

**JEREMIAH 31:31-34 (p. 644)**

**MARCH 21, 2021**

**JOHN 12:20-33 (p. 873)**

**BLAINE**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

We gather in your Presence Lord, in order to hear a Word. We come as disciples, as those who would grow from your teaching. We come as “the least of these”, and from various places. Some near, and some far. Some troubled, and some still. Some comfortable, and some, not comfortable at all! But we come, Lord, asking for your Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts and minds in Jesus’ Name, Amen!

**“WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE JESUS”**

I like the Gospel of John! A lot, in fact! It’s one of my top, four, all-time favorites! Matthew shares a decisively “Jewish” perspective. He helps connect a lot of the Old Testament Prophecies and Teachings with what Jesus is currently doing. Luke speaks to a Gentile audience. He writes “an orderly account”, it says, to the “most excellent Theophilus”, which in Greek means “Lover of God”! Mark is short and sweet. He gets right to the point. Scholars say he wrote under the guidance of Peter. And Peter is one of my all-time favorite Disciples! Definitely in the top twelve!

But John’s Gospel is different. He is more ethereal, to quote a friend of mine. More wispy, more spiritual maybe. John writes on multiple levels at the same time, which always makes me think. When a blind man is given his sight, for instance, the Disciples suddenly “see” who Jesus really is! I like John! And in today’s lesson from John, some Greeks, Gentiles by birth, folks like you and me, want to see Jesus. So, I wonder if we might see ourselves in the text?

“Sir”, they ask, “We would like to see Jesus”. And that may be the best request ever, don’t you think! We too want to see Jesus, right? That’s why we are here! Again, these are Greeks, therefore originally, outsiders to the Faith. And yet they have traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, quite likely from a long-ways off. So, they now believe in the One True God, or at least want to believe in the One True God! Can you relate?

I mean, we too have come to the House of the Lord to Worship, right? And I’ll bet it’s safe to assume we would all like to see Jesus too! Oh, you might be a stranger to the rituals, or not understand the Feast itself, let alone what it means? You might be a recent Convert to the Faith, or potential Convert to the Faith? You could be God-Loving, as Luke would say? Or God-Fearing? Or at a minimum, God-Curious? You might even feel like a “Foreigner”, yet one grafted onto the Promises of God? Or like an “Alien, especially around the People of God? I get it! I do! But you’ve come, haven’t you? You are here to Worship! So, would you like to meet Jesus?

I’ll bet these Greeks have heard some things, don’t you, or seen some things. I’ll bet strange things, even, out on the streets of Jerusalem, possibly in the last few days! People have been talking, right? And they are saying that this Jesus fellow is the long-awaited Messiah! He teaches with Power and Authority! He Preaches boldly! He defies the status quo! Only He is not a Messiah like most of the Faithful were expecting. He doesn’t carry a sword, which is weird for a Conquering King! Those who follow Him aren’t arrayed in military splendor, let alone armor! There is no nationalism in His Preaching!

There is no exclusiveness to His message either! He says “all people will be drawn to Him”! He openly invites everyone to be a part of the Kingdom of God, even newcomers, like you and me! It is not just those from Abraham’s lineage anymore. All are welcome to follow where this Galilean Rabbi leads! This Jesus fellow welcomes sinners and tax collectors, Roman Officials, even the haughty Religious Elite! He is definitely someone we need to meet, right!

So, they come to Philip, one of Jesus’ Disciples. Which makes sense. Phillip is from the village of Bethsaida in Galilee, in the Golan Heights, remember! It says so right in the text! Phillip grew up not far from the border, on the edge of Jewish territory, quite near the Gentile world! I wonder if that says something? Phillip is also one of only two Disciples with a Greek Name! I wonder if that’s is important? I wonder if that somehow makes him more “approachable”? I wonder if these Greeks thought Philip could relate?

Philip then takes them to Andrew, the only other Disciple with a Greek Name! Who ironically, is also from the town of Bethsaida! And Andrew does what we always see him do in Scripture; He brings them to Jesus! Andrew is a great role model for an Evangelist! He brings people to Jesus! We see him in the very first chapter of John, bringing his brother, Simon Peter to Jesus! And then, in chapter six, he brings a young boy with two fish and five loaves of bread to Jesus! Andrew brings people to Jesus! That’s what he does! And now here, in chapter twelve, we find him helping some Greeks, folks new to the Faith, see Jesus! You see, I told you John speaks on multiple levels at the same time! So, can you relate? Or better yet, who can you relate to?

How about Andrew or Philip? Are you a conduit to Jesus? Or if not them, then how about the Greeks? Have you ever felt like a stranger in a strange land, maybe a stranger looking for Jesus, in the midst of people at Worship? Maybe you're God-fearing, or simply God-curious? Maybe you've seen a thing or two, or heard a thing or two, lately even, and now you want to find out more? Or maybe you are one of the faithful who is always at Worship, always at the Temple, always present at every Feast? And you have been for a very long time! Maybe you long for redemption, to be freed from whatever bondage has you locked-up tight! But you are here now, wanting to see Jesus!

