be a sort of second nature with them, and they liked it. It was not once a week they were with Him, on the Lord's Day, or on special occasions; but it was every day of the week and every hour of the day, Monday as well as Sunday, morning, noon, night. They were with Him not only when something special was going on—when He was preaching His great sermons, when He was narrating His grandest parables when He was doing His wonderful works, when He was revealing His power and glory, when he was being honored and feted; but they were with Him too in the commonplaces of His life, when He had miles of dusty road to travel over, when there were but few to take Him in and shew Him ordinary respect and kindness, when He was off duty and uninteresting, if that could be ever said of Him.

If being with one is useful at all, then the more you can be with Him the better. If you want to drink in of a man's spirit, to feel the glow of his holy earnest life, to catch fire from him, to understand him, to be filled with his fulness, then be much with him, bind yourself to him so that you have to be with him all the time, and whatever is good and strong about him will slowly grow into you, and thus become yours. Jesus understood what being with Him could do for men, and especially for those who were to carry forward His world-work, and therefore He required His disciples to be with Him specially, with Him not only on certain days of the week and certain hours of the day, but all the time. He was not afraid of familiarity breeding contempt. It does in the case of small minds and of those who are not what they profess to be, but not in His case. On the other hand, the more men saw of Him, and were with Him, and knew Him, the better they liked Him, and the more He was able to do for them. It was Peter and John's being with Jesus so much, their being with Him habitually, that made them what they had come to be, the envy of the world as well as its hate.

But again, important as a personal, intentional, and habitual being with Jesus is, it is not everything. Mere association with Him, eating at the same table, under the same roof, in the same boat, coming in contact with Him as

men come in contact with men—even that being with Jesus does not make men, and do for them all we would expect it to do for them. While as a rule perhaps, association with wise and good men, walking with them through the years, companionating with them, does tend to our being wise; still, it does not necessarily follow. Put a wolf into a flock of sheep, and he is a wolf still, and all the more so there. Send a fool to college, and his being with the wisdom there does not help him in the least. He is if possible more a fool after he comes out than he was when he went in. He learns only how to be a clever fool. Yes, from the feet of the wise comes sometimes the most stupid blockhead that ever was. Out of the best Christian homes come sometimes the most renegade sons. And out of the little group of followers that the good Jesus led and loved and taught came the worst man who was ever born.

Thus, simply being with Jesus, being with Him every day and every hour in the day for years, being with Him in all circumstances and as much as it is possible to be with Him, in the sense of associating with Him, is not the *being with* of Peter and John, not the *being with* that does so much for men. That *being with* may be the *being with* of Judas, or the being with of the crowds who thronged Him on the streets of Capernaum and Jerusalem, the *being with* that at last breaks away from Him, as from a bitter bondage, and rushes all the farther into headlong sin and ruin.

To be with Jesus as Peter and John were with Him, is to be with Him spiritually. It is not the contact of clothes with clothes, or the touch of hand with hand, or the free interchange of ideas; but it is the contact of soul with soul and of heart with heart. They are more with Him than can be seen with the seeing eye. You see yonder John leaning on the Master's bosom, and you think that is near enough. You see Peter side by side with Jesus, and that is about as near as one man can get to another. But it you could see what is spiritual and unseen, you would see Peter and John not only with Jesus, but in Him, according to the teaching of the Bible, spiritually in Him, in Him by faith, so in Him that they are one with Him; it is not a bondage to be with Him; it is a blessed freedom, a glad life. They understand Him. They are in sympathy with His ideas of things, and look at things and feel about them as He does. They have confidence in His wisdom, and so what He thinks is best they think is best, where He leads they follow, what He does or wants done they do. There can be no being with without mutual confidence. "How can two walk together except they be agreed." It is their spiritual being with Him, their holy inner being with, their being in Him by faith, that lies at the foundation, and is the secret of their being with Him through those three years.

And more than that, it is because they are with Him spiritually, in Him by faith, that they are with Him, and even more so than ever, where they are. You do not see Jesus yonder with Peter and John as they stand their trial for the crime of being christians, and of relieving a poor cripple from his lifelong helplessness. You look for Him, but you see Him not; He is not there. Ah! has He turned His back on them in their dark hour, as they turned their back on Him in His dark hour? No! He is with them and they with Him. Indeed, He is more with them and they with Him than ever, for by His spirit He can be with them as He could not by His bodily presence, and by their faith they can be with Him as they could not by sight. It is not only that they had been with Him in other days, but it is rather that they are now with Him, that they are able to speak out so boldly, and to do so mightily, in His name.

