

We Would See Jesus
5 Lent - April 2, 2006
John 12:20-30

The story starts simply enough. Some Greeks approach Philip saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus;" and Philip and Andrew bring them to the Rabbi. The disciples fade from the scene as Jesus then speaks to these foreigners. That's when the simple story starts getting complicated. For starters: Are they Greek-speaking Jews, or Gentiles? We don't know. Are they would-be disciples, or curiosity-seekers? We don't know. Did they hang around after this conversation, or leave, scratching their heads in befuddlement? We don't know!

All we *do* know is that Jesus immediately launches into a somewhat foreboding and mysterious pronouncement about the hour when the Son of Man will be glorified. Clearly this isn't standard-issue glory, for he says: *Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. If any would serve me, they must follow me, and when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.* Just so nobody misunderstands, the Gospel writer adds: *By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.* Thanks very much, John.

We would see Jesus. I don't know what these Greeks were expecting to see, when they *did* see Jesus; but anybody who's read John's

gospel thus far might be forgiven if *they* expect to see a glorious divine figure. After all, this Gospel writer starts with glory. *In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...and we have beheld his glory, the glory as of a Father's only Son.* Yet this glorious Son of God now compares himself to a lowly grain of wheat, about to be buried in the dirt. *What does he want us to see in that?*

We would see Jesus. But the only Jesus we are *permitted* to see is one who dies on a cross and is buried in a tomb. This Jesus also says, *Those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Whoever serves me must follow me.* We're to follow him into death and the grave? *What are we to see in that?!*

To answer that, we must skip forward a bit. The Greeks had come to Philip and said, "Sir, show us Jesus." A few days later in the upper room, Philip said, "Lord, show us *the Father.*" Jesus replied, "To see me is to have seen the Father." These words are crucial.

All along, *Jesus has been showing us* what his Father is like. His truly is the glory of the only Son from the Father - John stresses that, and then sketches the shape of that glory for us. The Father so loves the world that he gives eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection. That's his glory. The Father's house has many rooms; and

Jesus goes to prepare them for his followers. That, too, is his glory. The Father causes us to abide in Christ through the gift of the Spirit, so that we might live with him forever. That, too, is his glory!

The Father wills that, in Jesus, we should have abundant *life*. He wants us to heal the sick and feed the hungry with earthly bread - and to share with them the Bread of Heaven. His work is to forgive us sinners; to graft us to the living Vine; to nourish us with living water; and to fill us the Holy Spirit. It's his glory to do all this and more!

This is the Father shown to us in Jesus. True: the only *Jesus* we see bids us come and *die* with him. But then he bids us come and *live in* him, because he *rose* from death. If we trust him, he'll transform *our* suffering and death. In him, because of him, the very worst thing that can befall us becomes a *door opening onto glory*, not a dead end.

Look at a grain of wheat, Jesus says. Left to itself, it remains hard, closed in on itself, and useless. Rainwater and sunshine only cause unburied grain to become moldy, or to sprout and die with nothing else to sustain it. But laid in the earth and *then* given moisture and sunshine, the grain finds *in this place of burial* all it needs produce many grains of wheat. It lives not *from* itself, or *by* itself, or *for* itself; indeed, it *dies to* itself. Only then can it produce a rich harvest: so rich that Jesus can say that it will result in drawing *all people* to himself.

That's what Jesus did; it's what he draws us to. Jesus promises that because of him, *our* suffering and death won't be futile, but fruitful - *like his*. We'll glorify the Father - *like him*. We'll receive, by the power of the Spirit, a life that never dies - *like his*. We may draw many to Jesus - *like he himself does*. *Our* suffering and death are transformed into something glorious - *because his Father transformed his*.

But Jesus' words are about far more than times of suffering or the moment of our death. They also call us to *repentance*: the *daily* dying to sin and self. We're like grains of wheat from the day we were baptized into Jesus' death and rising. Daily, the hard shell of sin and self-will must die, be buried, and be split open so we may live *to God* and *for others*. Daily, our efforts to "go it alone" must die. This new life needs the light of God's Word, the soil of his Sacraments, the water of forgiveness, and the fellowship of his Spirit-gathered community, if it's to bear fruit. Daily, our thoughts, words and deeds suffer death-blows if they blind us to Jesus; or if they prevent *others* from seeing Jesus in *our* lives, hearing Jesus in *our* words, and meeting Jesus in *our* deeds.

Jesus' words about following him, and of dying and bearing fruit, also describe what happens when we try to forgive as we have been forgiven. Forgiveness *really* is a sort of death: anyone who's struggled to let go of bitterness and resentment against someone who has hurt

or betrayed them knows that. Forgiving us *literally* meant death for Jesus! We have his assurance that when *we* do the hard work of forgiving, we're following him. We're *showing* him to someone who desperately needs to see Jesus. Even if our attempts seem like dead ends, our Lord says it isn't so. In him, they *will* bear fruit; he'll glorify them and lay them as trophies before his Father.

The world says to *us*: *Friend, we would see Jesus*. That's what's at stake. Often the world doesn't realize - and vehemently denies - that this is what it's begging for. But surely that's what the world needs. That's what *people* need most from us, and that is our task: to show another human being the forgiveness and love of Jesus, and so to have them catch a glimpse of his Father's heart. There seems to be only one way of doing that: the way of the grain of wheat, the way of Jesus. It's the way he bids us take when the Spirit helps us hear the world's prayer: "Friend, we would see Jesus."

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain. But if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.

The same Jesus who is the eternal Word made flesh; who shows us the glory and love of the eternal Father, does so by the humblest of means. Oh, I don't just mean dying like a lowly grain of wheat. He shows his glory in and through our lives and words, as we follow him.

God grant, therefore, that we follow him faithfully; and that in so doing, we help others to see him, and to know his Father's heart. *I will draw all people to myself...* By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die. He also indicates the kind of life he would have us *live*. May it be accomplished according to his will and to his glory. Amen.