

In the name of our Saviour and Redeemer AND the Triune Spirit who is with us always.

Notes.

Apparently, during the middle of the 20th century in America, it was quite the fashion for John 12:20 to be posted somewhere in the pulpit where the preacher could see it.

“Sir, we would see Jesus” encouraged the whole generation of preachers to remember their primary task: showing Jesus to people who need a Saviour.

In fact, the entire Gospel of John was written with this very purpose in mind. Near the end of the book, John writes *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”* (John 20:30-31)

If seeing is believing, we can imagine these Greeks who came to Philip were hoping for more than a glimpse of a celebrity. They were hoping for more than an autograph. They not only wanted to see Jesus, they wanted to believe.

The phrase “we want to see Jesus” or “we wish to see Jesus” can’t be *fully* translated into English so simply, but the literal translation sounds awkward in our ears. It sounds awkward, but to get a better understanding of what they meant, the literal translation might be helpful. Here’s what they are saying: “Mister, we are willing to be perceiving Jesus.

Not just “we’d kinda like to see this Jesus guy” or : “we want to see him so we can tell our friends back home that we did.”

We are willing. Our desire includes the understanding that this encounter is going to change us in some way, and we are willing to take the risk.

We are willing to be *perceiving*. We want more than the opportunity to lay eyes on Jesus. We want to perceive him, to know him, to understand him, to recognise him as the Son of God. And we realise this isn’t a one-time-and-we’re-done sort of thing. It’s an ongoing relationship. We are willing to be perceiving Jesus now and indefinitely into the future. Mister Philip, sir, we want more than a backstage pass. We are willing to know Jesus personally, whatever that means.

Johns’ account doesn’t tell us if they get a face-to-face meeting with Jesus, but it does describe the way such an encounter usually happens. The Greeks approach Philip, and he goes to Andrew, and together they go to Jesus. Why do the Greeks go to Philip first, and then Philip go to Andrew? Their hometown was in Bethsaida, a place that had a history of sometimes being Jewish and sometimes being Gentile. Philip and Andrew both have Greek-sounding names, so that might have something to do with it. It’s possible that these Gentiles came to Philip first simply because they were a bit more comfortable approaching someone who seemed a little bit more like them.

That’s often how evangelism works. It’s a chain reaction. One person experiences God’s love, and shares that good news with a friend or family member. They usually don’t go out looking for someone they don’t even know to tell about Jesus – they share their experience with people they know and trust, people who are a lot like themselves. And when those people experience the same life-changing love of God, they tell their family and friends. And these people’s lives are changed, and they tell more people...

It works the other way round too. If you are thinking about buying a new car, or maybe a computer, you do a little internet research, and then ask people close to you for recommendations. You trust the people who are most like you to have the same values and viewpoint you do. As every marketing expert will tell you, word of mouth is the best form of advertising, whether you're telling someone about your own experience, or asking them for advice and help.

So it's no wonder these Greek worshippers approach the disciples who look and sound most like them, when they try to get an audience with Jesus. But the very fact that *Gentiles* are looking for Jesus is a signal, and Jesus recognises his cue.

The "very truly" (amen, amen) that opens verse 24 is an attention device: Jesus is about to say something really important. But what follows is not comforting news. He announces that his hour has now come, and the seed must die to bear fruit.

Jesus knows he has come to save more than the Jews – he has come for everyone, Jew of Gentile. Now that the Gentiles desire to "perceive" him, he recognises that the time has come for him to die, like a seed planted in the ground, so that new life can begin. And it's hard news for us too. Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour." Only by embracing death, hating life, and following Jesus through death to life can we be true disciples.

We might not like the idea of dying to self, or "hating" ourselves – it doesn't sit well with our culture's emphasis on self-esteem, and even Jesus said "love your neighbour as you love yourself," But that isn't what he is talking about here. Jesus is referring to the life we live in this broken world, where self-centredness prevents us from being God-centred. That life is doomed to death, but by dying to it, Christ offers eternal life.

John uses two different words here for the word we see as "life." When Jesus says, "those who love their life" and "those who hate their life in this world," the word for 'life' refers to our inward being, our sinful soul. But when Jesus talks about eternal life, he uses the word "*zoe*" – which means a way of *living*. So giving up our inward selfishness, dying to sin, as a seed planted in the ground must die, makes it possible for us to experience new life, an eternal way of living.

And this is what brings glory to God. Throughout the Old Testament, "glory" is used to describe the evidence of God's presence among his people. God's glory was the pillar of cloud or smoke that stayed with the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. This same cloud of smoke filled the temple to indicate God had moved into his home among the people of Israel. In the psalms, when David speaks of his own 'glory' he means "all my being".

Likewise, a name embodied all of a person's being. A name's meaning described that person's deepest identity. To be named is to be recognised for who we are at our very core. When Jesus says, "Glorify your name," there are rich, deep layers of understanding involved. In effect, Jesus is asking his Father to make himself completely known to all humanity, to show that he is present among all people, and to reveal his core identity to everyone.