And when you think about it, aren't we all? Aren't we all standing shoulder-to-shoulder with those out-of-town Greeks? Haven't we too heard the stories, and seen a few sights? We know Jesus turned water into wine at a Wedding, for instance! And it was really good wine! We heard about Him upsetting the corrupt Money Exchange system in the Temple courts! We saw Him hang out with a Samaritan Woman for Pete's sake, make the son of a Roman official well, heal a crippled man by a pool in Bethesda! This Jesus fellow has fed multitudes, spiritually as well as physically! Five-Thousand hungry on-lookers, along with their families, out in the middle of nowhere, with hardly anything at all! Don't we, too, really want to meet Him?

Be honest! You hunger, right! We all do! We long for the Bread of Life! We're thirsty! We want to drink from the Well that never runs dry! We are here, at the Temple, in the very Presence of God! We've come to share the Feast, to sit at the Table! We want to see Jesus! That's just a given! But can you tell me Why? Why do you want to see Jesus?

Sit with that for a moment! Let that question sink-in! Let it seep past all the surface religiosity, past the abstract, past the pat answers, beyond what you may be accustomed to! Feel the weight of it, deep down inside of your heart! Sit with it for a while! It is a great question, an important question, a critical question! Why do you want to see Jesus? Who is it that you are looking for?

It's not the usual question, is it? It's not: "Do you love Jesus?" or, "Do you know Jesus?" or "Will you follow Jesus?" It's a different question entirely! "Why are you looking for Him in the first place? Who are you expecting to find? And why does it matter? Why do you want to see Jesus?" Go ahead, answer it if you will, just to yourself.

Are you looking for Jesus the Teacher? Because some are! But if you find Him, will you listen to what He has to say? Are you searching for Jesus the Great Moral Example? And when you discover Him, will you then attempt to emulate His life with your own? Are you trying to meet Jesus the Miracle Worker? And if you do, and miracles don't happen for you, or not right away, what will you do then? Who are you looking for?

I get it! Jesus is the redeemer of God's people! This is the One all of Israel has been waiting for! John has been telling us that for twelve chapters now! This is the Messiah, the One who will set God's people free, overcome the prince of this world, lead us into the Promised Land, give us life without end! That is what everyone is saying, right? Of course, you want to meet Him! He is a Rockstar! But why?

Did you hear about that thing with Lazarus, over in Bethany, after three days in the tomb? Did you see that Grand Procession into town just a couple of days ago, what folks are calling the Triumphal Entry? “Blessed is the King of Israel”, people shouted! You could feel the excitement, sense the anticipation! The time is at hand! The curtain is about to go up! The Messianic Age is here! Who wouldn’t be curious? Who wouldn’t want to be part of the celebration? Who, in their right mind, would want to be left behind?

But is that why you came? Is that why you want to see Jesus? Is that who you are expecting to meet? Are you searching for some kind of Rambo or Terminator, someone who will take over the world and make things right? Or a Mandela or a Gandhi, someone who will take over your heart and make things right? Are you trying to hook up with Santa Clause, or a Genie in a Bottle, who will graciously hand out rewards to all the good little boys and girls? It’s about “what you need”, right? Who are you looking for? A “Father, or Grandfather Figure”, one full of comfort and joy? An “Angry Judge” to hand out sentences from behind the Bench, to all those “others” that deserve it?

Well, I hate to tell you, but if any of these are your focal points, then Jesus’ response today is going to seem a bit odd! “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified! ...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed...anyone who loves their life will lose it...My Father will honor the one who serves Me...whoever serves Me must follow Me...when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself”!

It doesn't make a lot of sense, does it? John explains Jesus' answer, hoping to clarify it for us, hoping to make it crystal clear. "He said this", writes John, "to show the kind of death He was going to die!" Only it's still confusing, isn't it? That's because this Proclamation of Truth only makes sense when you look at it through the lens of the Cross!

Up until now, at various, even crucial points in His ministry—whenever the crowds are upset with His teaching and ready to kill Him, for instance, or very impressed with His miracles and ready to crown Him King—Jesus repeatedly says, "My hour has not yet come". But now, with this visit from some Greeks, Jesus states that "the hour has come"! The Glory that everyone has been waiting for "will be revealed"! Only that Glory will not come by wreaking havoc and vengeance on His enemies, or in doing even greater miracles than before! No! Jesus' Glory will be revealed by Him falling to the earth and dying like a grain of wheat, in His losing His life for others, by Him being lifted up, high, on a Cross! That's how God's Glory, and Majesty, and Power are revealed!

But I wonder why now? Why at this particular point in His three-year ministry? Could it be because the entire world is now knocking at His door? Some looking to tar and feather Him! And some clamoring for salvation, or simply miracles! I mean, people are definitely polarized as to "why" they want to see Jesus! Many still are today! But people are looking for Jesus! So, are these Greeks a visual example of that? Do these Seekers embody the various expectations that people have, for who they think Jesus should be? I wonder!

