

April 2, 2006
Lent 5

"We Want to See Jesus"

JOHN 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

A dynamic young pastor was called to serve a small country church with the hope that he would help that congregation reach out to the people moving into the country from the urban areas nearby. He was noted for his preaching skills. Sunday after Sunday he ascended the pulpit and urged his people to higher levels of living for the Lord. His practical sermons gave them lots of advice on how to improve their lives. He encouraged them to read their Bibles more and devote more time to prayer. One day, he noticed a little slip of paper on the pulpit where he preached. On it were neatly written neatly the words, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." He read it over and over again: "Sir, we want to see Jesus." He reread his sermons and realized the emphasis was more on what to do for Christ than what Jesus had done. He took the words to heart. Every week he asked himself, "Is this message helping my people see Jesus?"

Why do we gather here in this place for worship week after week? Is it not because we want to see Jesus? Oh, to be sure, we want practical advice on how to improve our lives, get along better in our families, and feel closer to the Lord. But the main reason for gathering is simply because we want to see Jesus. We want to see more of his love for us, and more of his glory as Lord and God. We want to see Jesus in the hymns we sing, in the readings we hear, the songs of the choir, the prayers we pray, and the Sacrament we receive. The more we see of Jesus, the less we will see of ourselves. Even our problems and troubles will seem small by comparison.

See less of ourselves

Some Greeks had come to worship in Jerusalem for the great Passover celebration. They

came to Philip. They wanted to talk to the disciple who had a Greek name that means "lover of horses." So they came with the words, "Sir we want to see Jesus." Philip went to his brother Andrew and together they went to Jesus with the message that some Greek people wanted to see him. Tens of thousands of people had crowded into Jerusalem, an area not much larger than downtown Santa Maria. Included in the crowd were people like these Greeks who had come from foreign lands to worship the true God.

"Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth. He is here for the Passover." The word passed through the large crowd of out-of-towners. "Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord," the crowds shouted as they welcomed into the city.

What about these curious Greeks who wanted to see Jesus, people so foreign to the Jews. We don't know if they were just interested in Jesus as an important person, or whether they have come to believe in him as their Savior. That is not told us.

Sometimes it does happen that people come to Jesus for the wrong reasons. They come looking for Jesus to see a miracle or to have him heal them of a serious illness. They want to be blessed in their business. They come seeking more meaning or purpose in life, or help in get along better in their family and marriage. They may come to church invited by someone whose life has been changed by the gospel. They are not sure what they are looking for but they seem to want that same peace in their lives they see in their friend or relative.

Notice what Jesus does to help people see less of themselves and more of what he has done for us. "Jesus replied; 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'" The finest hour of Jesus life on this earth was coming quickly. When the bombers were attacking London during WW2, Winston Churchill told the people of England that this would be their finest hour as they sacrificed their lives to save England and the world. Jesus was about to enter his finest hours here on this earth. His vision and understanding of what was about to happen was so clear.

He compares his life to a seed being planted in the ground. "I tell you the truth, unless the kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." The Christian faith is all about death, and dying and crucifixion. It is about seeing Jesus as the source of your salvation, not yourself. If I take these kernels of wheat in my hand and place them in a cool dry place, they will last for years without sprouting. However, if I plant them in the ground, they will die and grow into a new life that produces many more seeds.

Jesus was more than a great teacher who we admire like seeds in a jar, an exalted master who provides guidelines for how to improve your life. He is the Savior who planted his body in the ground through death so that our sin might be forgiven and paid for and we might live for every. He did this for us, and all people even the Greeks who said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

Several years ago Newsweek magazine had an article about Jesus called, "Visions of the Jesus." The article pointed out how other religions view Jesus. It said, "Clearly, the cross is what separates the Christ of Christianity from every other Jesus. In Judaism there is no

precedent for a Messiah who dies, much less as a criminal as Jesus did. In Islam, the story of Jesus' death is rejected as an affront to Allah himself. Hindus can accept only a Jesus who passes into peaceful samadhi, a yogi who escapes the degradation of death. The figure of the crucified Christ, says Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, Ô, is a very painful image to me. It does not contain joy or peace, and this does not do justice to Jesus.' There is, in short, no room in other religions for a Christ who experiences the full burden of mortal existence-and hence there is no reason to believe in him as the divine Son whom the Father resurrects from the dead."

