

**Seeing Jesus**  
**John 12:20-33**  
**Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, March 29, 2009**

The quote, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” is often found on engraved plaques bolted to the tops of pulpits, a constant reminder of the preacher’s responsibility to help the flock “see” Jesus emerging from the pages of scripture. It’s also common to have still another plaque right next to it, this one with the Apostle Paul’s declaration, “But we preach Christ crucified,” again reminding the preacher you can only see Jesus through his cross.

Unless you live in an isolated part of the world, chances are you know something about Jesus, but that doesn’t mean everybody sees Jesus the same way.

For instance, in last year’s presidential campaign the actress Susan Sarandon likened Barak Obama to Jesus Christ because in her mind, both were “community organizers.” I’m sure Obama cringed at the comparison and equally sure as a Christian he took exception to anybody minimizing our Lord as a “community organizer” because even a quick read of the New Testament tells you no way was Jesus a social worker.

But that doesn’t stop people from seeing Jesus the way they want to see him. The problem is people who reject the New Testament proclamation of Jesus being the Son of God who died for the sins of the world then have to remake Jesus in their own image. Since “their” Jesus reflects their world view and aspirations, their Jesus is recast as a political/religious revolutionary, or like Buddha a benevolent teacher and founder of one of the world’s great religions. If Jesus is exceptional it isn’t because he’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, it’s because he was an idealist who was put to death because he was too smart and dangerous for his own good.

In this morning’s gospel story we find some Greeks, visiting Jerusalem, who wished to see Jesus. Notice John didn’t identify them as converts to Judaism. Instead they were curious seekers, intentionally exposing themselves to the various expressions of faith and practice.

Greece was known for its illustrious philosophers and educated Greeks were encouraged to experience the whole range of new and different ideas and religions. So these guys were bashing around Jerusalem to “do” Passover when suddenly they heard about a young, cutting-edge rabbi. Not wanting to pass up the chance to experience provocative conversation with this new up-and-comer, they approached Andrew and made their famous request, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Impressed these sophisticated Greek intellectuals wanted audience with Jesus, Andrew and Phillip immediately go looking for him. But Jesus wasn’t in the mood for stimulating conversations with these religious tourists, because he was preparing himself for his crucifixion.

Notice Jesus totally ignored Andrew and Phillip’s announcement about the Greeks wanting to see Jesus and instead immediately made his own announcement, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

This telling statement should inform us Jesus wasn't just a community organizer; he came into the world so we can see him as he saw himself. In last Sunday's sermon Jesus likened himself to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up as the antidote for the snake poisoning that plagued the Hebrews during their wilderness wanderings saying, "...so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:15)

Listen again to what Jesus said to Andrew and Phillip in the context of his previous statement the Son of Man must be lifted up so whoever believes in him may have eternal life: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Dying, on the cross, and at the last triumphantly proclaiming, "It is finished," was the climactic moment God's glory shined through Jesus' broken body. In John's Gospel, this horrible moment becomes a glorious moment because through Christ's suffering and death, God triumphed once and for all over the powers of darkness.

This is how Jesus saw himself and this is how we should see Jesus, on his terms, not ours. By dying for the sins of the world Jesus staked out his central role, not just in world history, but in salvation history. In other words, the implications of his crucifixion transcends our time and space and sweeps us into the mystery of eternity.

But isn't that why so many people can't or won't see Jesus as the Triumphant Christ being glorified by God through his crucifixion? To them it sounds wacky. Remember Paul's declaration, "But we preach Christ crucified..."? That's only the first half of the verse, here's the whole quote, "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness." (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Those who choose to see Jesus as a community organizer or a wise teacher and founder of one of the world's great religions, short change themselves because if they could see Jesus as he saw himself, they'd see him as the fulfillment of the plan to save the world God so loved.

Seeing Jesus goes beyond seeing him as teacher and healer. Seeing Jesus means seeing Jesus become like a grain of wheat. "Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." (John 12:24)

This cycle of death yielding to new life foreshadows the resurrection, but remember, there would be no resurrection without his crucifixion.

We've talked about Lent being the season of repentance and reflection, but at its foundation, Lent is primarily about working our way to Christ's crucifixion, or as John put it, "the hour when the Son of Man would be glorified."

We may wonder at John's choice of words describing Jesus' death. Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke who emphasize the horror of crucifixion, John seems to sugarcoat Jesus' death with a dash of triumphalism. It sounds like the way young men talked on the eve of the Civil War boasting they couldn't wait to taste glory on the field of battle.

But John quickly tempers this theme of triumph and glory with Jesus' growing awareness of the suffering he'd surely endure on Good Friday. "Now my soul is troubled," he tells Andrew and Phillip, "And what should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name." (John 12:27-28)

There are lots of reasons people don't want to see Jesus the way he saw himself. Maybe they don't like the idea of Jesus Christ being the Lamb of God who takes away

the sins of the world. They think it's arrogant for Christians to claim Jesus isn't just one among equals with the other founders of the world's great religions. They're also peeved by the Christian proclamation, "Jesus is Lord," because they think we think we're right with God and everybody else is wrong. Like the bumper sticker says, "I like Jesus, I just can't stand Christians."

Which now brings us to the subject of you and me. Whether you like it or not if you've identified yourself as a Christian to your neighbors, they'll be watching you. So the question is, when they see you will they see Jesus? The next question is equally important: Will they see Jesus as he saw himself?

You see, like everybody else Christians are especially capable of recasting Jesus in our own image, to be in sync with our personal world view and aspirations. Unfortunately Church history reveals too often Christians reinterpreted Jesus and his gospel to legitimize their agendas. Think of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and in American history the way slavery and our policies towards Native Americans was justified. Certainly you and I are not responsible for these injustices, but are we keeping this legacy alive in more subtle yet equally harmful ways?

Almost every Sunday you hear me encourage you to regularly read and pray the scriptures because you need to see Jesus as Jesus saw himself so when your friends and neighbors see you, they'll see Jesus.

We're now days away from Good Friday and on the last leg of our journey through Lent. We are being asked to prepare for Jesus' crucifixion, so that at the hour of Christ's glorification on the cross, we will be glorified through him.

Does that sound incomprehensible and mysterious? It's meant to. We're talking about the Paschal mystery, the mystery of the cross, when eternity interrupts time and Christ triumphs over all.

During these remaining days of Lent, step up your intention to see Jesus as he saw himself. Open your eyes and let the Spirit open your heart and mind so his light will shine your way to the cross. And along the way let your light shine so when your neighbor says, "Sir, I wish to see Jesus," they will see him living and serving in you.