

"We Wish to See Jesus"
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia
 March 18, 2018

John 12:20-33

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

As with just about everything in the Bible, there is more to this passage than what meets the eye. There's more going on here than some Greeks who want to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Jesus is in a time of transition. For most of John he's been telling people the time is not yet here.

When his mother asked him to make more wine for the wedding feast. He told her it was not yet his hour. (John 2:4)

When he talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, he told her the hour was coming. (John 4:21)

And twice, we are told that he was teaching and that his opposition was present, but that no one touched or arrested Jesus, because his hour had not yet come. (John 7:30 and 8:20)

But now, in John's account, things are different. Lazarus has been brought back from the dead (John 11). Jesus has been anointed by Mary with a pound of costly perfume (John 12). Jesus has made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, on a donkey, over the palm branches laid down in front of him, to shouts of Hosanna.

And those in charge have decided that the turmoil Jesus is causing is too much, too disruptive, too much change, too much apart from their vision of the world. And they have decided to take action. To make, in their minds and hearts, that bargain in which they would rid themselves, kill, one person in hopes of saving a people.

The Pharisees, they are afraid. Of losing power, but maybe even more of what might happen if Pilate and the Romans see their religion as revolutionary. The very real, very dangerous consequences that would come about when they did. They were clinging to their lives. Holding on tight.

When the Greeks arrive and ask to see Jesus, they are proving the Pharisee's point. "Look, the world has gone after him!" Jesus has gone viral, News of what he has said and done is bigger than Jerusalem.

Jesus' hour has come. He has shared his life, and now, the time is at hand when he will give his life.

Jesus knows, there is no time to waste. There is little time for subtlety, Jesus lays it out plain: *Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me....*

And then Jesus says, "*Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.*"

It sounds familiar, but it's not the kind of questioning and doubt that the other gospel writers suggest. Gail O'Day writes¹, "An 'agony' scene cast in the idiom of the tradition as recorded in Mark would make no sense in this Gospel, because God's will and Jesus' will have always been the same. There is no internal struggle in the face of his death, because Jesus recognized the hour as the ultimate purpose of his ministry. It is the final revelation of his relationship with God."

This union between Jesus and God comes into even clearer focus when the voice of God comes down like thunder.

And Jesus said, "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" John tells us, "*He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*"

Jesus' death, just up ahead, is not an ending, it is a beginning. The avenue through which we are all invited to new life. New hope. Jesus will be lifted up. On a cross². Out of a tomb. From the earth. Jesus will be lifted up, and will draw all people to myself.

All people. Drawing all people.

Or, to quote Gail O'Day again³, "The positive effect of Jesus' hour is described in sweeping terms, and highlights the universal offer of salvation available in Jesus. It is people's response to this offer that sets limits, not Jesus himself."

And having gotten to the end of today's reading, it sends me back to the beginning.

"We wish to see Jesus". That's what the Greeks said, and they asked Jesus' disciples. They, the disciples, were the logical ones to ask. And yet, they don't seem to know how to respond. They wish to see Jesus. They ask Philip. We don't know what Philip says, but he goes and talks with Andrew. And then they both go and tell Jesus. "Jesus, there are people here who want to see you," which in the Greek means more than seeing. It means following. It means knowing.⁴

And I wonder...

How do we answer when someone says, "I wish to see Jesus?" Is it a question that causes us to conference... to pause and wonder and ponder, or do we show them the way? Are we comfortable enough in our faith to share our own journeys to seeing Jesus and to help a brother or sister find their own? And do we know who and when to ask that same question for ourselves when we feel lost...

¹ Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John," *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IX*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 712.

² O'Day, 713. Jesus will be lifted up has more than one meaning— lifted up on a cross and lifted up from the earth in his ascension.

³ O'Day, 713.

⁴ O'Day, 710.

Sometimes we show people Jesus by insisting that Jesus is present in the real world, and not just in church on Sunday mornings.

A couple of years ago, NPR profiled some of the hottest music around the globe. In Africa, they talked with VJ Kule, who told that the hottest trend in music in Kenya was music from the Republic of Congo⁵.

Kule said, "Well, the song is called "Tobina," a song sang by a gentlemen called Daddy Owen. He's a gospel artist. And it's just the craziest, it's the sickest, and it's just taken over the street of east Africa, not just Kenya."

The host, Michele Norris, asked him, "You know, we're listening to this music, and it's got so much energy, and it's a gospel song, and I'm trying to imagine where people would listen to this: In their cars? In the clubs? Would they be listening to this in church? Would people just sort of get the holy ghost and dance in uniform..."

Kule responded: "Man, they listen everywhere. They listen in the clubs more than anything. They dance to it at three in the morning with a beer in their hand, with like four or five girls. It's crazy and hectic. So if you are a pious person, and you walk into a Nairobi club at three in morning, you might not be happy with what you see. But you know what? The message is getting clear..."

