

Sermon – John 12:20-33; Jeremiah 31:31-34
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
5 Lent – Year B
17 March 2024

“We Wish to See Jesus”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. What do you wish to see? The list is long, at least for me. I’ve always wanted to see the Mona Lisa, but I have – and I’m not even kidding – a bad habit of ending up in Paris on Tuesdays, when the Louvre, of course, is closed. I always wanted to see the great Canadian rock band, Rush, live in concert. As they toured constantly, it seemed like I’d always have the chance. Until they stopped, and now the chance is gone. Some of you might be thinking to yourselves, “I bet Pastor Lyle would like to be watching Greta play in the Central District hockey championship game right now.” I assure you; I’d much rather be here with you. And no, I’m definitely not checking the score on my phone. Maybe. Probably. What would I like to see? Oh, my. How about a sunset over Mission Lake at my childhood Bible camp. Hank Aaron in his prime. World peace. My mother’s smile, just one more time. But more than anything, I wish to see Jesus.
2. We are a bit out of order today. The events told of by John this week happen after Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we will hear of next week on Palm Sunday. But liturgically it makes sense. We wish to see Jesus, but where and when does he show himself to us? The Greeks in today’s text are good stand-ins for us. They have travelled to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover, heard of the hubbub and witnessed the commotion, and they’ve become curious. They wish to see Jesus. So, they find Philip, whose

background is not so different from their own. Philip enlists Andrew and together they go to Jesus. Surely Jesus will be pleased to hear that folks want to meet him, right? Sure, bring them over! I've got white space on the calendar today at 3:00! No. Jesus doesn't even really respond to Philip and Andrew. Like the Louvre on Tuesday, Jesus seems closed for business, and instead starts talking about an hour now come.

3. Our time of Lent was preceded by the mountaintop moment of Transfiguration. Holy Week begins with the hopeful, joyful acclamations of Palm Sunday. And both of these moments reveal much that we need to know about Jesus – his divinity, his kingship – and what it means for him to be Messiah. But if we want to see Jesus in his glory, we must look to the most surprising places. To the cross, and to the earth into which the dead seed is cast. We may want to see Jesus on our terms and timetable, fitting him into our life. We may want to skirt by the scandal of Holy Week and skip ahead to the joy of Easter. But where we will truly see Jesus is where we most truly need him. We will see him in our mortality and brokenness. It is for this hour, this moment, that Jesus has come into the world. Jesus knows the suffering and sorrow of this world, and here we truly come to see and know Jesus.

4. Christian peacemaker and justice advocate Danielle Strickland tells of her time in Rwanda, learning about the reconciliation process through which the nation is putting itself back together after being ripped apart by genocide thirty years ago. Strickland sat with a Tutsi woman whose family had been killed, and with a Hutu man who had participated in those killings. They spoke of how they were rebuilding their lives in the same community, the same village, not as enemies but as partners in a peace that could make something new after the horrors they had caused, suffered, survived. New life emerging where there had seemed to be only death. Strickland sat with them and listened to their story, overwhelmed by this story of forgiveness

and hope. Finally, Strickland had to ask: How can you do this work together? To which the woman responded, "Oh. Do you not know Jesus?"

5. Do you not know Jesus? The One lifted high upon the cross to drive out the ruler of this world, whose arms open wide in love draw all into the divine embrace? He is here, today. Giving himself to you in bread, wine, and Word. The prophetic promise of Jeremiah is fulfilled in Jesus. No longer can our sin or any situation keep the divine at arm's length. God is here, authoring a new covenant, a new promise written on our hearts, by which we are grafted into the promise first made to Abraham and Sarah long ago. Cast into the ground, the seemingly-dead seed bears much fruit. For you, and in your life. May your life be transformed as Christ comes into your presence today. After all, to paraphrase my seminary professor, the hymnwriter Gracia Grindal, if your life isn't transformed when you encounter Christ, this whole thing could've been an email.

6. Friends, no longer do you not know Jesus. The hour has come. God's commandment of love has been written on your hearts. Jesus' arms open wide in embrace of the whole world, so loved by God. Out of death, life. Come and see Jesus. Lose your old life and take up the new one freely given you for Jesus' sake. As Holy Week approaches, come and see the One through whom everything is changing. New life breaks forth from the earth. New life breaks forth, for you. We will not see him on our terms. Rather, he shows himself to us when and where we need him most. Come to the cross and see the glory of our God. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.