

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

March 17, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fifth Sunday in Lent (Year B) 2024

John 12:20-33

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

(SING)

*Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him
Open our ears, Lord
And help us to listen
Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus*

There were some Greeks who came to Philip and said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” I must admit that the first thing I want to do is put these Greeks on trial. I want to ask them why they want to see Jesus. I want to dismiss the fact that they truly want to see Jesus, in that what they are really looking for is a miracle. I want to reduce them down to something less than me or us...But I can't. I just can't do it, because whenever times are tough – whenever life is hard, I find myself asking the same question. You surely can identify.

For all of us couples that conceived a baby but never got to deliver that baby. When we sat in the ultrasound room and desperately wanted to hear our baby's heartbeat, and we heard nothing. We cried out in some form or fashion, “We want to see Jesus.” Whenever things headed for the worst financially, and you borrowed all that you could from everyone you thought might lend you some cash; and then you were advised to file for bankruptcy, then did you cry out, “We wish to see Jesus”? When you got the phone call from your doctor, and they said things didn't look good, that you were now diagnosed with the big “C” word; did you shout in some way, “I want to see Jesus!”? When you were told that your child was in an accident, and your heart sank deep down to your belly, did you plead, “We must see Jesus.”? Whenever you got to the last week of the month and realized all of the money for the month has been spent, wondering where food and gas would come from, did you begin to whisper, “I need to see Jesus.”? The elementary school child sitting in his father's truck in the parking lot of a park learns that his parents are getting a divorce, and scads of emotions consume him and in his tears and he sobs and wishes to see Jesus. I cannot put these Greeks on trial. I cannot question their wanting to see Jesus; because we have all been there, wanting to see Jesus so desperately in our lives. We want to see Jesus in the midst of our trials.

(Sing) In my trials, Lord walk with me. In my trials, Lord walk with me. When my heart is almost breaking, Lord I want Jesus to walk with me.

Yes, we want to see Jesus in the midst of our pain, suffering, and death. We want the savior of the world to perform a miracle for us. We want to think all this bad stuff is just a bad dream. We want to go to sleep and wake up the next day and have every ounce of the hurt, fear, and gut-wrenching grief to go away. We want to see Jesus. We must see Jesus. Jesus will surely take this all away. If I can just see Jesus at work through all of this then certainly, I will be healed. Then I know that my faith will never waver again. If I can just see him. If I can just touch him. If I can just reach out and touch the hem of his garment.

The desire of these Greeks to see Jesus goes from Philip to Andrew and then the two of them to Jesus. Jesus doesn't say, like he does with Zacchaeus, "I'm coming to your house today." Jesus doesn't talk about traveling to raise these Greeks' grief and despair from the tomb, as he did for Mary and Martha in raising Lazarus. Jesus doesn't go to them and say "Be healed." Jesus doesn't go and tell their demons to go away. Jesus doesn't turn their hunger into a feast with leftovers. Jesus doesn't show up as the life of the party to turn their water into wine. None of that takes place here. Instead, Jesus points all of us to the cross. Jesus points us to his death. It is there that we can see Jesus. There on the cross, Jesus' throne, with his thorn-braided crown. There on the cross, in the midst of the pain and suffering and death of this world, Jesus showed us that there is no place our God will not go for us. It is beneath the cross of Jesus that we can see Jesus in all of His glory. It is there that our pain and grief and death are given hope – Hope that is given when we seem to be swallowed up by the darkness of this broken world. Jesus doesn't back down from the darkness, instead, Jesus shines in the darkness. Jesus illumines our world. It is there on the cross where death does not have the final say. Instead, Jesus is victorious. Jesus conquers death. Jesus defeats death on the cross – dying and then rising from the dead. Because he lives, we live. Paul says to the Romans, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Jesus on the cross is far better than any miracle we could have ever wished to see. Because now we don't see Jesus as just a miracle producer, but instead, we see him as the Savior that he is.

Folks, we aren't a church that baptizes you and then have you wait at the Rapture Bus Stop to see Jesus. No, we are a church that baptizes you and then sends you out into the world to see Jesus every day – even in the center of our pain and grief and death. Jesus is there with the couple in the ultrasound room. Jesus is there in the filing for bankruptcy. Jesus is there when the big "C" word is heard. Jesus is there in the receiving of horrific news. Jesus is there at the end of the month when there is no money for groceries. Jesus is in that pickup truck with sobbing and tears flowing. Jesus is there. And we can be sure of that, because if Jesus went to the cross with us and for us, then Jesus is surely here in all of the troubles of this world. From the last stanza of "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed": *(Sing) But tears of grief cannot repay the debt of love I owe here, Lord, I give myself away tis all that I can do.*

Brothers and sisters, give all of yourself to Jesus, even the parts you think he may not want, the grief, the pain, the darkness. Give all of yourselves and live. Live in the Good News that there is no place that our God will not go with and for us. We truly do want to see Jesus. He's here. He's here. He's here.