

LENT V 21 March 2021
The Reverend Roger B. White
Preached in St Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT
Jeremiah 31.31-34; Psalm 51.1-13; Hebrews 5.5-10; John 12.20-33

Some Greeks came to Philip and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'. Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

There is a pulpit in a parish church in New Jersey that has on its desk a shiny brass plaque reading 'Sir, we would see Jesus'. It is the first thing that any preacher sees upon arrival, and it is a sobering reminder to her/him that the faithful in the pews are seeking something --a lively encounter with someone they hope can change something, ever so much

The plaque cites the opening words of our Gospel reading for today. Some Greek-speakers --probably 'God fearers', Gentiles on the fringes of Jewish communities and curious about, sympathetic to Judaism and its single God-- have come to Jerusalem for the Passover observances.

They have heard about Jesus because he has rapidly become famous. He is a powerful preacher and teacher; he has also turned a lot of water into a lot of wine and has fed thousands with only a few loaves and some small fish. There have been several astonishing healings, and he has driven the money changers from the Temple; finally, he has revived the obviously dead Lazarus. The worried and frightened Temple leadership have realised that they need quickly to kill him off.

And the arrival of non-Jews seeking him out clearly changes something for him, in him. He seems to realise that he has done what he needs to do --to have broken through the formidable dividing line between Jew and Gentile-- and is now being heard amongst all of the Creation.

A mystery to his own neighbors --'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?'-- and anathema to the leaders of his beloved Temple, Jesus responds to the sudden, sympathetic interest of these Gentiles with the dramatic declaration that the moment of his Glorification has come. The thunder-like voice that, in the other three Gospels, we hear rejoicing at Jesus's baptism and at his Transfiguration on the mountaintop, in John's Gospel proclaims that, in Jesus, God is already glorified and will continue to glory.

At the moment when the non-Jews seek him and when the Temple leadership turn their backs, Jesus declares that 'now is the judgment of this *kosmos*' --what Fr David aptly calls 'the system'-- and draws the connection between what in a few hours will happen to him and the story about Moses that we heard last week.

The Hebrews, in flight from their slavery in Egypt and frustrated with God whilst they struggle in the wilderness, complain bitterly about their hardships. Outraged, God

sends poisonous serpents --please remember the serpent in the Adam & Eve story-- to sting them. God then tells Moses to create a serpent in bronze, put it on a pole, lift it up, and then tell the Hebrews that if they are willing to look up hopefully at it, they will survive the deadly stings. Jesus says to the Greeks and to everyone else that, when he is lifted up on the Cross, those willing to look up at him in hope will truly know life.

All of this comes tumbling out because some non-Jews have joined the ranks of those Jews who are trying to understand just who this compelling and also perplexing Jesus person is, what he is about. And that wondering extends well beyond the Crucifixion. For, the Letter to the Hebrews, from which we have just heard, is a very early Christian sermon in which the preacher puzzles through how Jesus is different from anyone else he can think of: Jesus is different from Moses the Law Giver, and also from the old prophets; he is different from God's messengers, the angels; and he is different from the priests of the Temple.

And still today, those of us whose attentions he has caught, wonder (whether they admit it or not), Who is he ...? And our readings today offer a suggestion, a way of thinking about it

We have his own invitation to envision him on the Cross, inviting each of us --everyone, of whatever tradition or color or nationality or sexuality or ethnicity-- to allow him to draw us into him, into his mind and voice and hands and heart. In Psalm 51 we have prayed, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God', and we have heard the prophecy to Jeremiah that God wants to change our hearts so that the Law is no longer inscribed on stone tablets outside of them but embedded in them. God wants us to read and hear and feel in our hearts, 'Love. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself'.

The Greeks approach Philip because he has a Greek name and so must speak Greek. Philip brings them to Andrew, who also has a Greek name and also speaks Greek, and Andrew also welcomes them. He is the first disciple whom Jesus ever called, and is the first ever to know how Jesus can change human lives, and he brings the Greeks to Jesus. In John's Gospel the moment is the revelation to the Gentiles, to the whole world, of the Jesus whom Andrew may know very simply as ... the re-Creator of human hearts. Amen.