

5 Lent  
Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Psalm 51:1-12  
Hebrews 5:5-10  
John 12:20-33

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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Grace and peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

When I was a young child my parents and teachers noticed that I began to have issues with my eyesight. I was often caught squinting from my seat in class, or cozying up far too close to the TV at night. A quick trip to the optometrist soon revealed that my loss of vision was not caused by anything catastrophic, but I had far from won my family's genetic pool when it came to good eye sight. This was proven to an unexpected degree when my family accompanied me to pick up my new glasses to hear me excitedly exclaimed that there were leaves on the trees when the lenses were placed on my face!

While this was something I had known all along – it took truly seeing them to know what I had been missing out on. With the aid of my glasses I began to see the world in a whole new way. The trees were no longer formless masses of muddled green – they intricately danced with every breath of the wind, their leaves becoming whirling wonders that would on occasion take flight, returning gently to the earth below. I vividly remember being overwhelmed and astounded by the very world around me as if for the first time.

My renewed ability to see gave me a new lens for life. One that helped me to know, and experience my community with greater care and curiosity. And one that granted me a transformed relationship with the world in which I lived.

Not unlike my first experience with better vision, our gospel lesson this morning opens with a powerful call to truly see as well. A call that does not come from Jesus A-list followers, or even his disciples. It's a call made by those on the outside of his usual social circles – several Greeks – who were some of the last people you might think would take a genuine interest in seeing or being seen Jesus by any means. Which partly goes to show just how far Jesus teachings and miracles had reached by the end of his ministry – that these outsiders would come to approach Jesus as he was entering Jerusalem to share in the Passover festival and feast.

And while their call to see Christ seems simple enough - when it is viewed in the light of John's gospel it means a lot more than simply seeking to spot Christ with his disciples. As seeing and hearing in this gospel are directly connected to the ways people come to know Jesus as God's Son.

So these outsiders aren't asking for proof of Christ's divinity.

They aren't looking for a miracle to take place.

And they certainly aren't looking to start a debate.

They are simply asking to see and be seen by God in a very real way.

To truly begin a relationship with the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

And their question is not simply unique to the Gospel of John, it is also foundational to our lives here and now.

We have all been created and called into life in community – both with God and within the world. No matter how introverted or extroverted we might be, our need to be seen, named and known, just as we are, relationally unites us all across the bounds of our society.

So much so, that this desire often ranks in surveys just after some of our highest needs – those for food, water, adequate clothing or shelter – centering it along side the core needs of our being.

And this longing to be in a right relationship with one another and with God is so great that when we feel forgotten, pushed aside, or neglected we can quickly succumb to the damaging effects of that broken relationship if we do not find a way to reconnect again.

All this is to say that we are each intricately and uniquely created with a heart and mind that long to connect with a relational God – and so it makes sense that God, through Christ would seek to truly know us all fully in the bounds of his grace and love.

And so perhaps knowing the depth of our human need – Jesus answers both his disciples and the Greek visitors seeking to see him that day by poetically proclaiming – that yes his time had come to be seen, heard, and known throughout the world, as he entered into the glorious fullness of his relationship with all of creation.

Yet there is something about Jesus resounding yes that causes us to pause in the midst of his expression - as it seems God's idea, and our idea, of how this relationship should progress could not be further apart.

Where we expect Christ to enter into a full on dialog on his great love and care for the world, all we find is a fast paced and confusing discourse on death, the benefits of grain planting, and the marks of discipleship. None of which seem at first to be about truly seeing Christ or being invited into a relationship with him.

Death by all human standards seems to be the ultimate end to our earthly relationships rather than the start. After all, the cross was the harshest and most humiliating example of death Jesus could have evoked for those gathered there that day to ponder. And no amount of teaching on planting grains could have ever prepared his followers to know that after the brokenness and pain that his death would bring, there would be life again to celebrate at the wonder of his resurrection.

In fact, you can almost hear the conversations murmuring through the gathered crowd as each of Jesus proclamations reaches their ears and drop swiftly to the ground.

Did he just say he was going to die on the cross?

No thanks Jesus.

We would rather keep our new found relationship with you on our terms and if possible and keep up the status quo.

We do like you alive, well, and here where we can find you after all.

What good would you do for us up on the cross?

Their must be some other way for you to accomplish all these things you keep speaking to us about as God's son?

But perhaps this uncomfortable chatter is the point of Jesus dialog after all – to make us and the gathered crowd radically uncomfortable in the face of what is about to come. To make us shift uneasily in our seat as we wait in advance of Christ's triumphant entry, betrayal, trial, and crucifixion during holy week.

Getting hit with these shocking revelations is one way to help us see that what we have come to value, what we have come to accept and define as desirable, may not be in line with Christ teaching here in John's gospel lesson this morning. And if we are being honest with both ourselves and God we may even admit that sometimes it is difficult for us to let go of our need to tell God how this relationship is supposed to go. Because sometimes our relationship with Christ isn't where we want it to be either.

But after all, isn't that at the core of our Lenten journey?

To let go and let God.

To spend time through study, prayer, fasting, giving, or resting that enables us to grow in our relationship with God?

Quite possibly the lectionary writers picked this text from John's gospel for the fifth Sunday in Lent knowing full well that even the most pious of us would need to hear a reminder that through all of our acts of repentance and renewal - it is in fact God who is at the center of our hearts restoration and right relationship with this world once more.

And most importantly perhaps, this cryptic text from John gives us a new lens for our relationship with Christ towards the end of our Lenten journey. A new lens through the cross that reminds us that Christ is at work even in the darkest, hardest, loneliest parts of our lives. That God is always at work, drawing life from death, calling what looks shameful into something beautiful, turning suffering and desolation into a time and place of revelation and rejuvenation.

And if we can lean into the promises of this gospel text – that Christ is at work to bring light and life to even the most difficult parts of our world, we will begin to feel the change and shift in our relationship with both God and the world in which we live. All of which can give us a new perspective on those parts of our lives – and our relationships that we feel are not whole.

So it is my prayer for us all today that we would come to know and see and hear like those gathered long ago that God is here among us all.

That the Spirit of God is ever present in our lives driving us towards God in reconciliation and love.

And that Christ sees and values relationship with us in a way we may never truly understand. That he will not give up on us, even when the road turns towards the cross, pain, and death, and when all the world is gathered to him in love and reconciliation once again.

And may this be the new lens through which we can watch, wait, and see, all that God is working to bring to new life to here among us.

Amen.