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Lent 5

March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Wishing to see Jesus  
John 12:20-26

*Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Some of the people, who wanted to see Jesus, aggressively pushed through crowds to get close to him. Some of the people, who wanted to see Jesus, climbed up tall trees while he was passing by in order to get a good view. Some of the people, who wanted to see Jesus, broke through the roofs of homes to lower themselves into the place where Jesus was speaking to catch a glimpse of him. But the Greeks, they did not break in the house or push their way forward, they politely stated their desires. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." I just love their manners.

At this point of the story of Jesus, he is really popular. His reputation precedes him everywhere that he goes. It's...

Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph.

Jesus, the healer.

Jesus, the prophet.

Jesus, the one some are saying is the Son of God.

Jesus, the Savior of the World?

Lots of people wished to see Jesus. They were intrigued. They were hopeful. They were searching. The delegation of Greeks wanted to find out more about him. And so, they do what polite, civilized, educated people do, they don't climb trees or scramble up roofs, they get out their phones and make some calls. One of the Greeks, said, "Yeah, I know a guy. He's supposed to be tight with Jesus. His name is Philip, he's Greek like us. My mom plays bridge with his mom. I bet he will introduce us."

So, they called Philip. And Philip called Andrew. And Andrew and Philip went to talk to Jesus about meeting the Greeks. But the problem was that it was already time for Jesus to head to Jerusalem. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," he said. It was time for Jesus to fulfill his mission. He had to press on. No more pastoral visits for Jesus. This was not the time for that type of ministry.

Now, we know that the Greeks did accept the Gospel and hear the good news because we can see where the early church spread. But if the delegation didn't get an audience with Jesus, then how

did they come to believe? Philip and Andrew must have explained that Jesus could not see them because he had something really important to do. We know the disciples didn't understand exactly what Jesus had to do until much later so at this point all they could tell the Greeks was what they had already seen with their own eyes.

One of the things about the disciples that is comforting to me is that they never fully understand Jesus. They try hard. They mean well. But they only get him, in part. I feel the same way. There is a lot about Jesus that I think I understand but I have gaps as well and certainly some questions for him when we meet. The disciples who actually knew him had gaps as well so that makes me feel a little bit better about what I bring to the table. The other thing that is comforting about the disciples is that despite their flaws, and their gaps in understanding, and their mishaps along the way— they did a really great job of being disciples.

They told stories about what Jesus did in compelling ways. They talked personally about mistakes they had made and how Jesus forgave them. They talked about what it was like to be his follower and how it had changed their lives. Peter and James and Andrew and Philip and Thomas and Matthew and the whole gang of them – they did a good job, good enough job to pass the faith along to the next generation of disciples. That is fundamentally what Jesus asked them to do...stop fishing and become fishers of men. Tell the good news. Show other people who wish to see Jesus how to find him.

The conduit of the Christian faith is the relationships; it always has been. Faith is passed from a father to his daughter. Faith is passed from a grandmother to a grandson. Faith is passed from a coach to a player. Faith is passed from one college roommate to another. Faith is passed when one person has stories to tell about Jesus and shares them with someone else. Now we sometimes like to abdicate this responsibility to the “professionals”. You like to think that you need a special master's degree to talk about Jesus. Or at least a big black robe if anyone is going to take you seriously. Well...that just isn't true. It wasn't true for Andrew or Philip or any of the early disciples. There was nothing remarkable about any of them except that they knew Jesus and had stories to tell.

Paul said in Romans 10: *How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?* Faith is passed because people are willing to share their stories. Faith is passed by people setting examples for us as to how we live out our faith in daily life.

When I did my doctoral work I interviewed CEO's, Generals, Presidents, Senators who were people of Christian faith and I had a series of questions to ask them, and one was just how they came to believe. One of the people said that he went to church every Sunday with his parents, but they never ever spoke of faith at home. He said he never really thought it mattered that much but it was just something to do on the weekends. Then when he was about twelve years old his father took him on a camping trip. They were staying in a cabin with bunks. His father thought he was asleep on the top bunk but when he looked over the side, he saw his six-foot three father kneeling on the cement floor praying. Witnessing that one action alone was enough to make him realize that faith really mattered to his father and so it should probably matter to him. From that day forward, his faith buoyed him through trials and tribulations, all because of that one sermon his

father preached on the camping trip. No black robe, no ordination status, no master's degree required.

About year ago, I realized it was long overdue for me to teach my daughter to ride a bike. I had good excuses why it hadn't happened, covid, cobblestones, bugs – none of these should have been total impediments for a sporty kid learning to ride a bike. So, I decided to deal with my parental shortcoming and do the obvious thing – I researched online places where I could take her to learn to bike – like a camp! But then I saw the prices and the rational side of my brain kicked in. People don't have to pay money to other people to teach their children to ride bikes. Parents can do it themselves. And so...I did it. And you know how long it took? One day and there were even bugs out.

You get the connection. When the Greeks called up Philip and asked about faith in Jesus, they wanted to call in the expert. But Jesus was busy, so they had to do it themselves. And so they did.

- Let's not try to outsource telling people about Jesus to the experts.
- Let's not assume the Sunday school teachers are telling our kids about Jesus' love and so we don't need to tell them ourselves.
- Let's not assume our friend, who is scared to death about her cancer diagnosis, believes that God is holding her in the midst of the chaos, let's remind her ourselves.
- Let's not assume that our colleague, who is anxious and worried about the state of the world, couldn't stand to hear a piece of hope about God's love for creation.
- Let's not assume our parents at the end of their lives don't need of some reassurance about the eternal promises of Jesus.

Everyone needs to hear or see a sermon from time to time.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "There is only one preacher, Jesus. And we preachers preach on Sundays to enable you preachers to preach Monday through Saturday." There are lots of people out there who wish to see Jesus - they just don't where to look or who to call. But I am looking at a room full of people with stories to tell. I am looking at a room full of preachers! So, for now...it's your turn. Over and out!

Amen.