



We Want to see Jesus!

~ John 12:20-26

"They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ~ John 12:21

These are the words of some foreign visitors, who had come to a Jewish holiday. The holiday was a Holy day. It

was the Passover, which was actually a commemoration of a time before the Jewish slaves were freed from Egypt, when the children of every household were saved from a plague of death by sacrificing a lamb, then applying the blood from that lamb to the door post and lintel of their houses.

This celebration had been held every year for over fifteen-hundred years. What made this particular year different was that the real Lamb of God was at the celebration. You remember when John the Baptist first introduced Jesus, he said, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! Now, he is actually at the celebration to become the sacrifice. Even though he was at the feast, he was unknown and unrecognized. Perhaps, the Apostle John said it well, when he said, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:10-11).

So here is Jesus, unrecognized, in the middle of a large crowd of worshipers. The object of worship is unrecognized by the worshipers. This is a scene we might find repeated in our own time. People talking about Christ, people doing ritual toward Christ, people planning the work and ministry of Christ, people taking part in the celebration, while at the same time overlooking Christ himself.

While we are inclined to focus on the Church itself, its ministry and its ministers, John the Baptist had a refreshing and clear way to look at Christian endeavor. John said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him" (John 3:28). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Ministry is only safe when the church makes much of Christ. That is, the church is on target when it makes much of what Christ did, what Christ said, what Christ asked of us, and when the church seeks Christ's own presence. We have nothing else to make something of; who else is worthy, other than the Lamb of God? While the teaching of Christ includes a great caring, loving, reaching out toward and supporting of human beings in the world, it does not include the proliferation of ranking systems among ourselves.

From the very start, the church had a penchant for defining itself by the importance of its various groups. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, "What I mean is that each of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephas, or I belong to Christ" (I Corinthians 1:12). There is even a problem with the last category of folk who, apparently, wanted to indicate that they belonged to Christ more than others belong to Christ. We all

belong to Christ; we are all sheep; we are all his sheep.

Paul explained it more clearly when he said, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each" (I Corinthians 3:5). (That is, each of us have our *providential post* to tend, and it's as simple as that.) Everyone does his or her God-given work, some planting, some watering, you do your part, I do my part, but God makes us all grow. Only God gives personal, human, spiritual growth.

It is possible for us to have church and to worship, just like the people at the Holy day, and not notice the Lord, who we came to worship in the first place. If there is no, as John said, increasing of the Lord Jesus, what is the outcome of our worship?

Well then, here are a few gentiles, searching through a large religious crowd to find the Christ to worship. I wonder if our attractions haven't confused people some. Certainly, they have a wide range, all the way from "calling fire down from heaven," to the "best *this or that* East of the Rocky Mountains," to "LeRoy Brown was the meanest man in town --meaner than a junkyard dog" --and now he is a Saint. Come and see; come and hear LeRoy Brown. It is true, our "glory is often our shame."

Listen to what Jesus said, when Andrew introduced them to him: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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" (John 12:24). Jesus knew what they needed to see about him. They needed to see him in his birth, his death, and his life-giving resurrection.

In 1969, I, also, went to the places where Jesus lived and ministered, where he walked and prayed. I stayed in the towns where Jesus stayed. None of it would have held meaning for me if I had not first seen Jesus in his birth, death and resurrection. What did these travelers see on their trip to Jerusalem?

First, we wish to see Jesus in his birth.

"But, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Galatians 4:4-5). God wants us for his children. This was the first step in God's plan. This is the foundation stone of our Christian faith. This is the subject of Christmast. This is the fulfillment of prophecy.

Seven hundred years before Jesus came, Isaiah said, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He was the ruler born in Bethlehem, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting, spoken of in Micah 5:2. "and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, *God is with us*" (Matthew 1:23).

His birth changed all of history, dividing it into B.C. and A.D. Before Christ, every nation had its own calendar; people dated from the birth of a king or a national event. Now, everyone dates from the birth of Christ, except the Jewish people who missed out on his birth. Every legal document, mortgage, check, newspaper must be dated in reference to the birth of Christ. Every letter you send or receive gives witness to the birth of Christ; it is post marked *In the year of our Lord 2023*.

"The shepherds said one to another, `Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Luke 2:15). We wish to see Jesus in his birth!

"Jesus answered them, `The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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" (John 12:23-24).

We wish to see Jesus in his death.

"The hour is come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

The death of Christ was precipitated when the Jewish religious leaders rejected him as the Messiah. When they did that, he became the Christ of the world, not just the Jewish people. All this was in God's good plan, that he might be the Savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The death of Christ was the seed that fell into the earth, to become the power of God unto salvation to *everyone* that believes, not just the Jewish people.

To see Jesus, we need to see him dying for us, or we haven't seen him at all. In Matthew 27:54-55, there are a sympathetic few who are gathered around the cross to see Jesus in his death.

"Now, when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, `Truly this man was God's son!" Many women were also there looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him."

We wish to see Jesus in his death. Jesus didn't point folk to his birth, he pointed them to his cross. He must be the Christ of the cross and the empty tomb if he is to help us. "For the corn of wheat must fall into the earth and die, or it abides alone."

The harvest results from the death and resurrection of the kernel. While the corn of wheat died, that is not the end of the story. If the corn of wheat did not come forth with new life, there would be no hope for farmer --there would be no hope for any of us.

~ I Corinthians 15:17-20

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead."

We wish to see Jesus in his resurrection!

"After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." "But the angel said to the women, `Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay" (Matthew 28:1,2).

Mary saw an empty tomb. The grain of wheat fell into the ground, died, rose again, and brought with it from the dead a living church. This is what it means to be a Christian.

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

God raised him from the dead; if it were not for that, there would be no church today.

We must all see Jesus

We must see him in his birth. Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass! Emanuel, God with us! Let us see the virgin-born Son of God. He was not born of natural consequences.

We must see Jesus in his death; dying for us. The centurion saw, and said, "surely, this is the Son of God."

We must see him in his resurrection. "Come see the place where the Lord lay." We must see him living, and we must see that life is for us. Think of what Jesus said to the disciples before he died. The story ends where it began. It begins and ends with "fear not" –Angels, Angels saying, "Fear not, for I bring good tidings of great joy which shall be to all mankind, for unto us is born this day a Savior which is Christ the Lord." And now as we end the story, Angels saying, "Don't be afraid, He is not here; He is risen." It is a story with a consolation, "Fear Not." Gloria is now doing Children's Lessons on line, entitled: "Fear Not." This is why –this is why we don't need to be afraid.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live." ~ John 14:18-19

The seed did fall into the earth, died, and rose again; you know the fruit that it brought forth. It overflows our world today! Look for the goodness; it is all around you. Don't always be looking to the next election to find it. You are all ready surrounded by the good Christ is doing.

Perhaps the words of these foreign visitors should remind us all of what the church is really all about: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." It's what we ought to be looking for every time we come to church. "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Where's Jesus? We cannot afford one more cause, to take up all of our attention, –and "push Jesus out."

Years ago, there was an old lady, named Clara Peller, who became famous by going into a fast-food restaurant, ordering a hamburger and asking "Where's the beef?" I think our question should be "Where's Jesus" every time we enter a church. If it doesn't look like Jesus, it probably isn't. **We want to see Jesus.**