

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B, March 18, 2018  
The Rev. Bill Queen, "We Wish to See Jesus"  
John 12:20-33

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus," some Greek people ask the disciples; now you would think this to be a rather common request, probably something that happened all the time, as Jesus drew crowds of curious people everywhere he went; but there's something a bit strange going on here; you can tell it in how the request is handled; the disciples don't know what to do; Philip goes to Andrew, and the two of them go together to Jesus; is that really necessary? then Jesus goes on to speak an elaborate discourse that has nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that certain Greeks were asking to see him; and apparently, as they do not get mentioned again in John's Gospel, they never did get to see him

despite the fact that they don't get to see Jesus, the general question that this story raises deals with two of the most central facets of Christian life: (1) people who are already Christians, like us, trying to "see Jesus" better and (2) people who are already Christians, like us, trying to help people who are not already Christians "see Jesus" for the first time

this "seeing" Jesus doesn't mean literally to see Jesus in some mystical or visionary kind of way, where he is visibly standing right in front of us; it means we are trying to "see" him for who he really is, to understand him in such a way that seeing him makes a difference in our lives; think about it, any time we have a Baptism or a Confirmation, the candidates are all engaging themselves in trying to live out the consequences of coming to "see" Jesus and to live out the importance of Jesus in their lives; and anyone who reads the Bible regularly, like those who are reading the Good Book Club Bible passages, are reading accounts about Jesus to help us see the big picture of the fullness of Jesus' life and his teachings

to get some traction with this Gospel story, it helps to know just who these "Greeks" are; all we are told about them is that they "went up to worship at the festival"; where did they go up to?: Jerusalem; what was the festival they went up for?: Passover; so these are not just any old Greeks; they are not tourists who just happen to be on a visit to the Holy Land; they are there to participate in Jewish worship, but they are not Jews

these Greeks belong to a special group of people the Jews called “God Fearers”; they were attracted to the morality and monotheism of Judaism, but they were repulsed by the requirement of circumcision and by the nationalism of the Jewish people; so they worshipped God as outsiders, without taking the required steps of actually converting and becoming Jews; you can see why Jesus would be very attractive to them; Jesus offered all the elements that attracted them and none of the elements that repulsed them; and he was engaging all kinds of people into a deeper level of enthusiasm and commitment than Judaism had been offering

fast forward two-thousand plus years and look around us; I think we have many people very much like the “God Fearers” in our society today; people who are attracted to the community spirit, purposefulness, outreach efforts, and spirituality of Christianity, but who might be repulsed by the club-ishness, unfamiliar rituals, arcane language, and judgmental nature of some Christian people and some Christian groups; and let’s face it, some of the most vocal Christian groups present the worst side of Christianity

our job now is to go looking for our contemporary “God Fearers” who might be our family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, or casual acquaintances; I would not call them “God Fearers” today; I would propose something more like “Spiritual Seekers”, thinking about people who are just not satisfied with what our material culture has to offer them; they may hope that there is something deeper, better, and more lasting, but they may not even know what it is they are looking for, or where to look for it

some of these “Spiritual Seekers” may be from other churches, who haven’t found what they were looking for there; or they may be people who have not felt welcome at other churches; some of them may be completely unfamiliar with church; some of them may have experienced some kind of setback in their life, career, or relationships that has caused them to question things they thought they had under control; there could be any number of motivations for someone to seek a more spiritual life

I say that we need to go looking for them, because the chances are slim that they are going to show up at our church door and say “Sir, we wish to see Jesus;” but they might, and if they do I hope you’ll do better than the disciples did when the Greeks came asking; I hope you won’t feel that you have to go tell an usher or a Vestry member, or that you have to come to me or to Margaret and say “there are

some people here who want more out of life and we don't know what to say to them"

I'll bet every one of you could, if you took the time to think and pray about it a bit, tell someone in a very straightforward and convincing personal witness what keeps you coming to "see Jesus" here at church and in your other personal activities of faith; and if you are not sure you could, spending the final two weeks of Lent to pin that down for yourself, through some concentrated time of thought and prayer, would be a good activity to undertake; if we make a concerted effort to "see Jesus" better in our own lives, then we'll be better able to help other people who are not already Christians "see Jesus" for the first time

and for the people who don't come to our church door asking to see Jesus? as I said before, our job is to go looking for those "Spiritual Seekers" who might be our family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, or casual acquaintances; be attentive as you talk with people; listen for any signs that they might be discontent or searching for something more in their lives; it may be something as simple as boredom: that might be all they are willing to share about the deeper longings in their lives; be attentive to those who the Holy Spirit might lead you to, or lead to you; always be prepared, yourselves, by trying to "see Jesus" better and better; and always be ready to recognize and help direct anyone else who is trying to "see Jesus" for the first time