

## LENT 5- PASSION SUNDAY – JERIMIAH 31:31-34 John 12: 20-33

Let's go back through the lens of time to a city called Jerusalem. There are all kinds of people gathering around him in this Cosmopolitan city. Stories are being told about Jesus and his works. Some have seen his remarkable deeds. One day some Greeks come to Philip, now Philip's name is Greek, and so they feel a little more comfortable about talking to him, and they say. "Sir, we would like to see Jesus".

Philip is not sure how to reply to that statement, and so he goes to find Andrew. Let's think about that for a moment. Someone chatted about Jesus to others. Do we ever do that, or do we find it embarrassing? Do we perhaps leave that to formal religious figures?

Most of us would be surprised by the infinite power of a word from a lay Christian. It can have an influence far beyond the statements of ordained figures. Many of us have some idea that to speak about Jesus we have to know some mysterious thing called theology. We don't at least not in any technical sense. To speak simply and naturally about the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is significant in your life is to speak the most powerful theology!

The request of those Greeks sounds in millions of people's lives in every age and in every society. We wish to see Jesus. You know all really profound things are often expressed with such utter simplicity. If someone came and said to you that they wished to see Jesus, what would you do?

I would hope that first of all, you might be deeply humbled, because the very request means that in some way, however limited, the person has caught from you a glimpse of what Jesus might be like. The possibility might make us want to laugh. But we must remember that Our Lord can use, and has used, the most apparently unprepared material – human beings.

And then next you might then bring that person to church to meet your Priest, other Christians who share the love of Jesus and are willing to share their faith with them. Perhaps bring them to a Bible Study, or someone whom you know and whom you trust to reach out to someone sensitively. We would do this because Jesus must be seen in his people today. There is no other way.

So how do we see Jesus? The most sacred place is in the Eucharist, where we come to be fed spiritually so that we can face the work a day world with Christ renewed within us. That is why the Anglican Church has reclaimed the Eucharist as the main worship service on Sundays over that of Morning Prayer.

The mark of the Christian Church is community. We gather Sunday by Sunday to break bread together. It is at the heart of what we do. There is a miracle that happens whenever we share our bread or ourselves with others. Bread symbolizes the life of the many who work together to produce it. We are sustained and nurtured by bread. It symbolizes our life, Christ's body. We are all fed by the same holy bread. We all become that which we eat, the Body of Christ. In the breaking of the bread we see Jesus.

In the passing of the Peace, we see Jesus. The Peace is an encounter, as it reminds us that we meet Christ in others and without that encounter it is impossible to meet God. "If anyone says "I love God" and he hates his brother, (or neighbour or anyone) he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1John 4: 20).

The Peace is also a reconciliation for we hear in Matthew "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift". And that is why the Passing of the Peace is at the particular place that it is in the Eucharist. Everyone needs to be in complete communion with all present. The passing of the peace should be an empowering gesture to each other. . That gesture is to acknowledge the Christ in the other person. Christ meeting Christ within each one of us. It is a very sacred moment and not something to be dismissed lightly. For it is a foretaste of the banquet in the kingdom. The peace and unity experienced provide a glimpse of the kingdom which is yet to come. The peace of Christ is the peace that passes all understanding – it is God's peace.

Jesus was under no illusion that the request of the Greeks meant that the future was to be any less costly. Once again he talks about death before there can be new life. That is eternally true in human experience. The man or woman who loves only themselves is lost. Jesus says that with chilling simplicity and clarity.

There must be a dying of self before there can be a rising of the living Christ in our deepest being. His self replaces our self-centered self. Each one of us ceases to be centre, and Christ becomes centre of our lives. When that happens, love flows and our lives are changed as to how we live.

That does not make our self any less. What it does do is to mysteriously make each one of our self more, even though that self is no longer at the centre of our existence. We are no longer a prisoner of our self. We are Christ's prisoner. Therefore, because we are his, we are free to be truly our self.

Yet we need to see Jesus more than ever. The mark of our day is alienation. People feel alone, isolated. The family is no longer the strong social unit it once was. Lines of communication so easily break down. Research into family life came up with the statistic that the average couple probably spends between nine and twelve minutes a day in meaningful conversation.

Don't we joke about whom in the family operates the remote control on the TV? We probably consider that it is about who has power in a relationship, but I suspect it is really an indicator of how little we communicate with one another. Far more time is spent in passive activities like watching television than in intimate conversation with one another. If we don't find time to talk to one another, I wonder if we find time to talk to God.

We have lost our sense of community. Our anonymous society locks itself behind closed doors. Unless you have children or a dog, you probably don't even know your neighbours. It is easy to say that you love your neighbour if you never have to deal with them. Yet to be human is to seek the strength and support that comes from being part of a community. Companionship is a human need.

We mourn the decline in the Christian faith. When the un-churched do actually reach out and try to find their way into our churches, they are met with barriers that we have erected. We speak what might as well be a foreign language. There's the ever present conflict between the BAS and the BCP and the Common Praise and the old hymn book. No wonder many see the Church as ir-relevant.

Our faith in Jesus Christ should enliven and inspire us to gather weekly in worship-for that is what Christ asks of us and for whatever form that takes on any given Sunday, to praise, to

pray to break bread and to thank God for all that he has given us .Are there times when Jesus cannot be seen because of the way we present him? Are there times when we are not really looking? Do we want Jesus to fit our preconceived notions of who God is? Our lifestyle? Are we so set in our rigid patterns of worship that we become unintelligible to the uninitiated?

Are we so tied to a book or a way of doing things or our own needs that we fail to let someone in to see Christ? Are we so afraid of being the wheat that we live death instead of life? Everything we do as a church is done so that we will see Jesus - in our own lives and in the lives of others. It comes as a longing inside our minds and hearts. It comes as a hunger that simply won't go away. It comes as we journey to the foot of the cross, for we must be willing to see Jesus as the one who died and rose again, the one who accepts and who empowers.

There must be no foreigners when it comes to following Christ. There must be no 'them' and 'us'. We must be a welcoming community of faith. When someone comes seeking, we must simply do what we do in our own homes, open the door and invite them in. If we need to, we must expand the table, add a leaf, lay some more places, find some more chairs, become truly inclusive. But more than that, we must become the kind of community that reaches out beyond itself. We must be sharers of this wonderful faith.

We must seek Christ in others, and let Christ be seen in us. Let us be renewed in the Spirit this day. *Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus. Amen.*