And here there is something for us. We cannot be with Jesus to-day as Peter and John were with Him in the long ago. We cannot be with Him in the boat as they cross the lake of Galilee yonder. We cannot to-day look into His face as they did, and hear Him speak to the people in gentle love-tones or in words that blister and burn. We cannot know as they did the thrill of His touch, and the inspiration of His presence. He is in Heaven. But by faith we can be with Him in a very real sense. We can reach up to where He is on His throne of glory, and we can take hold of all the help there is for us in His right hand, and we can feel and know that He is with us, oh! so with us, and that we are with Him.

My friends, you know what it is to be with those you love though separated

from them to-day by wide lands and wider oceans. Your love and faith over leap in one bound these barriers, and you are with them and they with you, and you do so mightily, struggle on so bravely, live so hopefully and joyfully, because you are with them and they with you. You seem to feel that their eye is upon you as you are doing, and you do the best you can; and you seem to hear their word of cheer, and you are brave and strong and true in the battle of life.

Now, nearer still is Jesus to you, and more with you than any unseen friend can be. You live and do as with Him, as in His presence, as with His kindly beaming eye looking down and watching you. You speak up to Him where He is, and you know He hears, and is near to help, and He speaks down to you in a way that you can hear, and thus you are with Him. This being with Christ is something that we can more and more attain to and more and more learn. He comes near us as we come near Him, and this nearness grows into a blessed being with Him; and men take knowledge of us, as they took knowledge of Peter and John, that we have been, and are, with Jesus.

Let us next consider briefly what being with Jesus, as Peter and John were with Him, does for those who are thus with Him.

And it gives them power. Peter and John had power—power to heal, a strange glad power to help the wretched of men, to do a wide world-good. When they preached, their word was with power. It startled the conscience, woke up the dead in sin, wrung tears from eyes not used to weep and groans from hearts not used to anguish. Men said they were sinners, and asked what they must do to be saved, and they were told to believe in Jesus, and they believed and were saved. Such was their word of power that nothing could stand before it. One sermon that Peter preached led to the conversion of some three thousand. Oh what a word of power, and a glad word of power, that must have been!

Now, it was not because he was Peter. It was not the brilliance of oratory, the might of learning, the power of argument or diction. No; Peter was not a man of letters. He had not in his Galilean home the advantages and opportunities of an education. If he could read and write, that would be as far as his early education would go. He would be but young in years when he would have to go to work to toil for bread, and he would not have much of a chance to improve his mind. Still, he was a man of ability, gifted naturally with a strong vigorous intellect. He could think out for himself the questions that came up for consideration, and he was able to express in forcible words the opinions he held. It must be granted that his want of a liberal education was rather against him. It hurt him somewhat in the estimation of the learned and polished. But then it was all the more evident that the power he had was not of himself, but of God. He had learned it the three years He was with Christ. The scholarly Sadducees, when they heard him speak with such power, at once concluded that it was because he had been with Jesus. And the same too of John.

And here let us learn, that, if there is to be power in the pulpit, and power in the pews too, for both are needed; then there must be much of being with Jesus after the Peter and John sort. Learning, rhetoric, the wisdom and power to be had at the schools, and so on, have a place, and a most important place, and as a church we attach much importance to them, and the Lord did so too, for He chose as one of His Apostles the most scholarly man of the age, the learned Paul; but they cannot, and must not, take the place of close continuous companionship with Jesus. If we expect our learning to stand us in good stead of that, and our hard studying, we will fail. We will have no power to heal men and help them, no power to reach their consciences and waken up their dead souls. It is only with Jesus where this blessed power is to be enjoyed in its fulness.

Again, being with Jesus inspires with courage. It was the boldness of Peter and John, their dauntless bearing that surprised and amazed the temple-fathers the most. They stood up there before their judges with the calm confidence that comes from being sure of their ground, the righteousness of their cause, and they fearlessly and faithfully declared what they knew and felt and believed, and they seemed not to care how it would be with themselves so long as they did their duty. Their boldness was

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