

## “Seeing Jesus”

It is a Sunday morning, five minutes before ten. You are out in the narthex having a last sip of coffee before the service of worship begins and through the door comes a stranger. Your eyes cast a quick glance and then return to the bottom of the coffee cup. You don't want the stranger to think you are staring at him. But in spite of this precaution the stranger comes up and stands right in front of you—you have to look up. Then the stranger says, “I want to see Jesus!” What are you going to do?

You could first pretend you didn't hear him and say, “Can I get you a cup of coffee?” You could assume that he is lost and say, “I think you are looking for a different kind of church.” You could say, “Wait till after the service and talk to the minister.”

So some Greeks (code word for people who are strangers to God) come up to Philip (who has a Greek sounding name) and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Now Philip was Jewish, from Bethsaida in Galilee, and he was suspicious. Why would these atheists want to see Jesus? Perhaps they just wanted to tell him ‘there's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.’ Jesus has enough to do trying to convince those who believe in God that God wants something different, let alone worry about nonbelievers who know nothing about a relationship, a covenant with God.

These Greeks probably don't know a thing about the first covenant with Noah. God blesses Noah and his sons, tells them to populate the earth, God places all plants and animals under human command, forbids eating meat with the life-blood still in it, forbids murder, commands humankind to shed the blood of those who shed blood—for humans are made in the image of God, God promises to never again destroy all life on earth by flood and creates the rainbow as the sign of this covenant for all ages to come. These were laws for every human being. The Greeks should know these things, but they probably don't.

They probably didn't know about the covenant with Abraham to make of Abraham and Sarah a great nation and to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him and all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham. (Genesis 12:1-3) To give Abraham's descendants all the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. (15:18-21). Hard to talk to the Greeks about this with the Roman occupation going on.

They probably didn't know about the covenant made with Moses. No other gods, no idols, no use of the holy name in vain, keep the Sabbath, honour parents, no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no lying, no coveting. No, it wasn't just the ten; there were 613 commandments that God gave so that Israel could be a holy nation and live long in the land.

And the Greeks certainly didn't know about the ‘new covenant’ promised by Jeremiah who said that God would write the law on our hearts. We wouldn't have to learn the rules anymore; we would simply live them as naturally as breathing.

So concludes Philip, “why bother Jesus with people that don't know the first thing about God—Jesus already has enough to do.” But rather than say this to the Greeks he says to them, “Just a minute, I will check.” So he probably goes over to Andrew and says, “Look at those pagan foreigners who want to see Jesus. Let's go and tell them they will see Jesus when hell freezes over.”

Now Andrew had seen, just the other day, a camel go by with ‘there's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life,’ painted on one side and knew, just like Philip, that these strangers probably didn't know a thing about God. But his thoughts were different. The covenant with Noah was for all people (Greeks included), the promise to Abraham and Sarah was that all the nations (included Greeks) would be blessed, and

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just the other day Jesus had said to them, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

So Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus about the Greeks.

Jesus then says, “Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.

“If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you’ll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment’s notice. The Father will honour and reward anyone who serves me.” (John 12:24-26 MESSAGE)

Now the interesting thing about the Greeks is that for once it seems a group comes looking for Jesus with no apparent agenda—no request for healing, no attempt at controversy—just this: we would see Jesus.

We all see Jesus in different ways: Healer, Saviour, Friend, Teacher, Prophet. But here Jesus is calling us to see him in a different way, as the crucified one. A grain of wheat that must die to live. A love that must be given away so that it can be eternal. He tells us, ‘Love that is held onto dies; love that is released lives.’

And to know that love is to serve, giving of ones life. Albert Schweitzer said, “The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” Jesus says, “Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.”

Mother Teresa, explained why she ministered to the least of the least on the streets of Calcutta. “Each day I go out into the streets looking for Jesus in the eyes of the dying and the destitute.”

Did you happen to notice that the Greeks actually never get to see Jesus—at least Jesus in the flesh. I think John tells the story that way to make an intentional point. You don’t need to see Jesus in the flesh; you simply need to see a follower of Jesus who serves Jesus—that is seeing enough.

Crossroads United Church, the new community of faith, resulting from the amalgamation of Royal Heights and St. John’s Strawberry hill will be a community that will “Invite and welcome the stranger.” To do this we (and I am quoting from our Mission Statement) “will spread our message in the community, actively reaching out and inviting people to connect through their gifts and needs; we will train people for hospitality; we will host community events.”

Now if the Greeks come to the door and say to you, “We would like to see Jesus.” This is your answer, “Come, walk with me and we will see him together.”