

We Want to See Jesus

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B – John 12:20-33

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, March 25, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

We had a Hitchcockian moment right here at St. Paul's last week. Right before our potluck supper and program Wednesday evening, a parishioner took me aside into the church. Somehow a pair of birds, starlings, actually, had managed to find their way into the nave and, she worried, had built a nest in the organ. We both knew that it was too close to time to begin our activities to do anything about it, so we closed the door and propped one of those heavy plant stand thingies in front of it to keep the beasties from getting at us during our supper. After our program was over, several of us, including your Senior Warden and yours truly, returned to the nave. One of the birds had been coaxed out an open door, but the other one had somehow gotten stuck inside one of the organ pipes – that one, there – the pipe too small for it to fly out, and the mouth too small for it to escape. I could tell it as a much longer story – those of you that have been coming on Wednesday evenings no that I could – but the short version is that the nave was returned to a bird-free zone with the help of three great big ladders and five very sturdy firefighters. As the newly emptied pipe was finally being carefully set back in place, the Senior Warden turned to me and laughed, "I'll bet they don't teach *that* in seminary, do they?"

One of the things they *do* teach in seminary is homiletics, preaching. Though I had practiced in class, the first time I stepped into the pulpit at Virginia Theological Seminary was also a bit Hitchcockian. As I stepped up to lay down my notes, I saw that a note had been fixed there, yellowed and cracked with age, a message for poor preachers like me. It was a reminder, I suppose, of what people really need from preachers, a quote from the Greeks in this morning's lesson from the Gospel, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

I must admit that after a lifetime in the Church in one capacity or another, after years of Bible study, after three years of seminary and years in the pulpit, I want the same thing as those Greeks who approached Philip: I want to see Jesus. I want to know and be known by the one who is *everything*. I want to be able to be face to face with the one who created me, with the one who redeemed me, with the one who sustains me.

I want to see Jesus, to look into his eyes and see the will and the spark through which the world came into being, to hear the voice that taught angels and archangels eternity's song of praise. I want to see Jesus, to offer my profound thanks for all that I have received from his hands, to thank him for the assurance that I have an eternal home with the Father, to thank him for his spirit of peace when the world around me is frenetic and threatening and out of control. I want to see Jesus, to warn him that his radical message of grace and forgiveness and love for even one's enemies is a dangerous idea in a world steeped in power seeking and violence, to warn him not to go to Jerusalem. But of course, he already knows. The rejection of those closest to him, the utter contempt for his message of love, the pathway to suffering and the cross, all were in his sight from the beginning of time.

And yet he came *anyway*. He came because he loved us beyond all comprehension. He came because he knew that becoming one with us, of living and dying as one of us, was the only way to allow us to become one with *him*. He came because he knew that we were absolutely helpless and utterly hopeless without his singular sacrifice. He came because, "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."

I want with all my heart to see Jesus. And you know, over the years a good many people have *shown* him to me. I think of my mother, telling the stories over and over and over again – in the basement Sunday School room, in the rare quiet time just before bed, in the un-air-conditioned station wagon barreling from Ohio to Arizona. I think of Pastor Dean Freed, who in the midst of storms within me that he never even knew about, spoke peace to a troubled thirteen-year-old heart. I think of Father Nat Massey who reminded me over and over again that while Salvation is deadly earnest bid-ness, everything *else* is

meant to be a joy. I think of many of *you* who have ministered to me even in the short time you have allowed me to minister to you.

Look to your right and to your left – do you see Jesus in your neighbor? Maybe that’s not all that hard. After all, we who have gathered here this morning are like-minded folk. But let me tell you, we will have a hard time reaching past our own little clique to show Jesus to the people who most desperately need to see him if we cannot see Jesus in the seemingly most un-loveable, if we cannot see Jesus in the one who is *least* like us, in the one with whom we disagree most fervently. If we ourselves want to see Jesus, we need to cultivate the faculty to see him not just in the best and the brightest, not just in the ones that hold our same views and opinions and interpretations, not just in those we see as somehow *worthy* of our regard, we need to see Jesus in *every* face.

Now, maybe here’s the real *hard* part – look again to your right and to your left – does your neighbor see Jesus in *you*? If we are to see Jesus, if we are to help others to see Jesus, we need to let the love that has saved us and made us whole permeate all that we think. We need to let the love of Christ color all that we say. We need to let Jesus literally *radiate* from us in all that we do. Even here in the very shadow of our remembrance of the cost of our redemption, here in the shadow of Calvary’s Cross, we have a story to tell, you and I: that the living God of all creation, the longing pursuer of our souls, the loving Father of us all, has loved us with a love so great and so wide and so deep that he lived for us *and* died for us.

Some people came to Jesus’ followers with a single plea, “We wish to see Jesus.” Will they see Jesus in you? In you? In you? Holy Spirit of God, let them see Jesus in me!