...he's talking about praising God when things have gone well, thank God for the beautiful life that you're living, thank God for your health, thank God for your family. And once God has sorted all of that out, the only thing left to do is to dance and to praise him... Praise the lord whether you're in church or whether you're clubbing in Nairobi, Kenya...

...it's a phenomenon. I wish you could come here and see how big and how quick churches are popping up all over and how the youth are being incorporated.... [In Church, on Sunday] You would hear this. You would hear live bands. You'd hear the youth screaming. There'd be... it's loud. Churches have become louder than clubs, truth be told. I'd never believe I would see the day when a church would be more jiggy than in the club.

Sometimes, we invite people to see Jesus out there.... in clubs, in labs, boardrooms, at lunch counters.

Sometimes, Jesus is right here, waiting to be seen.

Gordon Atkinson, a Baptist preacher from Texas shared an event that happened at his church a few years ago⁶:

I don't know how the Kramers found our church. We're off the beaten path and we don't advertise. Jennifer was only 19 and David was 20 but they already looked beaten, worn, and creased.... [19 and 20, they were parents to 3 year old David Jr. and 7 week old Stacy.]

About a month after the Kramers started coming to church we were gathered together for our Wednesday night meal. Everyone was sitting around the tables chatting after supper when we heard a terrible scream down the hall.

The first thing I saw was Lyle and Cathy running toward JoAnn, one of our deacons, who was carrying [their son] Steven..... Steven was screaming in pain, and there was something in the scream that made every parent stop talking.... Cathy [Stephen's mother] pulled up Steven's shirt and everyone fell silent. On his back were eight vicious bites, two rows of four oval wounds. The skin was broken and oozing blood....

When something terrible happens, there is a moment when horror borders on disbelief. You see something horrible with your eyes, but your mind can't take in the information. That's how we were that night....

⁵ The Spin: Nairobi's Hit Is Daddy Owen's 'Kupe De Kalle' by NPR Staff, August 17, 2010.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129258724>

retrieved October 27, 2010

⁶ <http://www.thehighcalling.org/4014/covenant-stories-the-passion-of-steven>

Retrieved March 23, 2012.

JoAnn had found them in one of the Sunday school rooms. David Jr. [had] dragged Steven to the ground and....bit him over and over. Innocent little Steven, only 2-years-old, didn't even know how to struggle.....

As everyone fussed over Steven, David Jr. walked into the kitchen and watched with an innocent and unconcerned expression. I stared at him in wonder. How can a 3-year-old have such rage? How can his anger come and go so quickly? Where did he learn to bite like that?

David and Jennifer came rushing around the corner and immediately saw what had happened. Jennifer....ran out of the church, crying hysterically.

David picked up his son and pleaded his apologies. As he edged toward the door he kept saying the same thing over and over. "I'm sorry. He knows better. I'm sorry. He knows better." Tossing one final "I'm sorry" over his shoulder, David ran out the door. I followed him...

I could tell they wanted to leave. Who could blame them? To be honest, I was hoping they WOULD leave. I was trying to be nice, but I was so angry and so sad all at once. Then the front door of the church banged open and Cathy [Stephen's mother] burst out. She ran toward Jennifer, who froze...

Cathy didn't say anything at first. Then she put her left hand on Jennifer's shoulder and her right hand under her chin. She lifted Jennifer's face and spoke in a very soft, but firm voice. "Stop."

"Listen to me", she said. "Steven is going to be fine. He will heal, and he will get over this. I'm not worried about Steven. Do you know what does worry me?"

Jennifer shook her head, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I'm worried that you and David will be so embarrassed about this that you will never come back to our church. That's the only thing that worries me. We've come to love your family, and you need to be here with us. You need to be in church, and I want you to promise me that you'll come back THIS Sunday."

Jennifer didn't answer her. I don't think she could, really. She did what felt right. She melted into Cathy's arms, sobbing. There was something different about the way she was crying, too. It was sad crying, but not as crazy and not as lonely as before. They stayed like that for a long time, two mothers holding each other in the parking lot. Two mothers crying for their sons.

[Gordon concluded,] I watched in awe and had the strangest impulse to take off my shoes.

It's one thing to read about Christ in Bibles and books. It's quite another thing to meet Christ in person. Quite another thing.

What do you do when someone comes along and asks you (knowing that they probably won't use words) "I wish to see Jesus?"

Will you show them Jesus? Because he might be wearing a hoodie. Or come bearing a casserole. Or walk really, really slowly and hold up the line that you really need to get through on your way to the next thing.

We wish to see Jesus. And seeing, to follow. Following to serve. Serving to give our lives. Our cares. Our treasures. Our pride. Our secrets. Our all.

And in doing so, to live.

I wish to see Jesus. Don't you?

Today's text makes it clean, the only thing that is stopping us is the blinders we place on our eyes and our hearts.

Let's take them away, because we wish to see Jesus.