

Fifth Sunday in Lent; March 17, 2024  
+ John 12:20-33 +  
“See the Real Jesus, the One You Want”

**Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew came with Philip and told Jesus.**

**Jesus answered them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain. Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, let me him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.**

**“Now, my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, this is the reason I cam to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”**

**A voice came from heaven: “I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again.”**

**The crowd standing there heard it and said it thundered. Others said an angel talked to him. Jesus answered, “This voice was not for my sake but for yours.**

**“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die.”**

**“We would like to see Jesus.”** That’s what the Greeks wanted. They were apparently converts to Judaism, in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, an occasion when Jews and converts to Judaism from around the world made pilgrimages to the Holy City. And they had heard about Jesus. They could have glimpsed him on his triumphal entrance on Palm Sunday, or at least heard about it. This Gospel of John also reports that the witnesses of Lazarus’ resurrection were spreading the word. One way or another, they had heard about Jesus. And now they want to see him.

A wise pastor with whom I used to serve has those calligraphed words taped to his pulpit. Before every sermon, he told me, he looks at them and prays, “Let them see Jesus.” Every good sermon, every good hymn, every liturgical rite and gesture is for you to see Jesus. Good churches, too, are designed for people to see Jesus in their architecture and symbols.

But do we want to see Jesus? I mean really see him, as he really is, and want him to be who he is? Do we want to see a Jesus glorified by dying? **“The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain.”** This is the glorified Jesus: a dying seed. This is how Jesus is praised, honored, celebrated, and adorned in splendor. It’s not in dollar signs or packed arenas. His glory comes in death; his glory is gory. And this is to fear, love, and trust in God above all things: to see your glorious God hidden behind flesh, under thorns, behind the tomb’s stone, fallen to the ground dead. Is that who you want to see?

Do you want to see the Jesus who says, **“Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life.”**? This is the fruit that grows from the Christ the

dead seed: that you, his Church, hold no attachment to your life in this world, would give it all away to follow him, who deny their own desires to follow him. This is the fruit that grows from the dead seed of Christ: when you place everything in this world in the balance against eternal life, you hate them: money, job, career, grades, promotion, toys, vacations, marriage, family, health, rights and privileges and everything else.

Are you here to see the Jesus who says, **“If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”** This is the life that sprouts from Christ’s death: life with Jesus where he is, and where he wants us to be; life where he leads, you follow; he’s captain, you’re crew; he’s master, you’re servant; he’s parent, you’re child. He says your sin is sin, and you stop it. It doesn’t matter if he says miss time with your team and your boy/girlfriend or best friend. Where he is, you are.

Are you here to see the Jesus who refuses his own power to leave his Father’s plan? **“Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, this is the reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”** The Word made flesh has all the power at his fingertips to do as he pleases – and refuses. He does not consider his equality as God something to flaunt and cling to. He makes himself nothing, the very lowest servant, obedient even to death on a cross. He does not stop Judas’ betrayal, Peters’ denial, Caiaphas’ cunning, Pilate’s flogging, the crowd’s taunting, or his Father’s forsaking. He lets them all have their way. He doesn’t always use his power for you, either – at least not the way you want. He doesn’t always answer your prayers the way you want. He doesn’t always heal you. He doesn’t always solve your problems. He doesn’t always make the bad go away. What good is power if you don’t use it? Is this the almighty Son of God we come to see?

Are you here to see the Jesus who speaks openly of being crucified? **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** He announced it, whether anyone understood it or not. If they thought the Father’s voice was only thunder, they would also miss the meaning of these words. But he said it: I will be lifted up, to suffer the shame and horror. I draw people to me, and so through me they come to the Father, and come to heaven. I am the Way.

The real Jesus straddles no fence, nor leaves many paths open to God. No other god, no other effort, no other faith, no other sacrifice draws you to heaven. Jesus does it, drawing you to him, to the Triune God, to his heaven. In Christ alone is life. Is this who you came to see? The one who says, “I am lifted up, to draw all.”

The fallen human mind, and even the sinful nature of believers, say no. I do not want to see this Jesus. I want to see a Jesus who finds glory in money and popularity, not a gory death. I want a Jesus who never dies at all, and never lets me die. I want to see a Jesus who lets me love my life in this world, with all its trappings, most of all. I want to see the Jesus who is where I want him to be, and does not ask me to move from my comfort to sacrifice and obey. I want to see the Jesus who uses his power all the time, every time, to spare me all trouble. I want to see a Jesus who makes himself optional.

But we are more than our sinful nature. We are not even mainly our sinful nature. Our identity is believer. God has brought us to faith, and made us say in our hearts, “I want to see the real Jesus.” See him raised up, drawing you to himself – his real self – and through him, the Father and heaven’s glory. Believers want to see him – the real him, every aspect of him – and agree: this is the Jesus, and this is my Jesus. Amen.