

Inviting Others to Love Jesus

April 7, 2021 Scott Gunn

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. —Luke 24:31a

The disciples met Jesus and didn't recognize him at first. They weren't expecting to meet him, because they had seen him die a few days before. I wonder how often we meet Jesus and do not recognize him at first.

Some years ago, I was in Shanghai on a Sunday morning. Having done some research, I knew there was a Chinese Protestant church that had some English translation equipment for visitors, so I decided to visit the church. I made sure to arrive plenty early, in case I had trouble finding it.

Though I arrived at least fifteen minutes before the service, I was pretty surprised to see crowds outside the church. The windows were open, and people were standing on the lawn so they could hear what was happening inside. Even those spots were pretty full.

I'm pretty tall, and there weren't many white people there, so I stood out. Literally. As I walked a bit closer to the church, a woman asked me if I was there to visit the church. I said yes. She said to wait a few minutes. I wasn't sure why, but wanting to be a good guest, I obviously agreed that I would be glad to wait.

A few minutes later, I noticed one person leaving the church. She gave me a big smile. The woman who had asked me to wait pointed me to an usher who would take me to a seat. The inside of the church was packed. The usher led me to a perfect seat right in the balcony where the English-language headphones were. For me, it was the best seat in the house.

I quickly realized that this woman had cheerfully given up her perfect seat for a stranger. Everyone in the church was hospitable in ways I have trouble putting into words. These Christians welcomed me, a stranger, just as Jesus teaches us to in Matthew 25.

Of course, every gathering of Christians is by its very nature the body of Christ. So I shouldn't have been surprised to be awed by kindness and hospitality. These Christians taught me something about warm welcome, even though we could exchange few words due to our language barrier. Looking back, I realized that every single person had welcomed me from the moment I got close to the church campus. I have every reason to believe they are one of those churches who pray for their guests before they arrive.

I know that I meet Jesus every Sunday, in every church I attend. But this particular Sunday, my heart was warmed by the sheer extravagance of it all. Everything about the service—the welcome, the music, the care of the building—showed that they love Jesus and want others to love him, too.