

## WE WOULD SEE JESUS

**TEXT:** John 12:20-26

This wonderful text from the Gospel of John provides several strong possibilities for exploration. But what stands out for me is the plea from the Greeks who were worshipping at the Passover: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” “We wish to see Jesus.”

So, what is happening here? Crowds of people are gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus has just returned from Bethany where he has raised his friend Lazarus from the grave. The news of this event has traveled through the crowd and everyone is wondering about this man and the miraculous and mysterious things he has done.

There are some Greeks in the crowd who had come for the feast. Apparently they were not able to go into the court where Jesus was, but they were anxious to meet this very exceptional man. So they went to Philip – presumably because he spoke their language – and asked him to arrange an introduction to Jesus. Philip recruited Andrew’s help and the two of them set about arranging a meeting.

So, how do we meet Jesus? We cannot become part of that milling crowd of faithful gathering for the Passover Feast. We cannot seek out Philip – or Andrew – or any of the disciples to arrange an introduction.

How are we to get to know the real Jesus? If Jesus is to be anything more than another name, another historical mythic figure for us; if he is to become in any real sense “Christ”, “Savior”, “Lord”; if his name and his story are to arouse in us anything like “faith”, then we need to encounter him and not merely some ideas about him. We need to meet the real Jesus. We need to see him and feel him and know him. Faith needs not only to hear about Jesus, but in some real sense we must “see” Jesus.

We have many images of Jesus. Great artists throughout the centuries have depicted nearly all the events of his life and ministry. We treasure the images of the

infant cradled in the loving arms of his mother. We are comforted by the images of the Good Shepherd carrying the lost but now found lamb over his shoulders. We are humbled by the image of Jesus calming the surging waters and filling the disciples' nets with fish. We are excited by the images of the triumphal Jesus riding through Jerusalem with palm branches waving around him. And we are devastated by the images of the King of the Jews suffering and dying on a cross.

We need these images to picture Jesus the Christ. We need these images of the central figure of our faith. But to truly see Jesus we must encounter him and not merely some ideas about him. I would like to propose four images of Christ and how these images can help us find the real Savior and the source of our faith.

First, we must see the Divine Christ. For us to encounter the divinity of Christ we must recognize his absolute distinction from us. We are finite; Jesus is infinite. We are sinful; Jesus was sinless. We are mortal; Jesus, though he assumed mortality, was really immortal. These images bring us to a better understanding of God's plan for the world, and the role Jesus was sent to play in bringing that understanding to people who feared the wrath of God rather than welcomed the love of God. When we see Jesus as the Son of God we are bringing the Deity into our lives in a very human way. When the Greeks sought to "see" Jesus during the Passover events, they were looking for the face of the Divine in human form.

Can we find the Divine Jesus today? Is his divinity even relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Is our concept of the Divine only our way of escaping the hopelessness of our earthly life? I believe we must find the Divine Jesus – we must accept this way of "seeing" Jesus in order that we not abandon hope for the future of the earth. We must see the Divine hand as the guiding force and steadfastly hold the course set for us at the Resurrection. The Divine Jesus is our hope for our own resurrection.

Second, we must see the Victorious Jesus. Imagining Jesus Christ as victor belongs to the most ancient strands of Christian thought. But the questions come...what

sort of victory do we have in mind? Over whom or what is this victory achieved? Unfortunately, we have lately seen the religious fascination with the Lord's divinity combined with the more political idea of divine sovereignty to produce a picture of Jesus as conqueror. We have seen the image of the victorious Christ because the image of heroic victor, captain or king moving the faithful towards this world – with military intent. This sort of Conquering Christ has been inextricably bound up with imperialistic societies, and the United States is perhaps the greatest empire in recorded history.

If we are to use the image of a victorious, or conquering, Christ today we must be very clear that the power and the victory under discussion are not the usual types. At the top of the list of what must be conquered by the Christ is surely our own need to conquer everything and everybody. This does not give us free rein in a triumphalistic bid for world power. In the chaos of our world today, we must remember the Jesus who came not to destroy, but to give life more abundantly. This is our victory in Jesus.

Perhaps the image we find most reassuring is that of the loving and accepting Jesus. "Jesus Loves Me" can be a profound summation of the gospel. When Karl Barth was asked by a nervous American theology student what, in all his years of reflection and writing, he had learned, he replied with a twinkle, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the bible tells me so".

For us the image of the loving Jesus is paramount. But we also must remember that love doesn't just accept everything. If it's love, it cares about the real condition of the beloved. "Jesus Loves Me" does not mean that Jesus likes me, accepts me, and makes no great demands upon me. Jesus loves me - therefore I had better be prepared for some embarrassing moment of truth and some hard work!

There is a responsibility tied to this love. If we are to live in this image of Jesus, we must be ready to show his love in very tangible ways to others. Our acceptance of this image does not allow us to just accept the status quo. It wills us to alter it drastically. We must see the loving and accepting Jesus not as the one who rubber-stamps whatever

road we choose to take, but one who charges us with loving and accepting others and making them part of the solution and not part of the problem.

All of these images of Christ have some basis in scripture. All of these images of Christ can be distorted in the attitudes they foster toward the world. If we only focus on the divinity of Jesus, we may find ourselves denying and evading our responsibility for the world. In limiting our scope to the victorious and conquering Christ we view our role as a triumphal bid for world power. By putting the loving Jesus ahead of all else we are apt to take an uncritical acceptance of the status quo.

In order to really “see” Jesus, we need to meet him in today’s world. We need to “see Jesus” as the one who intends to transform the world. To transform something means to change its form, shape, direction; to turn it toward a different goal, to reorient it. Against the image of the divine Jesus, I believe Jesus does not want to take us out of the world but to put us into it with a mind to mending it. Against the conquering Jesus, I believe Jesus doesn’t ask us to take over the world but to befriend it. Against the judging Jesus, I see the Christ as gathering about himself a band of reconcilers and stewards and poets of creation. Against the accepting Jesus I see someone who calls human beings to responsibilities they would never dream of undertaking otherwise. Discipleship today must be not to accept the violence, injustice, inequality and degradation of our social and natural environment. That is discipleship today.

We need to be serious about seeing Jesus today. The Greeks who asked to see Jesus at the Passover heard about this man who had some of the divine in him. They wanted to see who this was that was causing such a stir among the people. We need to move away from the images and look for the real Jesus. If we are serious about seeing Jesus today, we will have to realize that he is in our midst. We need to see the Divine Christ in every face on the street and in every call to help those in need, no matter who they are or where they come from. We need to see the Victorious Christ not as the one who empowers us to domination of others, but as the catalyst for our own individual efforts to conquer the evils of our world and bring peace among nations, starting right

here where we are today. We need to see the Loving and Accepting Jesus as the model for love and acceptance of everyone without regard to race, creed, national origin, or sexual orientation, whether we like them or agree with them. Above all, we must prepare ourselves to meet the Transforming Christ, the Christ who calls us to participate in his transfiguration of the creation.

A friend once sent me a Franciscan Prayer that I would like to share:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen.