

“I’d Like To See Jesus.”

John 12:20-33¹

Imagine for a moment you are Philip in this text.² Hypothetically put yourself in Philip’s position where someone comes to you and says, “I’d like to see Jesus. Can you take me to him?” How would you respond?

Our text says that Philip went and told Andrew. So obviously this is a question that God never intended us to handle on our own.³ Who would you go tell? Maybe this is a benevolent matter because whenever I get phone calls and someone starts out talking about Jesus, they are really asking if Cane Creek will pay their bills. Maybe this is youth and children’s matter that we should drop on Brenda and Kelly’s lap. We all know the most honest and hard questions are usually asked by our children. Maybe they’ve got an answer? We’ve recently been working with the UNC Law School on incorporation matters to protect the congregation in the event of a lawsuit. Should we consult with our lawyer before we even attempt to answer this question? Maybe we should call 911 because this person obviously needs psychiatric help? Do you think we should form a committee to study the matter and report back to the congregation before we answer? Maybe you should just tell the preacher and he can ask Jesus himself? Someone comes to you and says, “I’d like to see Jesus.” How would you respond?

We all have ideas of how we hope we’d respond to this question. In case there is any hesitancy in our response, maybe we should look at how Jesus responds to Philip and Andrew when they come to him with the news, “Some Greeks want to see you.”

Jesus says in verse 23, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” For those of you who have been around the Gospels for a while, you know that this is Messiah-talk from Jesus. Anytime Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, this is a clue that he’s pointing to his calling and his mission on earth. And his glorification comes through...take a big gulp here...his suffering on the cross.

When Jesus responds to Philip and Andrew, his answer points to the risen Christ, the Jesus who is with God today, the Jesus we don’t always see in a physical sense. We don’t see the historical Jesus anymore. We tell stories about the pudgy baby in the manger, the Jesus who walked on water, and the Jesus who was whipped beyond recognition. But that’s not the Jesus we see

¹ I also preached on this passage at Cane Creek on 3-16-97 and 4-9-00. This sermon uses some of the previous exegesis but develops the material in a different way.

² The idea for approaching this text in the way I do comes from a message by Walter J. Burghardt in his book, *Grace on Cructhes* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 43-48.

³ I intend this sentence to be said in a sarcastic tone.

today. Today when we look for the powerful risen Christ, he is just as real, but can often be harder to recognize. So, when Philip and Andrew come to Jesus telling him that some Greeks are looking for him, the first thing Jesus seems to be asking them is, "Can you see me?" Can you see Jesus? Is that a possibility that exists in the framework of your world? Are you open to that possibility right now, at this moment, that maybe you can see Jesus?

Think back to your original reaction when you put yourself in Philip's shoes. If you had a moment of panic when you imagined someone saying to you, "I wish to see Jesus," and you didn't really know how to respond, then you should be praying right now, "Lord, soften my heart so I can be open to the possibility of see you. I sing about seeing you. Seeing you is part of my faith base. But realistically, I'm not so sure. Soften my heart and put within me a desire to see you."

If you're open enough, and your heart is fertile soil for the experience of seeing Jesus, then how could we expect to see this risen Jesus today? Although there are many options, I think we see Jesus today in three ways. First, we can see Jesus in creation. Just go outside sometime this next week with no agenda. Smell the smells of Spring. Maybe pick a new blade of grass and taste it. Listen to the birds chirp happily the songs of new birth. If these are not experiences of God, then I don't know what they are. Second, we see Jesus in others. Each of us encounters people who blow us away with their generous spirit. When you experience someone giving of him or herself, that's seeing the risen Jesus. Third, we see Jesus in ourselves. More than likely, there is no one harder on you than you are on yourself. Poor self-esteem of one of the great cripples of our time. Each time you sell yourself short, put yourself down, and beat yourself up, you are also saying something about God. Genesis 1:27 says we are created in God's image. We are beautifully and wonderfully made.

There's one final question to be answered. We've wrestled with: Can we see Jesus? How can we see Jesus? The last question is one that most of us find the most troublesome: What will it cost us?

Jesus says in verse 24, "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." Really seeing Jesus often means that we'll see him most clearly as we're going through hell. Think about this for a moment: often on Sunday morning we pray for health, prosperity, safety, and good things. Yet, so much of the scriptural story tells us that really encountering God comes in those moments of tragedy, hunger, conflict, and loss. Perhaps we ought to be praying, not that we will be relieved of our hunger, but that in our hunger we will find nourishment. We ought to pray that in the storm we might find shelter. In the loss, we will find the greatest treasure of all – Christ. Jesus talks a lot about denying one's self, taking up a cross, and following him. As much as we'd like to have a coupon or discount for the price in following him and seeing him, for each of us the cost is full price. But

not as costly as it was for Jesus. What cost are you being asked to pay in your following of Jesus right now?

I find it interesting in this Gospel account that we never really know whether Philip and Andrew take these Greeks to Jesus. They ask to see Jesus and we don't really know if they were taken to him. Did Philip and Andrew leave them hanging or usher them into the presence of Jesus? We just don't know.

Directly, or indirectly, there are going to be people in life who ask us, "Can you take me to Jesus?" And then, the situation won't be so hypothetical anymore. We'll be right there in that moment when someone is saying to us, "I wish to see Jesus." How will you respond?

Can you see Jesus?

How do you see Jesus?

Are you willing to pay the cost?

Amen.