I have to tell you, I believe the point of Jesus' rather complicated answer to His Greek visitors—the miracles and healings, the purpose of the Passion even, of Jesus' Crucifixion, His Death and Resurrection—is actually Full Disclosure! Jesus is Lord! God's One and Only Son! He is not a Magician, or a Faith-Healer! He is not a magic wand that you can pull out of your pocket whenever you need Him to fend off the ravages of evil! He is not simply a great Teacher, or Social Reformer. He is not whatever "idol" you or I, or the Church has made Him into! Jesus is the Christ, the Lord! He is Holy, God incarnate! The Word made flesh, Immanuel, God with us, right here and now! And all the other wishful thinking just doesn't apply!

I think the Greeks, searching that day, like so many who are searching today, wanted to see Jesus the Man, the Rabbi, the Preacher, the Radical, or whatever! That's what people do! Far too often we attempt to create a Social Gospel, or a Prosperity Gospel, a Liberation Gospel, or some kind of "self-focused", "what's in it for me" Gospel! But because of the Passion, that's just not possible anymore! Or it shouldn't be! Not if we open our eyes! To see Jesus, from here on in, means to glimpse His Glory and His Majesty! To see anything else, anything less, is simply self-deception! The Cross and the Kingdom are no longer separable! "Anyone who loves their life will lose it! Whoever serves me must follow me! Wherever I am, there my servant will also be!"

Again, John speaks on multiple levels simultaneously! And there is a definite theme that weaves throughout his entire Gospel! It's a theme of having limited vision at first, of not really seeing the whole picture right away!



Remember Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night, in the dark? And Jesus telling him that no one can “see” the Kingdom of God unless he is born again, born from above, born of the Spirit? Remember Jesus at a dinner party in Bethany, and only Mary seeing Him for who He really is! Everyone else is clueless, blind! Even though the resurrected Lazarus is sitting right there! Only Mary, who takes a pint of very expensive perfume anoints her Lord for burial!

Remember Judas, who at this point still thinks this Messiah thing is all about a military takeover! Judas wants social reform! And the rest of the Disciples can’t wait to take their seats of honor in the Kingdom, whatever they imagine that Kingdom might be!

Some are convinced that the coming Messiah will bring Religious Reformation, in addition to Social Justice! Some just want to know what’s in it for them, a Prosperity Gospel, if you will! Some are crying out for Messiah to will stand the current Political System on its ear! And all of these assumptions are still pretty common with the multitudes today! But a few Greeks, strangers really, have heard the rumors, experienced the miracles, and now want to meet Jesus for themselves!

“A time is coming,” declares the Lord “when I will make a New Covenant with my people.” No longer will the Law be “out there,” written on tablets of stone! Instead, it will be written on their hearts and minds! No longer will there be a need for intermediaries between us! In those days our relationship will be more intimate, more personal, between you and me, declares the Lord!”

“All people will be drawn to me when I am lifted up in Glory! And some, a few, will choose to follow where I go! But no longer will people be able to hide in ignorance, or behind some armchair religiosity, because everyone will know! And everyone will have to choose! I am the Lord, says Jesus! Not something else! Not something less! Not something you have created! I created you! And therefore, the staggering question before each one of us is, “Do you want to meet Jesus, or not?” “Do you want a personal relationship with the Living God, or not?” “Will you follow Jesus as Lord, not just as Savior, or Miracle Worker, or whatever you can get from Him, or not?”

In Matthew 7:22, Jesus says, “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your Name, and in your Name drive out demons, and in your Name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Simply calling Him Lord won’t do! Driving out demons in His Name isn’t the answer! Performing miracles in His Name even, is not enough! Jesus wants you! To know you! For you to know Him! Jesus wants a personal, intimate relationship with you! And woe to me, woe to us, if we preach any other Gospel!

Today, Greek visitors to the Temple, people on the margins, those on the edge, seek to meet Jesus. Perhaps that is your request as well? And all of God’s people said, Amen!

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

We've come to Worship Lord! We've come to stand in your Glorious Presence and praise your Holy Name! We've come to bow before you Lord, and offer our lives as witnesses to your Son, and to your Holy Spirit moving in our world! We've come as your people Lord, as those who meet at the foot of the Cross!

You have blessed us in so many ways Father, and we ask you now to bring some of these to our mind. We have so much to be thankful for, so many times when your Hand has moved in our lives. We are a blessed people Lord, who serve a Holy and Loving God!

But there are times Father, when the ravages of this world, and the sinfulness of this world, try to break our hearts, and even crush our spirits. There are moments Lord, when we lose sight of you, or when we are distracted by the evil around us, or even by the beauty around us. So, we ask, in these times, for an encouraging nudge. Help us to trust you Father, in the midst of the storms. Increase our faith, even when our eyes cannot see, especially when our eyes cannot see. Strengthen our hearts with your Word Lord, and our spirits with your own Holy Spirit. Make us into visual witnesses to your own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Father, some of us need your healing touch even now. And some of us have loved ones in places like that as well. And all of us, Lord, need your power and your strength, your wisdom and guidance, your love and your smile! So we come to you now in prayer, and lift up before you..... Bless us Father. And make us a blessing to others. For we ask these things in the Name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, and pray now in the way that He taught us, saying, Our Father...