

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Lent 5, March 21, 2021

READINGS:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:1-13

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

The Greeks in today's Gospel reading come to Philip with a simple request.

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Philip Brooks, the author of our Christmas hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, also was central to the design of a nineteenth-century masterpiece of church architecture: Trinity Church, Boston. He had that same simple request carved on the inside of the pulpit for the preachers to see.

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Could there be a better request from each and every Christian, here and now? To follow our Lord and Savior, it helps to really SEE him!

Jesus gives us a pattern of life, if we watch what he does. It is HIS pattern of life. His way of life takes risks. It reaches out to others. It serves the poor. It works for justice. It makes a point to be reconciled with others. It is like grains of wheat that multiply if they give up the safety of being seeds for the adventure of new growth and new life and the spreading of blessings.

Sometimes, though, we are NOT watching!

In our collect today, we pray that God will bring into order our sinful, unruly wills and affections and give us grace to love his commands and desire his promises.

Our psalm asks God to blot out our offenses, and to create in us clean hearts and right spirits. Like the psalmist, we know we need forgiveness. We know we don't always "get it right." We know that sometimes, we just aren't even trying!

We need to say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

When we meet Jesus today, he has just finished the seventh of the great signs John records in his Gospel. He has raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus has caused quite a stir, and that is why the Greeks have come, asking to see Jesus. They don't ask Philip to talk to Jesus, only to SEE him.

When we meet Jesus today, he is on the way to the cross. The hour has come, he says, for the Son of Man to be glorified. The grain of wheat must fall to the earth and die in order to bear much fruit. Disciples of Jesus must follow him in order to be where he is. His soul is troubled, he tells the disciples, but he will not ask the Father to save him, because this is why he has come - to be lifted up, and to draw all people to himself.

Jesus ends his response to the request from the Greeks with a prayer. "Father, glorify your name." God answers Jesus out loud: "I have glorified my Name, and I will glorify it again!" Jesus tells the crowd of bystanders, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine." The voice that some in the crowd think is thunder, and others the voice of an angel, speaks not for the sake of the Lord Jesus, but for his disciples, and those in the crowd, and for us!

Jesus is always "tuned in" to his Father's voice! Throughout John's Gospel, he speaks of his intimate connection to his Father, telling us that he does only the will of him who sent him, and that apart from the Father, he does nothing. He invites us into this intimate relationship of love with the Father through him, and encourages us to love each other.

We are the ones who need to listen for God's voice, and pay attention to God's word, written no longer on stone tablets, but on our hearts, as Jeremiah reminds us today. We need always to watch what Jesus does, to SEE him, and follow where he leads. As Jesus tells Andrew and Philip in our reading today, "Whoever serves me MUST follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also."

Jesus sometimes uses grapevines and wheat as examples of crops that "bear much fruit" to help his followers understand what life in his kingdom looks like. It looks, he says, like a vine with its branches (his disciples) attached firmly to the main trunk (himself) and with his life flowing through them. It looks, he says, like a grain of wheat that produces much fruit only if it dies and grows up as a new wheat stalk with many seeds.

People of God, we are the vine branches and the wheat seeds in God's kingdom today. We are not perfect branches; sometimes we look away from our Lord and let our connection to him

loosen. We are not perfect wheat seeds; sometimes we look away from our Lord and fail to serve and to sacrifice for others.

When that happens, and we fall into sin, what do we do? I think we repent, and we return to the Lord, and we rejoice that he makes up the difference between our sinfulness and where we need to be! Joseph Pagano, in his sermon *A Second Chance, a Clean Heart*, puts it this way: "Since our hearts need cleansing, God is going to do it. And through Jesus Christ, we can have a clean heart that can love again. For a second chance, and a third, and a fourth."

Cyril, who became patriarch of Alexandria in 412, tells us that "Christ is the true bread that came down from heaven, and by offering himself to God the Father as a fragrant offering for our sake, he also delivers us from our sins and frees us from the faults that we commit through ignorance."

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus," say the Greeks to Philip in John's Gospel today.

"Sir, we would see Jesus," says the carving inside of the pulpit at Trinity Church in Boston.

Let us make the same request every day: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." To follow our Lord and Savior, it helps to really SEE him! And to see him, we have to WATCH!!

Amen.