

Wanting to See Jesus

John 12:20-31
March 21, 2021

Today's reading from John's Gospel is so intense that it is almost comical. Some intellectual Greeks decide that Jesus has shown up on their radar screen and they arrive to meet him. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" they announce, and Jesus says, "it's too late, I don't have time for you guys, my life is coming to end here." And you can see the Greeks backing off, saying, "Oh, ok, we'll be back tomorrow."

There is a story of a busy young man, who came up behind a old farmer, who was taking his hog to market. The young man was walking briskly and as he comes close to the slow-moving farmer, he sees something strange. The farmer was picking up the hog and carrying it for a bit, and then dropping the hog. Then he would wipe his brow, rest up a little, and pick up the hog again and carry it. The young man had to make a comment: "that is the most inefficient way to get a hog to the market. Why don't you just let the hog walk to the market? Doing it your way is going to take all day. To which the farmer replied, "Son, time ain't nothing to a hog."

Which one had it together: The young man or the farmer? It all depends on how you look at time. Are you the rushing young man, full of efficiency? Or are you the old farmer, going about your life the way you always have. Or how about this: Are you the hog? That would make God the old farmer. God picks you up, carries you a little way forward then puts us down, picks us up again, in hopes, that you might stop focusing so much on where you are going, and instead notice where you are. After all, time ain't nothing to a hog.

Perhaps Jesus missed the social cues when the Greeks announced that they wish to see Jesus. Maybe he missed that they were busy people. They did everything they were supposed to do to get to very important people: they talked to Jesus' assistants, and they expressed certain urgency: Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

But they missed their chance for a face-to-face meeting. If they want to see Jesus, they will have to follow him. You want to see Jesus? You don't get to make an appointment.

How did they walk away from that encounter? Did they back away nervous, or did they say, so that did not work out, we did not get our big meeting with him, not our big life changing experience. So, let's go to the next teacher and see if he can more adequately meet our needs.

That is kind of how a lot of our culture operate in the religious landscape. We want to see Jesus, and we want to see him now, but if he doesn't show up or we don't like what we see, we move on to the next thing. We want answers. Heaven forbid Jesus shows up and not deliver. Heaven forbid he be complicated and demanding. We don't have time for that.

My flight from Louisville to Chicago was cancelled due to bad weather. It became clear that nobody was flying to Chicago anytime soon. People began comparing travel woes – one young father was really eager to get home to his kids, another had a medical appointment. I was supposed to participate at an event at the Lutheran Seminary in Chicago and it seemed to me that my task was most important: I was going there to see Jesus.

I called my husband to complain and he did this annoying thing suggesting that instead of just complaining about it I do something about it. “Tuula, it’s a 6-hour drive and you have your car parked at the airport. Why don’t you start driving and you’ll be there tonight.

But there was a reason I had bought an airline ticket. I never considered driving there. And I certainly did not feel like I could do that drive all by myself. And then it hit me: I was surrounded by all kinds of people who might be able to help me. “You wanna ride with me to Chicago?” I asked, half joking with the father wanting to see his kids. “You bet” he said.

What had I got myself into? This guy could be a murderer, or worse, compulsive talker. “I am in,” he said, and we were off.

Later people told me that I was crazy to go on this road trip with a stranger, but neither of us would have made it alone. Life is better when we look out for one another. In fact it ended up being fun and the time flew by. I thought I was going to my religious conference to meet Jesus, but instead I met him on the way. Nobody in that car was actually Jesus, but Jesus was present, I believe, in this communion of two strangers.

And that is sort of how I think the church works. We belong to a faith community because we want to see Jesus. Instead, we see other people, and this year not even that! It seems like a rip off, but it isn’t. Faith communities matter as they teach us to see Jesus by following him.

So we walk behind Jesus, trying to figure out what he looks like, trying to hear what he says, and then realize that he has been with us all along. It’s not like Jesus hangs out only in churches, but I think it is in faith communities that we learn to recognize him everywhere else.

I have never been surprised to hear that people find God in the sunset. The miracle is finding God in the company of other people. The miracle is that Jesus shows up here. But not when we demand to see him, but on his schedule. “Sir we wish to see Jesus”. Doesn’t he understand that we are busy people or does Jesus think - time ain’t nothing to a hog.

We can have endless debates about who has seen Jesus and who he actually is. Is he the risen Christ who died on the cross, is he the one who exists outside time and space and was there at the creation of the universe, is he the spiritual teacher and from whom we can gain wisdom and courage. I want to see Jesus, but which one?

In a life changing moment thirty-three years ago, when my infant daughter was slipping out of this life, I was weeping in a hospital room by myself, and in that moment it was Jesus, the

Saviour who put his hands on my shoulders and asked me to trust him. I did and I felt this lightness take over that I still carry with me. And it was Christ the King who came to me when I flew over Greenland and saw the glaciers and was in awe. And it was Jesus, who said he wants to gather us all up like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, Jesus who accompanied me in the work of parenting and scoped me up in the failures every parent knows and only a mothering saviour can see.

And it was Jesus who gathered so many misfits at the table that I can see I have a place there too. And it is that same welcoming Jesus that makes me want to share the table with all people of goodwill as the foretaste of the heavenly banquet, where I believe there will be room for all of us.

Sir we wish to see Jesus. Sorry you don't get to set the appointments. Try following him instead. Amen.