

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Renewing Spirit.

The scene from today's Gospel takes place just after Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead. As you might imagine, that has drawn quite a bit of attention to Jesus and his ministry, and not all of that attention is positive. Jesus has shown unquestionably that he has power over death. It is the culmination of his earthly miracles as the Gospel of John tells it; and it is the final straw for those who hold power, and see Jesus undermining it. The religious leaders have met and considered killing not only Jesus, but Lazarus as well, to obliterate any evidence of what Jesus has done. Our reading this morning indicates that it's a little too late for that. The writer of John tells us that everyone who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus continued to testify to that miracle. In our passage this morning, we see that the news has crossed the boundaries of language and place. Greek speakers, people who do not speak Jesus' native language of Aramaic, have come to the festival of the Passover in Jerusalem; from near and far, people have heard of Jesus.

These visitors find one of Jesus' apostles, Philip, and they say something we should all say: "We wish to see Jesus."

As with much of what Jesus says in the Gospel of John, he doesn't answer this request directly; he seems to wander off on a tangent that has nothing at all to do with greeting these visitors to Jerusalem. He goes into the ins and outs of wheat farming, he gets metaphysical about losing and keeping one's life, then has this monologue with God. I wonder if Philip and Andrew understood any of it then; I wonder if those visitors ever made it near Jesus; but the truth of what Jesus said about himself made it to the writer of this Gospel, and was recorded faithfully. The disciples eventually understood this episode and remembered: "We wish to see Jesus"; and the answer that Jesus gave was an act of selfless love that is the foundation of our hope today.

To see Jesus was to see God go to the length of laying down God's divinely human life for a world that wasn't ready to accept God's expansive invitation to love. The religious authorities wanted Jesus to play by the rules that kept things in the status quo; they didn't disturb the Roman occupiers, the Roman occupiers let them have a little power. The authorities wanted to see a Jesus that didn't disrupt things as they were. The zealots wanted Jesus to overthrow the Romans and take their power

and share it with people like the zealots. The zealots wanted to see a Jesus who was a new warrior king, like David. Most of the disciples, I think, just wanted an end to their oppression, their suffering, and their long, long wait for the saving help of God. They saw a Jesus who cared for them, fed them, and even raised their dead; they wanted to see this Jesus remain among them performing these miracles.

But Jesus, in our passage today, is telling his disciples that he is something they didn't expect to see at all: to see Jesus is to see God's love embodied. To see Jesus is to see death willingly embraced and then overcome. To see Jesus is to no longer seek power, certainty, or the treasures of this world, but instead to turn to what is lasting and eternal: the fullness of our humanity redeemed by God.

"...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

To see Jesus is to enter into this new covenant with God, not one bound by written law, or diminished by the limited vision of human authority. To see Jesus is to look within ourselves and make space for God to give birth there to something new. Because when God sees us, God sees a seed of God's own image deeply buried within us and ready to rise and grow.

These Greek-speaking visitors in today's Gospel traveled to Jerusalem to worship God, and then asked a question that held the possibility of eternal life: "We wish to see Jesus". Jesus responds by showing them and all the world what God's love for us is; after this encounter Jesus will wash his disciples' feet and make his journey to the cross. Jesus will return from beyond death to dwell with them in body a little while, and then to dwell with us in Spirit for ever.

Do we wish to see Jesus? Do we wish to risk our certainty, our self-sufficiency, our sense of control, our comfort with what we know? Do we wish to nourish that seed of God's image within us? St. Athanasius said, "...The kingdom of God is always here and now, wherever you are,

within you. Precisely because the kingdom is within, and God is our friend, our salvation only requires that we be willing.”

We do not have to travel to Jerusalem, and cross boundaries of place or language to see Jesus; we have to be willing to look within and lose what binds us to death and keep what binds us to eternal life. We have to be willing, every day, every minute, through whatever adversity or whatever good befalls us to say: “We wish to see Jesus”. And we will find that God is faithful and will meet us there. Amen.