

**Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion, April 14, 2019**

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## Seeing Jesus in Holy Week

[John 12:20–23](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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After Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, some Greeks—non-Jewish believers who came TO WORSHIP AT THE PASSOVER FEAST approached the apostle Philip, asking, “SIR, WE WISH TO SEE JESUS” (vv 20, 21).

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Some years back I had the opportunity to visit St. John Lutheran Church in Seward, Nebraska, near the campus of Concordia University, Nebraska. I was struck by the pulpit, especially by what can be seen from up in the pulpit. Clearly and boldly etched on the pulpit’s white stone surface where only the preacher can see them are the words of today’s Gospel reading: “SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS” (v 21). It’s the congregation asking the preacher to show them Jesus in every sermon, through every service, and in every time of spiritual care. What a great reminder for the pastor that his job is simply to let the people see Jesus!

I wonder, however, if the Greeks who come to Philip have any idea what they are asking or what they’ll see when they say, “SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS” (v 21).

The Passover feast is near. Visitors and pilgrims fill Jerusalem. Anticipation and excitement hang in the air. Our Lord has just entered Jerusalem on a donkey while the crowds TOOK BRANCHES OF PALM TREES AND WENT OUT TO MEET HIM, CRYING OUT, “HOSANNA! SAVE US NOW! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, EVEN THE KING OF ISRAEL!” (Jn 12:13).

All sorts of stories are going around about Him. How He healed a man born blind by mixing His saliva with dirt (Jn 9). And, just a day earlier, how He called His friend Lazarus out of the grave after his body had been decomposing for four days (Jn 11). Hard to believe, except THE CROWD THAT HAD BEEN WITH HIM WHEN HE CALLED LAZARUS OUT OF THE TOMB AND RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD CONTINUED TO BEAR WITNESS. They saw it happen! So THE REASON WHY THE CROWD WENT TO MEET Jesus on Palm Sunday WAS THAT THEY HEARD HE HAD DONE THIS SIGN (Jn 12:17–18).

No wonder these Greeks want to see Jesus. Maybe they're hoping for a miracle, something glorious. Maybe they're expecting to hear one of His parables. Maybe they want His signature. Maybe they're after a selfie with Him. (Okay, that's not it.) Maybe they think He's going to drive the Romans out and reestablish the kingdom in Jerusalem. Whatever the case, He's a huge, polarizing celebrity, and I suspect there were all sorts of people wanting to see Him for all sorts of reasons.

And do we know what we're asking when we say, "SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS?" What are we wanting to see? What are we expecting from Him, and what will it mean for us?

It seems like a simple enough request. Philip consults with Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip go and tell Jesus. We don't know what answer they expected, but they probably weren't expecting what they heard. "Hey, Jesus, some Greek fellas would like a moment of your time. Could you let them see you?" And His reply is to start talking about death. We would see Jesus, but it's like His head is somewhere else. He's thinking about other things. We ask to see Jesus. Instead, we hear about death.

Jesus says, "THE HOUR HAS COME FOR THE SON OF MAN TO BE GLORIFIED. TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS ALONE; BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT" (Jn 12:23–24).

Somehow seeing Jesus and death are intimately related. To bear much fruit, this grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die. The Lord enters Jerusalem on a donkey, not a warhorse. His glory is hidden beneath His humility. He comes NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE (Mk 10:45). He doesn't see His life as something to hold on to but something to give away. Though He was God, He EMPTIED HIMSELF, BY TAKING THE FORM A SERVANT, BEING BORN IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN HUMAN FORM, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS (Phil 2:7–8).

You really want to see Jesus? Then see Him break the bread and give it to the disciples, saying, "Take, eat, this is My body." See Him distribute the cup with the words, "Drink of it, all of you; this is the new testament in My blood." See His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the prayers, the sweat, the cup of wrath, the betrayal with a kiss. See Him hauled before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod. See Him falsely accused, mocked, spit upon, slapped, and whipped. See His flesh ripped open and bleeding. See His head crowned with thorns. See Him stricken, smitten, and afflicted. See the nails

driven into His hands and feet. See Him LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH that He might DRAW ALL PEOPLE to Himself (Jn 12:32). See Him bear the sin of the world. See Him forgive His persecutors, rescue the dying, entrust Himself to His Father, suffer hell, finish His work, and breath His last. From an earthly perspective, it's not much to look at. The cross is shameful, horrible, something to hide from view.

What are we looking at on the cross? The wages of our sin. The wrath of God revealed against all rebellion and ungodliness. The separation from God that is hell. That thorn is my lust. That spike is my anger and resentment. That lash is my lying. That bruise is my pride.

What are we looking at on the cross? We are looking at the One who bore these things for us.

This is how we see Jesus. As way more than a miracle worker. More than a good teacher. More than a famous person of history. He is LORD (Phil 2:11) and Savior. Holy Week is a time to see Jesus anew, with fresh eyes, and we'll do that together as we gather again on Thursday evening and Friday evening and as we read the accounts of our Lord's suffering and death in all four Gospels throughout the week.

But what will it mean for us to see Jesus in this way? It will mean more than just looking at Him. He's not just an object to be viewed, whether with scorn or sympathy. To see Jesus, to have our eyes on Him, is to follow Him. We are participants in what He does, not just spectators.

Jesus says, "WHOEVER LOVES HIS LIFE LOSES IT, AND WHOEVER HATES HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL KEEP IT FOR ETERNAL LIFE. IF ANYONE SERVES ME, HE MUST FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE WILL MY SERVANT BE ALSO. IF ANYONE SERVES ME, THE FATHER WILL HONOR HIM" (Jn 12:25–26).

Seeing Jesus means learning to die with Him and in Him. To hate our life in this world. To see our sinful natures crucified and buried with Him. If we avoid and deny this death, if we keep our eyes on our own lives, then we refuse to see Jesus. Jesus is seen when we lift our eyes and take them off ourselves. He removes the blindness of sins and death.

Look! Your sins are there with Him on the cross. THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD (Jn 1:29). Your suffering and pain are there, too. HE TOOK OUR ILLNESSES AND BORE OUR DISEASES (Mt 8:17). Your death is absorbed

by His death and your hell by His suffering of hell. MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? (Mt 27:46).

See! Your life no longer belongs to you. It belongs to Him. We die with Christ, that we might live in Him. In the death of Jesus, we see the death of our sinful natures, and so we are born anew.

This Jesus isn't just for us, and the Jesus we see in Holy Week isn't something we can keep to ourselves. He came for the Greeks, too, and He wants them to see Him. Having seen Jesus, it's for us to do as Philip did earlier in John's Gospel. After being introduced to Jesus, He went and told Nathanael: "COME AND SEE" (Jn 1:46). See Him glorified and lifted up on the cross for the life of the world.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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