What do you see in Jesus as he draws this comparison of the seed being planted into the ground? Please allow for this illustration of what Jesus means to us: Imagine for a moment that you have been chosen to take the diseases of the world on yourself, die for them, rise from the dead and eliminate all disease forever. Every form of cancer, every virus, heart disease, diabetes, everything placed is placed on you. What a privilege that would be, even though it would be painful. That is what Jesus, Lord and God from all eternity, did during a certain time or hour of world history. He took the sin of the world upon himself. Isaiah 53 says, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." He died and was buried and gave his life and was raised up again that he might bring forth the fruit of new people who have eternal life through him.

Jesus takes this concept of dying and applies it also to us. "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me." I am born into this world with a life inside of me that needs to die. It is a life of thinking sin is OK or that I can do whatever I want to do and get away with it. I am born believing the teaching of all religions of the world, that I have the power with me to work at living in such a way that I am able to save myself. Jesus says follow me. Serve me. Faith or believing is setting aside your thoughts, your plans, your desires, your dreams and your hopes for salvation and accepting the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus. Faith means believing that Jesus was and is and always will be there for you.

You are falling down a deep black hole, yelling and screaming for help. False voices call out to you: "Grab on to something and pull yourself back up." Desperately you reach out for something to hang on to. Then you hear a voice calling, the voice of Jesus: "Don't worry. You are safe. I will be at the bottom to catch you." That is what faith is. Faith is simply letting go and letting God. Faith is dying to self and seeing Jesus at the bottom of the deep dark hole as the source of your forgiveness and peace with God. It is hearing his words from the cross and believing they are true: "It is finished!"

Seeing more of Jesus

The less you see of yourself and the more you see of Jesus, the more you will want to see Jesus. Let's see more of Jesus. See him now suddenly overwhelmed with sorrow as he thinks about the death that his about to die. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from his hour'? No it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Jesus saw what was coming- the sin of the world would be placed on him and it would crush him. Soon he will be praying, "Father if it is possible let this cup pass from me, not my will be yours be done." He sees the pain and suffering, but he also sees the glory that will come when he has completed the work and is raised to

life again. Our second lesson for today said of Jesus, "He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death." Just as soldiers from battlefields have flashbacks, Jesus had a flash forward to great battle at the cross.

The heavenly Father heard the anguishing cry of his Son. "Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again.'" Some people thought the loud voice was thunder. Others said it was angel speaking. Jesus knew it was the voice of the Father giving him the assurance and also the whole world assurance that when he gave his life like seed in the ground, the Father would raise him back to life again. When Jesus died he said, "It is finished?" How do I know for sure that the Father accepted the work Jesus finished? The Father raised his Son to life again. "He was delivered for our offense and raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). That was the plan that Jesus saw so clearly. That's the plan he wants us to see clearly every day in our lives. We can begin each day with the words, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." Those words from Psalm 118 are in the context of the stone the builders rejected being elevated to the capstone. We live each day under that capstone, the completed work of Christ.

We want to see more of Jesus. He speaks to us about the crisis he faced. "Now is the time for judgment on this world." The Greek word for judgment is *krisis* from which we get our English word "crisis." Crisis time. Crunch time. A crisis can be good if it leads to positive change or it can also go the other way. The ultimate crisis for the world occurred on Good Friday. The future of all humanity hung in the balance. Would Jesus be able to carry through with the work of atoning for us and redeeming us? We listen to the voice of Jesus speak with confidence and authority: "Now the prince of this world will be driven out." God is on his throne. Satan accuses us before that throne day and night. Suddenly we see Jesus, the nail prints on his hands, defending us and saying, "It is finished." He throws him out of the courtroom and stops his accusing finger with these words.

People are being drawn to Jesus death and crucifixion. "But when I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself." Those who see Jesus always want to see more of him. "Sir we want to see Jesus." That's the aching and longing we have. Amen.