

We Wish to See Jesus

I used to attend the Church with my gran, and as the minister preached his 40-minute sermon, I had counted all the panes of glass in the windows of the church for the twentieth time, “if only I could see Jesus, it would be much more exciting,” I thought! But the years passed and I drifted from any notion of seeing Jesus.

Until, I was 19 years old, I met a person who I knew had seen Jesus, he spoke so passionately of him and he helped me to see Him also.

It took months of internal strife, as I explored who Jesus was – my 19 year old self was being challenged, and I didn't want to let it go of all the fun, that's how I perceived it, but when I saw Jesus high and lifted on the cross, that was what clinched the deal for me, and suddenly, I realised that the Jesus of the cross, was who I had been searching for, I realised that he died for me, and then the real adventure began, as Jesus turned my life upside down, inside out, and I was never the same again.

In our gospel story today, we have a curious event, when some Greeks, who were visiting Jerusalem for the Passover, asked a simple question to the disciple Phillip, “We would like to see Jesus” and Phillip immediately got his colleague Andrew and Andrew and Philip conveyed the message to Jesus.

I'm sure that they were unaware that this question would trigger the greatest event to happen in human history – the Son of God dying on a lonely cross.

I say it is the greatest event, because no human life has transformed the world as Jesus Christ has. His impact through his cross and resurrection is felt today all around the world.

When you think of it, Jesus never had a facebook account and yet he has more likes than anyone else.

He never had a mobile phone and yet people from every race and tongue still want to contact him.

He never wrote a book and yet there are more books written about Jesus than any other person.

He never composed music and yet there are more hymns composed to his glory than anyone else.

People like Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), regarded by many as the greatest composer in the history of Western music devoted his life to creating music to the glory of God. “The aim and final end of all music,” he affirmed, “should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.”

And the reason was simple, he saw Jesus, whenever he set about composing, he marked his blank manuscript pages with the initials, “J. J.” (Jesu Juva—“Help me, Jesus”), or “I. N. J.” (In Nomine Jesu—“In the name of Jesus”). At the end of his compositions, Bach regularly inscribed the letters “S. D. G.” (Soli Deo Gloria—“To God alone, the glory”). Bach understood that all of life can and should be lived for the glory of God alone. He had seen Jesus, his life was changed, and he was able to let other people see Jesus through his music.

In Jesus` day, Greeks were well known for their philosophy, and their learning, think of Plato and Aristotle, and they would travel long distances to gain knowledge. The story of Jesus must have travelled far and wide, and like the wise men who came searching for Jesus at his birth, looking for the one born King of the Jews, so these wise men came from Greece, nearing the end of Jesus` life, searching for Jesus.

“We want to see Jesus,” they said. It is a great question.

Why are we here this morning friends?

Well, I hope that the question of the Greeks is also on our minds today – “we want to see Jesus?”

My responsibility and privilege as a minister of the gospel is to help people see Jesus, to help people encounter Jesus, through his living Word, and through the Sacraments, which are baptism and communion.

When Jesus hears that the Greeks are searching for him.

He says to his disciples, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.”

In our Old Testament reading this morning, we read of two great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven on chariots of fire...we are familiar with this story through the words sung at English rugby games "Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.' Where's home? To the negro slaves in the mid 1800`s who first composed these words, that`s heaven."

This hymn found a home at Twickenham through a black English winger called Martin Offiah, who was given the nick name chariots, because of his speed, and so he was called Chariots Offiah, this was around the time when chariots of fire was being screened in cinemas around the country, and you can see how it stuck with the English crowd, as they sung it with gusto, when Martin Chariots Offiah ran with the ball. "Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.'

But the root meaning is found in Elijah, who was glorified when swing low, sweet chariot came to carry him home. He was lifted to heaven on a chariot.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus would also be glorified, not by being taken home on a chariot, but by being lifted on a cross, the cross became his glorified chariot.

A cross that has also become our chariot, lifting us into the presence of God.

Elijah plays a large part in Jesus` story. Elijah had died hundreds of years before Jesus but he and Moses appears to Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, to speak of Jesus` impending departure – Elijah knew what that felt like, when God swooped down and lifted him into heaven and in his encounter with Jesus on the mountain, he told Jesus that his chariot was the old rugged cross so despised by the world where the dearest of all would die for sinners - for from that point on Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to encounter the cross.

Jesus said, "My hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

How can a cross bring glory?

Three years earlier at a wedding in Cana, when the wedding party ran out of wine, Jesus` mother asked him to help out and he said, "woman, my hour has not yet come."

But now he knew that his hour had come, the hour of glory, and from this moment onwards, he moves swiftly towards the cross.

These Greeks who came to see Jesus, would have heard of his wise teachings, heard of his power in healing the sick, of his compassionate life, but did they expect to see Jesus high and lifted on a cross? I doubt it.

But this is what they see. This is God`s chariot.

They will see a man crucified, not the wisdom that they were looking for.

The Apostle Paul wrote, speaks about this, 20-25 years or so after Jesus' death on a cross, when he writes in 1 Corinthians

²² For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

²³ But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

²⁴ But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Christ on a cross, is both the wisdom and the power of God.

It is the wisdom of God, because it is how God in His wisdom redeems the world. He comes into the world in the person of his only Son, and lays down his life on a cross, so that the sin of the world has been dealt with.

This is God's wisdom. He chose to become a man, to identify with us, to walk our path, but because he is also God, he can also deal with our sin, once and for all.

The cross is where God takes our sin. All our selfishness and greed are nailed to the cross.

And, it is the power of God, because it transforms human beings, and it transforms the world.

The hour had come for God to be revealed in Jesus and so reveal His wisdom and power.

Jesus sees his life as a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying but from it comes other seeds.

It's an analogy of his life, a life that was brief like a small seed and yet a life that produced many other seeds.

That's you and me, we are the seeds of Christ's death and resurrection. When people want to see Jesus, they look at us, and if they ask us the question, we would like to see Jesus, well, our lives will tell them, this is what Jesus looks like!

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am my servant must also be."

So, when the Greeks come looking to see Jesus, they will only see Jesus through his followers.

We are his seeds and his seeds will bear much fruit.

When we leave this morning, we go back into God's world to share the seed of the gospel, that's the good news of God's love and we do this through loving service, so that God can work through us and in us and prepare us for his Kingdom and in doing so people will see Jesus for themselves.

But the final word belongs to Jesus himself because when we search to see Jesus, we discover that he is already searching for us. He loves us whether we love him or not. He wishes to see all of us — far more urgently than we'll ever wish to see him. The bible tells us that we love because he loves first. We love because the cross draws us towards love — its power is as compelling as it is mysterious. The cross pulls us towards God and towards each other, a vast and complicated gathering place. Whether or not we want to see Jesus, here he is, drawing us. This is the solid ground we stand on. Stark, holy, strange, and beautiful.

We are only a few weeks from Easter and the cross again invites us to see him as he truly is, high and lifted on a cross, for all the world to see.

What will our response be?

Amen.

