

There is another way
John 12:20-33
21 March 2021
Lent 5
Sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae

Who is Jesus for you? That is really at the heart of this Lenten journey, isn't it? Who is Jesus for you, and why does he matter so much?

The whole process of Lent is an invitation to explore this very question. Why do we follow this man from Galilee? Why have his stories and teachings survived 2,000 years, and how is it that they are still relevant today? Who is this man, and how can we get closer to him, learn more from him? As we get closer and closer to Good Friday, these questions become more and more important, not just for his friends who entered Jerusalem, but for those of us that follow today, that make time to mark these holy days and let the messages of them impact our life, our decisions and let them define us by the name Christian.

So, who is Jesus for you?

Our scripture lesson this morning follows immediately on the heels of Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we will hear about next week in worship. Crowds have gathered to watch this

man enter the city in a very unique way, in stark contrast to the military parade, the symbol of power on the other side of the city. They are intrigued, they want to know more. Many who are gathered had witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, they know there is something different about this man, a power they can't understand. They can feel the temperature in the city changing, they sense that something is about to happen. Everyone is on edge, intrigued, worried, excited, everyone wants to know Jesus, even if they aren't ready to follow him. He drew so much attention in fact, we are told some Greeks, gentiles, (hinting at the fact Jesus' message is for everyone) come up to Jesus' friend Philip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

There is no question asked by the Greeks, just this simple statement. We wish to see Jesus.

And maybe that sums up best what we are doing here together week after week. We wish to see Jesus. In a world where fear is overwhelming and everything is uncertain, we wish to see Jesus. We wish to see a glimpse of a new and different way of doing things, of responding, of ordering our world and our priorities, we want to see that things can be different and that someone has modeled it for us.

We want to see not only that someone has modeled it for us but that someone, someone greater than us, has deemed there is another way.

Because as Christians, when we seek to see Jesus, we see God. So when asked, "Who is Jesus for you?" your answer will likely have something to do with glimpsing God. We wish to see Jesus because we wish to see God, and for us, for Christians, the best way to see God is through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

But what exactly is Jesus telling us about God, and what specifically are we learning about God during this final part of the Lenten journey? Let's think about it for a minute, let's consider the journey that Jesus himself is on in our scriptures, the journey to Jerusalem, to certain arrest and, as those of us who have read ahead know, death. Jesus knew that this is what he faced, likely his friends did too, it was no secret that the authorities were on to him. He says it himself numerous times. But what exactly were the authorities on to? Promises of eternal life? No, not exactly. Despite the fact that a big part of our faith is about eternal salvation and promises of life after death this really wasn't what got him in trouble. Jesus' message, God's message for us has more to do with the here and now

than it ever did with the great hereafter. Jesus was a challenge, a threat, to the status quo, to the earthly powers that be.

Consider the statement Jesus is making by willingly heading to Jerusalem as a wanted man. Calmly telling all who will listen that just as a seed must die in order to find new life so too must we. We must be broken to find new life, our old patterns, the ways of this world must be broken in order to find new life.

That is why the authorities are after him. No other reason. He is not speaking only of eternal life and spiritual fulfillment. In a very practical way Jesus is speaking out against the powers that be, against the system of oppression and occupation in Jerusalem. By coming to Jerusalem, by not fighting back, by not resisting his arrest, he is saying that the system of violence and force under which the world operates, is not the only way to be. He is resisting fighting violence with violence and by doing so sending a clear message that there is another way to be in this world. His arrest and crucifixion then become not an indictment of Jesus, not an indictment of the people that day who betrayed him and had him executed, it is an indictment of the way we choose to organize our world. It is an indictment of what we allow to have power over us, the world's

systems versus God's purposes, it is a wake up call that things can be different, that systems can be changed that new life, a new world, is possible.

And in that hope, in that new way of being, we see God.

Sir, we wish to see Jesus. We wish to understand a God who is willing to suffer the pain of our world in order to understand us and our systems better, in order to show us a different way.

We wish to see Jesus, to learn how to respond to injustice in ways that are life giving, hope giving. We wish to see peace in place of war, love in place of hatred, self giving in place of greed.

Sir, we wish to see Jesus, so that we can really see that there is a different way, a better way. We wish to see, so that we can imagine a world where violence does not beget violence, and fear does not beget fear. In a world that has gone mad around us, where fear invades our day, every day, where we lose a little hope for the future with each daily report of covid numbers and are filled with anxiety and uncertainty, we want to see that there is a way back, a way out. We want to be filled with hope, reassured that we are not alone; so that we can know that you God are in charge.

We want to see, so that we can know that the ways of the world are not the ways of God, that there is more than you and me and this. That the glimpses we get of something bigger, something brighter, something more love infused is not an illusion, but an opening to new life that is waiting, wanting to break open.

We want to see so that we can know, tomorrow can be different, will be different if we have the courage to follow this path that has been shown to us. It is a path that will leave us broken, leave our systems broken, a path that requires old ways to die, but promises newness, new life, new hope, new beginnings. It is a path that promises life if we can just hold on a little longer. Morning will come, and with it, resurrection.

Who is Jesus for me? The way, the truth, the path, the one who gives me courage and insight who points to hope beyond the night, who says there is another way of being in this world, one filled with justice and life and compassion and hope. Jesus turns this world upside down, and me with it, and pushes and prods and calls and encourages and demands that I respond. Demands more. Makes me rise above my anger and my frustration, and my fear and my anxiety. That makes me replace envy with compassion and hate with love.

Jesus is the author of my new story, the artist who sees colours my eyes have not yet adjusted to. Jesus is my path in and my path out, my glimpse of forever. My hope. My God. That voice I hear who rages and loves and soothes and disturbs. And I can't help but follow, and I cannot help but respond.

Who is Jesus for you?