

“Are You *Sure* You Want to See Jesus?”

+ 5 Lent B +

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

March 22, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

One of the best snippets of advice I ever heard about what people want from a sermon comes from today’s Gospel. It seems a pastor had told his congregation how difficult it was (and still is for this pastor) to wrestle with God, Greek and Good ideas week after week. One Sunday as he entered the pulpit he saw a note saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Simple, accurate and daunting for any preacher to consider each week – but on this basis of this text I must ask you, “Are You *Sure* You Want to See Jesus?”

Well, that’s a silly question, isn’t it? Of course you do, we all do, just like those Greeks in today’s Gospel. But before you decide for certain, let me tell you something about those Greeks and the Jesus they would not see, at least not that day, but the Jesus we must all see, be drawn to, and cling to for our salvation.

John tells us that these Greeks were in Jerusalem “at the festival,” namely Passover, the last Passover before Jesus was betrayed and executed. We know also that already then a plot was being hatched to kill not just Jesus, but the recently raised Lazarus. If they could simply get rid of Jesus and dispose of Lazarus whose coming forth from the grave was strong evidence Jesus just might be the Messiah God had promised – well, then the Scribes and Pharisees could continue with their shady “business as usual.”

“Messiah Fever” burned in the hearts of the thousands and thousands of pilgrims who poured into Jerusalem, hoping that this might be the year that God’s Messiah would be revealed. That is one of the reasons some commentators suggest for these “Greeks” to seek out an audience with Jesus. Their very appearance in John’s Gospel is unique and leads to many questions about those Greeks about which we know very little with certainty.

1. We don’t know how many there were. John just says “some.”
2. We also aren’t quite sure about their “Greekness,” because the possibilities include Greek by race or, more likely, culturally Greek Jews, known to the Jews of Israel as

Hellenists, who in their own estimation were too sophisticated to be simple Jews as they had adapted to the Greek/Roman culture during the various invasions and exiles where they'd been forced to live away from Israel. Oh, there were Hellenistic Jews in Israel but these most likely these came from any of the Greco/Roman cities in Palestine or perhaps Alexandria in Egypt, a stronghold of Hellenist Judaism with their own school of Hebrew scholars who had their own translation of the Old Testament into Greek.

3. We don't know what they had seen and heard since Palm Sunday or if they were even aware that Jesus had entered into the city riding on the foal of a donkey. Most likely they had.
4. We don't know how much they knew of Jesus' teaching though some commentators contend they wished to see Jesus to invite Him to travel back to their Hellenistic synagogue in whatever city or country they were from, to teach. It would have been the typical Greek style to check out this possible Messiah's philosophy about life. Remember that St. Paul complained about that: "Jews seek signs and Greeks seek 'wisdom.'"

What we do know is they went first to Philip—good choice, as he had a Greek name. Phillip means "friend or lover of horses," Philip came from Bethsaida in Galilee where there was a Hellenized community. The "Friend of Horses" took them to Andrew—another plus; another man with a Greek name; "Andrew" means "manly," as in good looking, good body, fit – in charge. We don't know when Andrew gave up the Hebrew name his parents had given him but he would have had one – in the Bible he's known only by his Greek name, "The MAN!"

John being a Gospel that is simple to read but gives one much to ponder tells us the two disciples who brought others to Jesus: Andrew and Philip bringers of Peter and Nathaniel to see Jesus are again the delivery men of this message. Jesus didn't seek out these Greek potential followers – they have come to Him.

It seems, at first blush, Jesus had a rather curious inclination toward turning His attention away from the matter at hand (namely those Greeks cooling their heels a short distance away), but, in truth, what happened next brings whatever questions they might have had, whatever

knowledge they sought laid out clearly before them: they would “see Jesus” revealed to them but it would have left them unsure if this was the Jesus they or anyone wanted.

He tells all who will hear the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He, the single seed – the only one that could bring life to the whole world must die, go to his grave and in rising give life, new and eternal to countless billions who would be drawn to Him. He tells the crowd those who would follow Him must lay down their lives as well but that they would be known and loved by the Father. He underscores that by calling out to the Father asking that God’s name be glorified. The Father answers: it has been glorified (in Jesus)- in Jesus who would be “lifted up” – that code phrase the Jews used for Crucifixion – the most shame filled death possible. Jesus would be lifted up naked in OUR SHAME, bearing the sins of the world as the sinless sacrifice in His life laid down.

That voice from heaven gave the Greeks and the crowd listening the wisdom, the knowledge that Jesus was the one sent from on high – Messiah – the very suffering servant Isaiah had prophesied of old if they pieced all the prophecies and deeds done together. Jesus reveals that following Him means a life of service, as well. The “Messiah Fever” folk were hoping for a conqueror, not a servant. The other nations had gods that were aloof and afar, fickle but mostly benign. Here is Messiah calling them and us to serve, as well, to change, to grow, to suffer in His name. Are you *SURE* that is the Savior you want to serve? At least the crowd that day got to hear voice from heaven that affirmed Christ’s message – a voice like thunder – that promised to glorify Jesus – our servant Messiah.

I can only imagine the awe and fear those questioning Greeks must have felt when Jesus spoke of the end of the rule of Satan and the beginning of the kingdom of God. How their hearts must have pounded later that week when they heard that Jesus had been lifted up on a cross. How they must have pondered the news that He was risen – and if they didn’t come to believe that Jesus is Lord how they must have wondered as hearts and lives were drawn to faith in Jesus just as He had promised.

The wonderful promise that Jesus once He had been lifted up would draw all people to Himself is a promise fulfilled in all who have gathered here today. In truth, no one should ever have wanted to see the Son of God lifted up – crucified in our shame. But because He died and

rose and drew us to faith in Him through the Holy Spirit we are God's people, drawn from the Gentile nations, called to serve in His name, to give witness to the Messiah God sent – Jesus.

All of us know people who are in need of Jesus and some who are actively seeking to meet Him. Now is a critical time for Jehovah to consider who we want to partner with as we continue in ministry here on the corner of Snelling and Thomas. As we exist here to give witness to Jesus as Savior/Messiah we need to focus on how we can work together with others already in our building, with those God might bring to us to work together with in other ministries – how we can meet the needs of the people from all over the world God has brought to our neighborhood, and how we can more powerfully grow in our own faith and witness. We exist to serve our Lord, to serve others – those who do not know Jesus as well as those who do. We are here to be an open door to our transforming Christ; introducing others to the Jesus – the slaughtered in shame for our transgressions Savior who died for us in love on a cross so that all who look to the cross in faith will find life eternal. AMEN

Now may our steadfastly loving God receive our prayers, grant us grace to grow in His mercy and bring forth in us and through us the fruits of His Spirit that others may be drawn to the cross and life eternal in Jesus. AMEN