

March 17, 2024
The Fifth Sunday of Lent – Year B
Grace, Muncie
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:1-13

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

In the Name of God whom we name Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sundays like this remind me of “Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?” Some of you knew it as a computer game; I knew it as a television show. Today’s lectionary provides us with our own version – a sort of “Where in Judea is Jesus Christ?”

Throughout the seasons of Epiphany and Lent, we’ve followed Jesus and his disciples around the Holy Land, from his baptism in the Jordan to his Transfiguration on the mountain; from teaching and healing in Galilee and beyond, to clearing the money changers out of the Temple. Now, however, all that galivanting around the countryside has come to an end, and our focus is on the place we always knew we were headed. Jerusalem.

The passage from John’s gospel that we just heard serves as a turning point, a hinge, not only in John’s story of Jesus, but also in our own story, as we move through the end of Lent and into the beginning of Holy Week next Sunday. Something is in the air. Something has changed.

As Jesus and his disciples arrive in Jerusalem for the Passover, some Greeks approach Philip saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Philip gets Andrew and they go together to tell Jesus that folks are looking for him.

How does Jesus respond? Does he ask who the autographs are for? Or does he say he wants to be alone? No. Instead, he gives a strange answer... “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

“At last,” I can hear the disciples say, “He’s spent all this time saying, ‘my hour is not yet come.’ Now we can really get this show on the road!” And then...

It should come as no surprise to us that Jesus’ idea of glory and our idea of glory are radically different. Jesus’ idea of glory has nothing to do with military power, or political power, or even religious power – the kind of thing we would expect from any Messiah worth their salt. For Jesus, to be glorified was to embrace the cross, that scandalous symbol of suffering. For Jesus, to be glorified was to make that ultimate gift of self-offering: “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” (Jn 12:24-26).

For us, glory is usually about *having* more: more money, more prestige, more power, more, well, more. For Jesus, glory was about *giving* more. Jesus demonstrates this throughout John's gospel, especially in the final chapters that we will walk through in the coming days. Jesus gives himself to his friends by washing their feet. Jesus gives himself to the world by dying on the cross. "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32).

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Think for a moment of last week's lessons about the bronze serpent that would cure snakebite, and that passage in John where Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15).

As this is St. Patrick's Day, it makes sense to think about snakes for a moment. Among the legends associated with St. Patrick is that he stood atop an Irish hillside and banished snakes from Ireland—prompting all the serpents to slither away into the sea. Wikipedia tells us, though, that research suggests snakes never occupied the Emerald Isle in the first place.

Perhaps the tale about Patrick and the snakes was a local adaptation of Jesus casting a group of demons into a herd of swine who then run off the cliff into the sea.¹ Perhaps it was a way of saying that Patrick's faith in Jesus Christ could banish what we fear most, and snakes seem a pretty good symbol. Many of you will remember the scene in the 1981 film, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," when Indiana Jones moaned, "why did it have to be snakes?"

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In Jesus, God entered fully into the human experience – into its joys, into its sorrows, even into the snake pit of the thing you and I fear the most – death and the grave. Jesus took on our humanity, entered into our experiences in order to redeem them...and us. The Word made flesh heals the sick, feeds the multitudes, raises the dead, and finally completes his task by dying on the cross. "And when I am lifted up..."

Think back for a moment to this morning's Collect: "grant that, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found." This is what those Greeks were seeking when they asked, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

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¹ Matthew 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20, and Luke 8:26–39.

You and I are surrounded by people longing to see Jesus – and not just here within the walls of Grace Church. The people who are longing to see Jesus are at Walmart, and Payless, and Gathering Grace, and the bank...maybe even the post office!

Every day we hear and read more and more about division, and war, and violence committed with venomous words and poisonous deeds. Our hearts break open hearing about people who are teetering on the brink of disaster, and those who have already slipped over the edge. The entire world seems to be crying out, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

Those of you who gather week by week in this place have good reason to hope that you have a certain edge. You know that you encounter Jesus in the Scriptures and in the Sacraments. You also have the experience of others being the hands of Christ for you.

But what about the folks you meet on the street, or in the shops, or online? Where are they going to see Jesus? Do they see Jesus in your life? Do they see the Servant-Lord who washed the feet of his friends? Do they see the prophet who cleansed the Temple? Do they see the healer who made the blind to see?

If others are going to be able to see Jesus in you, then you must – first – let Jesus heal you, you must – first – feed upon Jesus' body broken for you, and above all you must – first – allow yourself to be drawn to Jesus who draws all things to himself...on the cross.

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So, here's the shameless commercial about allowing yourself to be drawn into a full participation in the services of Holy Week. Through the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus has redeemed, will redeem, and is redeeming, every part of your life...Including your maybe-not-so-pretty-anymore feet...and, especially, your fear of death. My invitation to you, my challenge to you, is to throw some reserve and caution to the wind, and step out of your comfort zone and into Holy Week.

Come join the crowd next Sunday as we shout both "hosannah" and "crucify him!" Let someone wash your feet and then remember the gift of the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday. Come and sit quietly at the foot of the Cross on Friday and Saturday mornig. Then on Saturday evening, gather to remember the stories of our life in God as we kindle the new light of the resurrection. In all of this, allow Jesus to draw you to himself.

Sometimes we ask, "Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?" Other times, it might be, "Where in Judea is Jesus Christ?" But perhaps the better question is, "Where in the world are the people of God in Christ?" In our best moments, we are standing at the foot of the cross. For it is here, at the foot of the cross, that we begin to catch a

glimpse of life at its fullest. It is at the foot of the cross that the snakes in our lives are banished. It is at the foot of the cross that we see Jesus modeling a life lived no longer for ourselves. It is here where our hearts must be surely fixed, where true joys are to be found.

Sir, we would see Jesus, the Greeks say to Philip. My friends, we, too, must desire to see Jesus, so that when others seek out Jesus, they might see him in us. As we journey together in these last days of Lent, entering into the mystery of the crucifixion, I invite you to keep on your hearts the deep desire reflected in the words of the old spiritual, *Give me Jesus*:

In the morning when I rise, Give me Jesus.
O when I am alone, Give me Jesus.
O when I come to die, Give me Jesus.
You can have all this world, Give me Jesus.
Amen.