

Holy Week 2026, March 31

Greeks Seek Jesus

John 12:20-26

Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. **23** Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. **25** Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Prayer: Lord, Shine a light on this text and open our minds to truly hear. Give us clarity as we try to understand your word and wisdom as we apply it in our lives. Humble us, Lord, so we may hear. Amen.

This week we have had a crazy Robin at our house. Over the course of two days, this little bird continuously beat himself against our front window, making a distracting racket. We tried to shoo him away but he just came right back and stayed

with it. Google helpfully told us it was mating behavior and the Robin somehow thought the bird in the window was competition for him. He was intent and destroying the competition, the perceived enemy, not realizing that in his zeal he threatened instead, to destroy himself. He could not see the truth about the bird in the reflection. He could not recognize that the real danger came from himself. He was creating a situation based on a perceived fear.

The robin reminds me of the Pharisees in the verse immediately preceding our text. Jerusalem is crowded with people coming to the Passover Festival. The news of Lazarus' being raised from the dead has spread like a wildfire, ripping through the crowd, who are hungry for the excitement and thrilled with the testimony of those who witnessed the miracle. The text says, "The crowd went to meet him." The Pharisees observe the events, but they cannot see themselves clearly. They cannot identify fear, control, jealousy, and pride as their own motivation. They think they are honoring God, but instead they are holding on to their self-centered way of seeing the world. We can hear their dismay in verse 19, when they say, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!" Their despair at the current events betrays their lack of faith and vision, revealing people who do not truly love God or neighbor, the two central tenants of their faith.

When we look at the setting, we see the mocking and fearful Pharisees, the huge crowd, and then we see the Greeks. Who are these folks? They are likely people who have believed in Judaism but hail from the North and speak Greek, thus marking them outsiders, Gentiles, "others," —people who feel they cannot enter into the inner

circle alone. They do what we would likely have done. They find one of Jesus' friends, in this case Phillip, one of the disciples who was from Bethsaida and likely spoke Greek. Phillip, in turn, takes them to Andrew, who is also known as the "connector," who introduces them to Jesus.

Why do the Greeks choose Phillip? Because they can relate to him. Being close geographically and in terms of language they have more in common. They can communicate.

We just got back from a trip to Turkey and Greece with Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, to see where Paul travelled. We stopped in Rhodes, Greece, where we saw this statue of Laocoon (lay-ah-kuh-waan) and his sons. The story is that in the Trojan War, he recognizes the Trojan horse for what it is, an elaborate ruse to convince the residents of Troy to allow the enemy inside their gates. Despite the wisdom, knowledge, and the accuracy of Laocoon's vision, the people don't believe him and he and his sons die, attacked by larger-than-life serpents.

Laocoon knows the truth, but he is unable to convince those around him because he is not a good communicator. His warnings go unheeded because he lacks the skills to reach the people. It is not enough for us to know the truth. If we want the world to be saved, we must be wise about how we present the gospel. We must learn to be in relationship with others and built on our powers of communication so that the truth enters into hearts and lives. In modern speak, we cannot rely on our church attendance and our private personal journey of faith to somehow magically "catch" on the people around us. We have to find ways to speak their language and bring them to

Jesus. We must tell people we love Jesus, share how he is working in our lives, and invite others to follow.

The Greeks address Phillip politely and say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Their simple statement resonates today. “We wish to see Jesus.” Maybe we are here today because we too, wish to see Jesus. They wanted to see the physical Jesus, but their questions would likely have been some of the same ones we would ask, “How can you bring the dead to life? How can you be a King in such a torn-up world? How can you see injustice and not just zap everyone? Do outsiders have a place with you? How can we get close and stay close as your followers?”

Although the text isn’t 100% clear on this, it appears to me that what follows is a somewhat private conversation between Phillip, Andrew, and Jesus. Maybe they are standing off to one side, while the Greeks wait on the other side of the room. In my mind’s eye, Jesus is clear-eyed, determined, but the disciples look puzzled, like they are saying, “Come again?” Or “What’s that?” They love Jesus so much. They would do anything for him. But, my goodness, he says the hardest things, things they really can’t understand!

First, he says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Jesus is announcing that his mission is near completion. When he hears the Gentiles have come—that the people who are not Jews are seeking him out—Jesus knows God is fulfilling the promise to Abraham back in Genesis 12:3, “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” And in Isaiah where the prophet outlines the purpose of his

chosen people: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6). He knows the end of his time of earth is near and that the fulfillment of all God promised was at hand.

Jesus identifies this moment as a pivot point in the Gospel. The door is opening for all people, all nations, the whole world to come to Jesus. The text foreshadows what happens in Acts with Peter and Cornelius. Peter explains to the Christian leaders, (Acts 11:12) “The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us.” Our challenge is to hear Jesus on this, to understand in our current context, that God’s plan prevails and that Jesus’ gospel continues to be the fulfillment of what he said in the synagogue at Capernaum, quoting the prophet Isaiah:

“...he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18)

Jesus calls us to see ourselves clearly, to question our own motivations, and to see others the way he sees them, particularly those who are oppressed and cast out.

Have you ever lost a password? Sometimes we can spend hours, even days, chasing after that magic code that will let us into our account. It feels like our lives can hang (or fall!) on the whim of a passcode. What Jesus says in response to the news that the Greeks want to see him is a bit cryptic, almost like the disciples need a password to understand it. He says, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those

who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” We know now he was talking about his death and resurrection and the subsequent spread of the gospel. What did the disciples hear when he said that? They likely didn’t fully understand, but they knew he was talking about priorities. They understood what it meant to plant a seed and watch it grow and multiply.

Jesus’ death on the cross revealed the power of sacrificial love. He says, a few verses later (12:32): “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He invites his disciples, and that means us here today, to stop clinging to the things of this world, and take up our crosses so we can gain the life that really matters. We have to “hate” this life—the things of this world—money, power, control, pride, envy, boastfulness— so we gain the new life that goes on into eternity. The cross is the password that helps us begin to understand. The cross unlocks the mystery.

Jesus goes on: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”

When we don’t understand, let’s keep serving.

When we have lots of questions, let’s keep serving.

When we want to stay close to our Master, let’s keep serving.

As Jesus’ faithful servants, we follow him on the way to the cross. We walk with him through Holy Week. We carry the cross with him as his blood drips onto the Via

Dolorosa. When he is crucified, we are right there, and our lives are crucified with Christ so that we no longer live but Christ lives in us. Praise be to God. Amen.