



A Heart for Christ
John 12:20-33
March 18, 2018 – Rev. Christopher

Once a month, the pastors of this Presbytery spend a day together. This includes all the pastors of Presbyterian churches in southern AZ and parts of Western New Mexico. We talk a lot, eat together, learn together, pray together.

We met last Thursday, and our theme for the day was the topic of people who call themselves “spiritual but not religious.” In other words, people who no longer affiliate with any particular religion.

The spiritual is important to them but they are not finding what they are looking for in the institution of the church or a structured religion. We give these people a name. We call them the “Dones” (those who used to go to church, but have given up on it) and the “Nones” (those who grown up never associating with any religion).

I think the scripture passage that Dian just read addresses the Nones and the Dones. Some Greeks (in other words, non Jews or Gentiles, or pagans as they called them in the day) come to Philip, a disciple of Jesus and say, “We want to see Jesus.”

Note: They don’t come to Philip asking for information about Jesus. They don’t inquire about a new member’s class or ask to join a committee. They don’t request a statement of beliefs before joining. They simply want to see Jesus.

Now this is interesting because these Greeks make this request on the way to a religious celebration: Passover...which has nothing to do with being Greek. Sort of like going to church when you have nothing to do with Christianity.

But they have heard about Jesus and they want an encounter with him. Perhaps they heard about his teachings. I am sure they heard about his miracles, especially the one that just happened – the raising of Lazarus from the dead. They want to experience Jesus for themselves, too.

So I wonder: If those Greeks were to show up in our congregation today, or to put it into today's terms: if "Nones" and "Dones" showed up in our congregation, would they see Jesus? Do we help people see Jesus?

There was a church in downtown Los Angeles called the Church of the Open Door. If you stood behind the pulpit, it looked out over a massive auditorium consisting of a large first floor and two balconys. Standing in that pulpit could give any preacher a feeling of importance as he or she looked over the crowd that has gathered to hear that preacher speak. But just as the preacher's ego might begin to inflate, it quickly came down to earth by a few words printed on a small plaque fixed to the pulpit with these words: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Not the preacher, but Jesus.

This is our task.

Friends, people don't come here simply because of our great programs, because we do great music, because we can see the mountains during worship – there are all kinds of groups in Green Valley who do these things. You can see the mountains when you go outside. I think people come because they want to see Jesus.

Jesus says in our passage that he draws people to himself. That is why people come, because they have been drawn, they have a thirst in their souls. We would like to see Jesus.

Will they encounter Christ here? I think they will.

They see Jesus in the hundreds of hours put into the patio sale by many volunteers so we can raise money to meet the needs of people here in Green

Valley, Tucson, Nogales, Mexico and around the world. We do this because Jesus came for the poor and needy.

People see Jesus when you visit the homebound and the hospitals, when you sit with families while a loved one dies. People see Jesus when you serve their family during a time of grief when we host a memorial. We do this because Jesus had compassion and came to serve.

People see Jesus when you pray before a meal at a restaurant. I know of one Christian who tells the waiter/waitress that we are going to pray for our meal, and then asks, What can we pray for you? We do this because Jesus asked people, "Do you want to be well?"

People see Jesus when we worship. Prayerfully people come to our worship not just because we do a good job, but because they see Jesus in it. Because we have a heart for Christ. This cross that you see in our window was put up about 6-7 years ago. And, we can see through it. One obvious reason is so we do not block the beautiful mountain view.

But the best reason this cross is see-through? Because we look at the world through the cross. "I will draw all people to myself," Jesus said because of the cross.

There once was an old man and a young man were on the same platform before a vast audience. A special program was being presented. As part of the program, each was to repeat from memory the words of the 23rd Psalm. The young man, trained in the best speech techniques and drama, began: 'The Lord is my Shepherd'

When he had finished, the audience clapped their hands and cheered, asking him for an encore so that they might hear again his wonderful voice. Then the old gentleman, leaning heavily on his cane, stepped to the front of the same platform and in feeble, shaking voice repeated the same words: 'The Lord is my Shepherd

....'

But when he was finished, no sound came from the listeners. No clapping. No clapping. Instead, folks seemed to pray. In the silence, the young man stood to make the following statement: 'Friends,' he said, 'I wish to make one explanation. You asked me to come back and repeat the Psalm. But you remained silent when my friend here was seated. The difference? I shall tell you. I know the Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd.'" (Hal Brady)

People see Jesus here because we know the Shepherd.
So choir, sing, not because the music is beautiful. Sing because you know the Shepherd and you have a heart for Christ. Then people will see Jesus.

Scripture and liturgy readers, read the liturgy not because we pastors asked you to do it. Read because you know the Shepherd and you have a heart for Christ. Then people will see Jesus.

Elders and Deacons, lead not so that we will be glorified by how well you lead, but lead so Christ will be glorified because you know the Shepherd. Then people will see Jesus.

Teachers of our children and adults, teach not because you have the gift of teaching, teach because you have a heart for Christ and you want to impart Christ to others. Then people will see Jesus.

Quilters of quilts, sewers of walker bags, knitters of prayer shawls, flower arrangers for the homebound, cooks of our lunches and dinners, those of you who do ministries that are quiet and in the background, do them not simply because you have the skill, but do them because you know the Shepherd and you want to serve like Christ did. Then people will see Jesus.

Follow the example of Johann Sebastian Bach. When he was finished with a work, above or below his name he would write the initials "AMDG." The initials were Latin shorthand for the phrase Ad Majorem Dei Gloria which translated means "For the Greater Glory of God Alone."

Maybe we can write these letters above the signature of our lives, above everything we do, everything we say, above everywhere we go. Because we have a heart for Christ.

I've been asking you: will people see Jesus here in this place, in your lives?

Now I am going to take this a step further and turn this question back to those of you who follow Christ: Do you want to see Jesus? Before you answer, take a look at what happened to the Greeks.

When the Greeks asked to see Jesus, they got a Jesus they didn't expect. They didn't get a Jesus that met their needs. They got strange words about glory and dying and losing and serving. And glory and glory and glory...Go back to the passage and see how many times you find glory.

Glory is a big theme in the Gospel of John. The Gospel starts out with this: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory." Usually glory is a really good thing, but here it is mixed with a troubled soul and a cross.

Do we really want to see Jesus?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus has encounters with people who think they want to see Jesus: a rich young ruler, a royal official, a man born blind, a man named Nicodemus. They hear about giving up their riches, losing their lives, being a servant, take up your cross. Once it becomes clear what it means to see Jesus, not all of them wanted to see him clearly enough to give up their riches, lose their lives, be a servant, take up their cross.

Do you really want to see Jesus?

Seeing Jesus is believing and believing is following and following is dying to self in order to be reborn. Not everyone really wants that kind of sight.

Do you really want to see Jesus?

Mother Teresa once said that we must shift our prayers from what we want to what God wants. That's what Jesus did here. He rejected "Father, save me from this hour" (in other words, the cross) and shifted his prayer to "Father, glorify your name."

When that voice spoke from heaven and spoke about glory in the midst of a cross, some said it sounded like thunder. When you are in the midst of a cross, a difficult turn in your life, do you hear thunder? Or, do you hear an angel offering you a chance to glorify God? This is what it means to see Jesus.

Do you really want to see Jesus? Yeah, I do.

Father, glorify your name...

in my life,

in these people,

in this church.

Amen.