And a voice from heaven answers him. We have heard this voice in other gospels at Jesus' baptism and the transfiguration, but in John's account, this is the only time "the voice from heaven" is heard. What does that voice say? "I have already done it, and I'm going to keep on doing it. I have revealed the deepest core of my identity to everyone, and I will continue to do so."

And what, exactly, is God's identity? Love. God is love (1 John 4:8). God's love has been poured out for us so that, "while we were still sinners" who didn't deserve it, "Christ died for us: (Romans 5:8).

"Mister, we are willing to be perceiving Jesus," the guests from out of town said to Philip. "This is a sign that my hour has come," answered Jesus. "Father, glorify your name. ...And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

John writes, "He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die." But John means more than the crucifixion. He means the kind of death that also includes resurrection and ascension. It's a three-way "being lifted up" – on the cross, from the grave, and into heaven, just as we sang a few minutes ago [Lord I Lift Your Name On High]. The kind of death Jesus was to die was the kind that leads to life and eternal victory over death. And Jesus invites us to that same kind of death that defeats death.

So, how do you perceive Jesus? And how can we help others to be perceiving Jesus, on a continuous, present tense basis?

On Thursday I drove to a retreat centre to attend the Clergy Leadership Academy. I'm in the second year of a three-year program, and we meet five times a year to work with a mentor, gather with our peers, and learn from experts who work intensively with us on many aspects of leading congregations well.

This week, Bishop Bruce Ough led our workshops on Radical Hospitality. Radical Hospitality refers to one of *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, as identified by Bishop Robert Schnase. (The other four are: passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission and service, and extravagant generosity.

To begin our discussion, Bishop Ough asked us to define "radical." The first thought that came to my mind was "extravagant." Others called it "extreme" and "beyond the call of duty." But one person looked up the definition on her phone's dictionary and said "it is going to the root" and that was the answer the Bishop was waiting for.

Radical Hospitality is not about the quality of our treats at Coffee Hour. In fact, according to our Bishop, Coffee Hour isn't about hospitality at all – it's about *fellowship*. That's a different thing. A very important, necessary part of being the church, and good treats are important to fellowship, but Radical Hospitality is something different.

Radical Hospitality means going to the purest, deepest root of our identity as God's beloved children, and finding ways to express that identity to others. Schnase writes, "Radical Hospitality in our personal walk with Christ begins with an extraordinary receptivity to the grace of God. In distinctive and personal ways, we invite God into our hearts and make space for God in our lives. We say Yes to God and open ourselves to the spiritual life. We accept God's love and acceptance of us. We receive God's love and offer it to others."

Here's the thing, though. As we identify ourselves with Jesus Christ, he calls us to do what he did. He calls us to die to ourselves, so we can bear fruit, like that seed planted in the ground. He calls us to hate our life in this finite, broken world, so we can gain a way of living that is eternal. That way of living, dying to self, hating our earthly limitations, is the core of Radical Hospitality. When we open ourselves to others, we put their needs ahead of our own, we inconvenience ourselves for their benefit, we make sacrifices for their sake.

Isn't that love? Putting another's needs ahead of your own? And isn't it a sign of being loved to know someone has done that for you?

Radical Hospitality is at the core, the root of what we do to open ourselves to relationship with God and with others. Just as glory and naming describe our core, being radical isn't so much so much going to the extreme or being extravagant, but about going to the root of who we are as beloved children of God. It follows then, that Radical Hospitality is all about sharing who we have become as fully and honestly as we can.

What are some ways we could do this here at St. Augustine's?

What if we were to open the 'old' front door every Sunday, to show the people driving up and down Murray Street that we are here, and we want them to know the door is open for them?

Let's take it one step further. What if we made it a practice to park further away from the church and walk to church so that there would be more parking spaces available for visitors?

It would mean inconveniencing ourselves. We might have to leave for church a few minutes earlier, to allow extra walking time, but *imagine what it would look like to our community to see a lot of people walking to church from different directions on Sunday and Wednesday mornings!* And the front door would be wide open to welcome each and every one of us!. How radical is that!

How does Christ's death show God's glory to all people of the world? By the way we, his disciples, die to self so others can experience God. Our Radical Hospitality introduces people to Jesus so they can perceive and experience that deep, profound love God has for each of us, so they can have eternal life.

This is the good news: God loves you and is always with you, extending to you Radical Hospitality by revealing his intimate self to you through Jesus Christ. As we die to self and engage in an eternal way of living, Christ calls us to extend the same Radical Hospitality to others that he has shown to us. It will mean inconveniencing ourselves. It will mean changing the way we do some things, so that 'others' become part of 'us'.

The hour has come. What shall we say, "Father, save us from this hour?" No, it is for this reason that we have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Help us to show Radical Hospitality to everyone who is "willing to be perceiving" you and your Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit,

Amen.