

Seeing Jesus

We talk about seeing people all the time.

Seeing our doctor, seeing some friends, seeing our kids and grandkids.

And when those Greeks come looking for Jesus, they seem to have that same kind of seeing in mind.

The seeing that comes with meeting someone, talking story, whiling away the afternoon.

But Jesus has something entirely different in mind.

When Jesus thinks of us seeing him, he's talking about lifting the covers and looking behind the obvious.

He's talking about tearing the temple curtain in two, so that the sacred and the profane meet.

He's inviting us to become like Jacob, who sees angels moving between this world and the world in God's nearer presence.

My daughter came home the other day and announced her summary of Greek history; "they were philosophical genius's and now they are broke."

When I responded that that seems a little harsh, she replied that harsh it may be, those are the facts.

In truth, the Greeks were philosophical genius's.

Whenever you think of this world as temporary and corrupt, a thing to muddle through, but by no means a sacred place, you are thinking Greek philosophy.

When you think of an immortal soul going off into heaven forever and ever — while your body rots to dust in a grave, you are thinking Greek philosophy.

The thing is, Jesus isn't a Greek philosopher.

And what Jesus comes to help us see is that Greek philosophy is fine and dandy if you like highly rational, antiseptic, neat and clean thinking; but the God of Jesus is far messier, far more intuitive, and much more tied up with our bodies and this beautiful world than any Greek philosopher would care to admit.

So when Jesus responds to the desire of these Greeks to see him, he responds by saying that they will indeed see him — but only when they see him on the cross — in God's most profound revelation to all of us, that God so loves the world that God, in the person of the Son, dies for us all: good and bad, creeps and saints, perverts and holy women.

He dies for us all.

The seeing that Jesus invites us into is a seeing that looks at the poor and suffering of the world and sees the beloved children of God, rather than merely the unfortunate or the lazy or the undeserving.

One fellow puts it like this:

"I don't see any poor people in the community where I live.

My education and hard work allow me to live where I want with neighbors who have similar lives and values.

I don't see poor people on my way to work.

It's really nice to drive along the Lake, enjoy the view and avoid the congested neighborhoods.

I work on the east side, so I don't see many poor people there.

There was a panhandler one day.

Someone called security and now we don't see him anymore.

Jesus promised to save me if I turn to him.

He has blessed me with many things.

I work hard to sing his praises and I share his story with the people I meet each day of my life ...

...so why on judgment day... as I stand to the left of my Lord, must I cry out and ask:

"Jesus, you promised me salvation, how did I **not** serve you?!"

Jesus turns to his right — and shows me the poor I didn't have to see." The Poor? What Poor?, Walt Chossek. (modified).

To see Jesus is to see God at work not in a privatized, other-worldly form of spirituality, not in an after-life that mirrors this life, but with better hair and fewer wrinkles; but to see Jesus is to see God, hard at work, here and now, in the muck and misery and joy and elation of this life.

To see Jesus is to remember that ours is a God who is "willing to live with wasted seed, with nets full of good and bad fish, with fields that sprout both weeds and wheat, who says no to violence — who says no to forcing people to be or do or think one thing.

Ours is a God, simply put, who loves us in our messiness." W. Willimon, Postmodern Preaching.

And our faith insists that we develop this vision to see God in all the messiness of life, here and now, because it may not be possible to develop that vision in the next life.

A poet writes:

"What you call 'salvation' belongs to the time **before** death.

If you don't break your ropes while you're alive,
do you think
ghosts will do it after?

What is found now
is found then.

If you find nothing now,
you will simply end up with an apartment
in the City of Death."

-Kabir, The Time Before Death

How do we break the ropes that tie us up?

By letting go — or as Jesus puts it today — those who love their life will lose it, and those who lose their life will keep it.....

Bishop Willimon tells of a friend who hit bottom, who experienced first hand what it means to let go, to die to oneself.

This fellow literally spun out of control as he crossed the centerline in his sports car heading the wrong way on a highway at over 100 miles per hour, totally drunk.

He is a big shot lawyer who found himself stuck in the depths of alcoholism.

He comes home one day to find his family, his minister, and three of his closest friends all sitting in his living room.

And it's not his birthday.

Yet -- it is.

He's on his way back now, thanks to a twelve step program.

He is a private man, so he won't share all the details, but he did say this to the Bishop:

"I was always a regular at church, but in the back of my mind, I always thought the Church was for losers, for the weak.

But you would be amazed at what I've learned about God."

"Like what?" Bishop Will asked him.

"That so much of what I heard year in and year out at church is suddenly real to me," replied his friend.

"Like what?"

"Like 'Take up your cross' and 'You can only find your life by losing it.'"

Through hitting bottom, I've met God."

"And who is the God you have met?" the Bishop asks.

"God is a tough, relentless, devastating, friend."

A woman describes her 20-year battle with cancer, a battle she thought she won ten years ago, but which recently returned.

There is a difference, however, between the battle she waged then and the battle she's waging now.

This time she senses a Presence with her, one that she identifies with the suffering Christ, one who assures her that everything is going to be okay.

And while she doesn't know exactly what "okay" means: whether she's going to live, or whether she's going to die; despite that uncertainty, she trusts the "voice" she hears when it assures her that everything is going to be all right, no matter what may happen.

Many of you have your own stories much like these we have just shared, and while I don't know what God's call to you looks like, or feels like, or where it'll take you in this life or the next, I can tell you this:

That while saying "yes" to this strange savior from Galilee may turn your life upside down, while he may shatter everything you ever knew about truth or righteousness or justice; if you choose to follow him, he will bring you to places of such joy, to sights that your eyes never dreamed of seeing, to a peace that is beyond all understanding.

So that when all is said and done, all we can do is fall to our knees and give thanks.

Perhaps it is then that we might finally see Jesus.

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