

John 12:20-33

We want to see Jesus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I first started at the seminary, I was placed at the Magill congregation. And in the pulpit, placed so the preacher can see it, is this verse from John: "Sir, we want to see Jesus." This is fairly common in pulpits around the world, and it's meant to serve as a reminder of the calling of the preacher. Whether it's me, or one of our visiting retired ministers, or even a lay reading, the sermon should give you Jesus. And as listeners, you should be expecting Jesus, even to the point of looking out for the not so obvious references.

Our Lutheran confession holds that the entirety of scripture testifies to Jesus. He is the Word made flesh, and all of God's word in some way points us to him. For those who lived when Jesus walked this earth in the flesh, they could physically make their way to him. But for us who live post ascension, we 'see' Jesus in the proclaimed Word, and in the sacraments of baptism and holy communion. This is not ordinary seeing, but John's gospel is not often concerned with ordinary seeing. And it's not necessary to see in the literal sense in order to believe.

John's gospel concludes with Jesus' words to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe". These seeking Greeks hadn't yet seen Jesus but knew enough about him to know that they needed to see him. They come to Philip, one of the few disciples with a Greek name, and ask to see Jesus. Now we don't actually get told if they do set their eyes upon the Son of God, but we do hear Jesus' response to their seeking. And it tells us a lot about who this Jesus is that should be preached. And when it comes to listening to that preaching, you need to know what to expect.

So what does Jesus say? When told about the Greeks who were seeking him, he says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified". And then starts talking about his death. Not in a direct manner, but it's clear to those who had been paying attention so far. Now earlier in John's gospel, Jesus said his hour had not yet come, and two of those occasions were in the context of his opponents trying to harm him. They couldn't harm him yet because the time wasn't right. But now the time is right. The hour has come. And this moment in John's gospel is when everything starts heading towards Jerusalem, to his arrest and trial and crucifixion. And it's in that that we see the Jesus we need to see.

Jesus says, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." This offers a hope that those who cannot see Jesus presently will recognise him soon. Jesus will be lifted up. As a result of his crucifixion, being lifted up on a cross, and his resurrection, being lifted up from death, and his ascension, being lifted up from earth to return to the Father, people will see his true identity. People will see that he and the Father are one. All the questions about who Jesus is, where he has come from, and with what authority he speaks will be answered as he is lifted up.

Jesus holds out hope that these events will reveal him to those who could not before recognise him as the only Son of the Father. And he is right. His disciples were the first for whom this is the case. "They remembered", John says. After Jesus was raised, after he was glorified, the disciples could see even more of who he was and what he had been doing. The end of the story helped them to see what they had been looking at all along. And John writes so that it will be the same for us: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

This believing, this life, is all tied into his death. St Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified". This is why so many churches prefer a crucifix instead of a plain cross. The messiah we need, the messiah the Greeks were seeking, the messiah sent by God the Father, is one whose crowning glory is his death on a cross. If you wish to see Jesus, then this is what you will and must see. It is always Christ crucified for you. Everything else needs to connect to that.

When the Greeks came seeking Jesus, he pointed to his own death. That's the Jesus they needed. They may have come after hearing of his miracles or his teaching, but they needed him on the cross dying for them, paying the price for their sin. We need the same. We might be intrigued by his miracles. They started with turning water into wine, and including calming storms and casting out demons. We might rejoice in his teachings about loving our neighbour and being blessed by God even in times of trouble. But what we need is Christ crucified for our sake. What we need is a messiah who deals with our sin, who reconciles us to God the Father, and who gives us eternal life together with him.

This is the Jesus you should be hearing proclaimed. This is the Jesus who came to you in your baptism to unite you with his own death and resurrection. This is the Jesus who comes to us in the bread and wine of holy communion, giving to us his very own body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This is the Jesus you should seek. This is the Jesus that John wrote about so that you may believe and have life in his name.

I hope and pray that this is the Jesus who is proclaimed to you every Sunday, that you may indeed look to him who died for you and receive his gift of eternal life. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.