

March 21, 2021

Texts: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; John 12: 20-33

Title: "We Wish to See Jesus"

Have you ever met a famous person, I mean, a real celebrity? And were you nervous? I'm sure we all hope that we wouldn't do anything too foolish. Like not recognize them at all.

Comedian Ellen DeGeneres convinced former soccer superstar David Beckham to pose as a Target employee to surprise his unsuspecting fans. Beckham dressed in as a Target employee with the red shirt and name tag. And he stood at in the perfume aisle and tried to convince passing customers to buy his new David Beckham cologne. He started up random conversations with passersby, sprayed them with cologne, even made up and sang a really bad little jingle to advertise the new cologne. At one point, a small crowd of shoppers gathers around to sample the cologne. They are within inches of the world's most famous soccer player and they never suspect a thing.

In this morning's Bible passage, some men from Greece were seeking to meet Jesus. I wonder if they were nervous about their potential encounter with him. Did they have questions for him? When they met him, did they blurt out something embarrassing? We don't know for sure. But we **do** know that the Greek culture of that time idolized philosophers and philosophies about the meaning of life. Yet these Greeks came to a Jewish Passover festival looking for a humble Jewish rabbi named Jesus. What did they hope to find?

Jesus wasn't a philosopher. No one would compare him to Plato or Aristotle.

We have nothing that he wrote, and not much of what he said. He didn't employ complex sentences or high-sounding ideas. He spoke mostly in parables and used the language and the symbols of the common folk. So why is it then that, 2,000 years later, we still hang on to his every word? Why is it that hundreds of thousands of brilliant people have studied every syllable that was recorded of his teachings, and whole libraries of books have been written on his impact on human history?

It wasn't what he said. It was who he was. There was something about the very person of Jesus that has fascinated people for centuries. That's why those words spoken by some Greeks to the disciple Philip are so important to all of us today: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

That is the most sincere desire of our hearts. We want to see Jesus. We want to experience him for ourselves. A second-hand report isn't enough. We long to be in his presence. We want to assure ourselves that he's real—that he's relevant—that he's resurrected. We, like Thomas, want to put our hands into his hands and feet and side. We want to know him as our Savior and Friend.

We want to see Jesus. That's part of why we're in worship today. The music is inspiring, the atmosphere is cordial, the prayers are reassuring, but none of it counts for anything if we can't see Jesus.

**We would like to see him because something is missing in our lives.** Once we had such high hopes, such great dreams, such a fresh sense of Christ's presence in our lives. But time has taken its toll. There is something missing. We wish to see

Jesus. Our lives sometimes seem so tedious, so lacking in vitality, as if we are on a continual treadmill.

Now maybe you exercise on a treadmill. Some of you do. But did you know that treadmills were originally invented as a form of punishment? Maybe you can believe that. In Victorian England, treadmills were placed in prisons. Prisoners were forced to walk for hours each day on a treadmill as a mindless punishment. Many people say that their life feels like a treadmill, moving but going nowhere. Something is missing in our lives. And there's nothing we can do, nothing we can buy, no earthly substitute that can fill that sense of longing. "We wish to see Jesus."

**We would like to see him because some of us have never experienced the peace that Christ brings.** We need something to give us not only meaning, but a new vitality. We're tired, listless, and apathetic. What we need is a new heart, the heart that Jeremiah spoke of—a heart that only seeing Jesus can give.

William Gibson wrote the book *Mass for the Dead* to honor his parents and their devotion to their children. In the book, Gibson tells how he grieved his mother and wanted so badly to understand the secret of her faith, which strengthened her in life and gave her peace and courage to face her death.

So he took his mother's gold-rimmed glasses and faded prayer book and sat in her favorite chair. He opened the prayer book because he wanted to hear what she had heard. He put on her glasses because he wanted to see what she had seen. He sat in her place of prayer and devotion because he wanted to feel what she had

felt but nothing happened. It didn't work. That's not too surprising. He needed a faith of his own—not his mother's faith. William Gibson needed to see Jesus for himself.

That's what we all need--to see Jesus and to know that he's real and that he's with us in life's trials and turmoil.

**And we want to see Jesus because of his promise of eternal life.** My friends, Jesus is the Way. He is the Truth. He is the Life. No wonder we all long to see him, and we can see him. Through the eyes of faith, we can perceive him in our midst. He's here. He is available to us today. To all who would receive him, he's here. Let's take new hope, new courage, let us commit ourselves anew to his work.

As someone has said, "Christianity is not a philosophy Jesus came to teach. It is a life He came to impart." Today, on this fifth Sunday of the season of Lent, won't you receive the life he has to give? Amen.