

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“We Would See Jesus”  
Thomas G. Speers, III  
Lent 5—March 18, 2018

Lesson: John 12:20-33

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” There is a custom in some churches around the world of placing a small brass plaque on this side—the preacher’s side—of the pulpit. On that brass plaque are the words from our lesson today: “Sir, we would see Jesus.” It is a reminder for any who would stand up to preach, that we have not come here today to hear a book report or an analysis of the latest cultural trends. We may do both of those things and a lot of other things as well, but we have come here primarily for an encounter. At the center of the church’s life is an encounter with the holy One. Sir, we would see Jesus.

Professor Tom Long tells the story of a friend of his who was visiting churches in Scotland. One particular day he was in one of the great churches in Scotland and had the place all to himself. The church had a great high pulpit, up twelve or fifteen stairs, offering a commanding view of the congregation round about. And the friend noticed on the preacher’s side of that pulpit the little brass plaque. He thought about how inspiring it would be to stand in that pulpit and look out on the church and read: “Sir, we would see Jesus.” So, since no one was in the church, he climbed those steps and looked out across the empty congregation, and then looked down at the brass plaque and read: “Remember Edna Bailey.”<sup>1</sup>

At first, he was disappointed, and then he thought that maybe we do encounter the Holy in worship by remembering the communion of saints all around us. Of course we do. Remembering the great saints of this place and any church can help us to see Jesus more clearly. Who are the people across the years who have helped you to see Jesus in this place? I’d love to know that from you. In recent days, two strong people from this church died: Betty Kendall was almost 105 years old. Every time I saw her she was marvelously alive, full of spirit and clearly a lot of fun. Doris Hoeflinger was an elder in this church and for some time she wrote the prayer emphasis that is printed in our weekly bulletin and also in the Spire. Those two women, along with a whole host of others have helped the people of this church to see and better to understand Jesus.

But you don’t have to go back to the men and women of history to encounter Jesus in our midst. We can find him right here amongst the living, where he continues to draw all people to himself. I think particularly of one member of this congregation who looks me in the eye when he comes forward for communion, and before taking the bread, says “Tom, Jesus loves you.” I gather that when he used to serve communion, he would say the same thing to most everyone who came forward. In the simplest way, he has helped a whole host of people to see Jesus. Every congregation where I have worshipped has helped me again and again to see Jesus, very much including Green Hill, in the ways that you really do care deeply for each other. Right here in this community we can see Jesus.

He doesn’t only appear when the times are good. He has a long history of being present when the times are particularly difficult. Many years ago, two of the people who taught me a great deal about Jesus welcomed a new son into the world. He was a delight for them and for their community, but they discovered he had a heart problem and the doctors said that he would not live much past the age of five. Sadly, the doctors were right. Early one Sunday morning, this light of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Long, Brown Lectures, First Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas. February 1996.

their lives died in the hospital, just five years old. That was more than sixty years ago, yet I know people who still talk about the fact that the parents of this boy found their way to church that morning—it wasn't their home church, but they snuck in the back of another church near to the hospital and with broken hearts gave thanks to God for a wonderful son. There are people today who have seen Jesus because of them. For you will find Jesus not only in the good times, but also especially in the hard times.

Sir, we would see Jesus. The Greeks show up and ask to see Jesus but who is it that they really want to see? Are they there because they want to see a miracle worker? Do they hope to see him walk on water or raise someone from the dead? Is it a spectacle they seek? If so, they will be disappointed. On hearing that they have come to see him, Jesus suddenly explains that his hour has come. "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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

So if you want to see Jesus, begin by giving your life in service to others. As Paul writes to the Philippians, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Let your life be that seed that will help others to grow more deeply in faith. Look to those who follow Jesus' example of service. If you've never joined in preparing a meal for Emmanuel Dining Room, or volunteered at Sunday Breakfast Mission or Urban Promise, or helped to deliver food with Meals on Wheels, do that sometime. You may well see something of Jesus in serving God's needy people in this city.

I think of Dr. King and all the ways he gave his life in service to others, while calling our beloved nation to live up to its ideals of justice and equality. What might we learn from him in helping others to see Jesus?

If we would see Jesus, how might we give our lives in service to immigrants in our midst? How might we ensure that children are safe in schools? How might we decrease the cycle of violence? How might we support the poor around the world and right here in our own community? When people look at our lives, what do they see of Jesus?

Back in 1980, Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero preached his final sermon on this passage of Scripture. He was shot before he finished. He said, "you have just heard in Christ's gospel that one must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and that those who try to fend off the danger will lose their lives, while those who out of love for Christ give themselves to the service of others, will live, live like the grain of wheat that dies, but only apparently. If it did not die, it would remain alone. The harvest comes about only because it dies, allowing itself to be sacrificed in the earth and destroyed. Only by undoing itself does it produce the harvest."<sup>2</sup> How might we give of ourselves to build God's new community and to help others to see Jesus?

If you would see Jesus, look around you. He is right here, waiting to be found by those who seek to discover his presence. Use your life to serve him in our hurting world.

Let us pray: Open our eyes and our hearts that we might see your presence, O God. Challenge and encourage us that others might learn of you by looking at our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Lessons and Other Statements*, translated by Michael J. Walsh. Orbis Books © 1985

