



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan  
by The Reverend Vicki Hesse, *Associate*  
Tuesday of Holy Week, April 11, 2017**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts  
be always acceptable to you O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.*

A few years ago, my partner and I attended the Wild Goose Festival. It's a 4-day gathering of church geeks and "spiritual but not religious" seekers to engage in spirituality, music, art and social justice – in a variety of venues: small group conversations and main stage performances. Most of the attendees that I met were looking for connections or experiences to fuel their faith and inspire action. People came not just to "check out" the festival, they wanted an experience.

It sounds like the Greeks were those kinds of attendees, seeking an experience, not just information. They didn't just wander into the Passover festival to stroll around the dusty grounds. Could be that Jesus may have been the whole reason for their trip. They first meet Philip. "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." So Philip, who himself was there to see Jesus, turns to his Andrew who then joins him to tell Jesus about these people who want to see him. It's not an unusual request, really. It's possible that most of us have asked this or thought it. I wonder if the Greeks knew what they were really asking?

Do we really know what we are asking?

I don't know what Philip and Andrew expected, but likely they did not expect to hear about death. Hearing about death is not the answer we expect when we ask about Jesus. But it's the answer he gave, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. If it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me and where I am, there will my servant be also.*"

Here, we learn how death and seeing Jesus are interwoven. To see Jesus means more than just looking at him, more than watching him on the festival stage, more than just believing his prepared speeches and watching him perform. To see Jesus, to follow him, means being participants and not spectators at a festival. If we want to see Jesus, we have to learn to die. To the degree we avoid and deny death, we refuse to see Jesus.



Professor Alyce McKenzie explains that, "... in Jewish thought, the death of a martyr was regarded as bearing much fruit. It benefited the others and the nation as a whole."<sup>1</sup> And in the Gospel of John, this kind of "fruit" is Jesus' metaphor for the life of the community of faith.<sup>2</sup> So Jesus is using this parable to show that the heart of his saving power is in the community that gathers as a result of his death.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes the gift of community when he writes in Life Together how, "... *The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in [this] companionship a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body...[receiving] each other's benedictions ...and the fellowship of [the community] is a gift of grace, nothing but grace, [allowing us] to live in community with other Christians.*"<sup>3</sup>

Seeing Jesus in community means dying to all the parts of our life that blind us to love each other; fear of the other, the need to be "right", anger or resentment of each other, even idealization or demonization of another. There are myriad ways that we separate ourselves from one another. Ultimately, seeing Jesus means dying to our own self-sufficiency. We let go of our life in order to receive God's life.

This is the work of Holy Week: learning how to die and looking through the window of death to see Jesus. This is the work of Holy Week: looking beyond the window of death to our transformation, to who we are becoming. This is the difficult and painful work of Holy Week: dying to ourselves. It is soul-troubling, as Jesus quotes of Psalm 42.

Do you want to see Jesus? Where are the places in your life that are protected, guarded, insulated, sure. These are the places of blindness. These places of pain and resentment are exactly the places of transformation. These are the places where there is a single grain of wheat containing much fruit. These are the places where we can lose our life and live the life of Jesus. These are the places where serving Jesus clears up our vision, frees us from what holds us back, and opens us to new possibilities. And this is the way of the cross: dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of living.

That is where Jesus asks to see us.

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<sup>1</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, Eavesdropping Discipleship: Reflections | "Sometimes getting within earshot of Jesus is transformative enough" as cited [here](#) on April 10, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> New Interpreter's Bible, John 12:20-26 Commentary, page 711

<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (Harper, San Francisco, 1954) p.6-7



If the Greeks at that festival listened and really absorbed what Jesus taught, they saw their path to becoming his followers. They heard a grain of wheat fall on that dusty ground. They saw the rich harvest come from that grain. They saw a cross being lifted to the sky – in small group conversations and in main stage performances. They saw a vision of all people drawn to that cross. They saw a light shine through that experience that beckoned them to walk in the light as children of the light.

May we, today, see Jesus in the transforming power of his dying.  
And may we be seen by Jesus in our new way of living.

*Amen*