

Follow Jesus's style and priorities

Archbishop Geoffrey Smith

Lent 5B – Jeremiah 31.31-34, Hebrews 5.5-14, John 12.20-33

English can be a tricky language to learn for a number of reasons but including because one word can have more than one meaning. There is an example of that in today's gospel reading: the word 'see'. See, that's s-e-e not s-e-a, (that's another challenge with English-different words can sound the same). S-e-e can describe process of seeing with our eyes, or it can describe understanding, as in 'oh now I see what you mean'. It can be tricky.

Today's gospel passage from John's gospel has some Greeks, that is people from Greece, likely to be non-Jews or in other words gentile people, who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, finding the disciple called Philip and saying-'we wish to see Jesus'.

The passage then has Philip telling this to Andrew and the two of them telling Jesus. Presumably they said to Jesus, 'some Greeks want to see you'. There is no record of the Greeks having a face-to-face meeting with Jesus. What follows the communication of the request to Jesus is a long passage where Jesus reflects on the meaning of his death and resurrection and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The people from Greece want to 'see', that is meet Jesus, but the response Jesus gives is about seeing who he is, and seeing the meaning of his death and resurrection and understanding what following him entails.

The Greeks want to see Jesus, but Jesus wants them and the disciples to understand what he is all about.

This play on seeing and not understanding is a bit of a theme in John's gospel. There is a contrast between the religious people who should recognise Jesus but don't see who Jesus is, and often the people who aren't religious specialists who do see. Who do get it. Who do understand who Jesus is.

So instead of ending up with a face-to-face meeting with Jesus where the Greek enquirers eyeball Jesus, we end up with the most concentrated teaching on the meaning of Jesus death and resurrection in the whole of John's gospel. This is to help us to 'see', to understand, to follow and so have life.

John's gospel tells us what the purpose of the gospel is: 'so that we might come to believe (or continue to believe) that Jesus is the messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we may have life in his name' (Jn 20.31).

So, it seems important then that we have a look at this block of teaching and see what it might have for us on the fifth Sunday of Lent.

First, Jesus' crucifixion was not some unfortunate mistake or tragedy where Jesus' life was taken from him against his will. His whole life was about service. In his ministry we see him offering himself for the good of others. His life was a life of love. Jesus' death was the final and most dramatic example of that. Jesus didn't have some macabre death wish but a sense of his vocation of service. As he says in verse 27-'should I say-father save me from this hour?'. (That is the hour of his rejection and suffering and death). 'No', he says, 'it is for this reason that I have come to this hour'. Jesus' whole ministry led to his offering of himself for the life of the whole creation. This is love. This is service.

Second, in Jesus' offering of himself, the world has been judged. All the priorities of the world, those who think they have power and influence, the forces of evil themselves have been shown to be false. Here in Jesus offering of himself do

we have real meaning, real purpose, real power. The world and its priorities and what it thinks is valuable has been judged and shown to be lacking. The ultimate power of evil is overcome in the offering of Jesus himself and his death on the cross and the true way of life and living has been highlighted.

Third, Jesus' offering of himself on the cross, his great act of love, will lead to reconciliation. He says, 'when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself'. His death is enough for all people. Through his death all the people of the world are invited to him. All the people of the world are welcomed by him. All the people of the world have the opportunity to know him and be at peace with God through him, and receive his life. This is the answer to the word of God through Jeremiah in the first reading: 'for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more'. This through the offering and death of Christ.

It is important that we notice the word 'draw'-I when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself'. There is the sense of a positive energy. Not only is the door to Jesus and his life open but there is an attraction to Jesus as people see the power of his loving service on the cross and realise how wonderful that is.

There is a tension in John's gospel in that so much is on offer to the whole world, but there is the need to accept what is on offer. To respond to Jesus' loving service. To believe and trust in him and follow him. People need to accept and believe but the way is open to all.

Fourth, those who 'see' who Jesus is are called to follow him. He says: Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life'.

To love our life is the antithesis of Jesus style. Jesus' style, his example is to give away his life in service. To

expend himself for the good of others. Not to preserve himself or save himself but to spend himself. To hate life in this context is not to despise our life, but to be loyal to Jesus. To follow his example. To serve others as Jesus did.

What it means to serve Jesus is seen clearly in the foot washing which comes in the next chapter. There Jesus takes on the task of the lowliest servant in the household and dirties himself in the process of making the disciples clean. Its only their feet but it is symbolic of cleansing all of them. That is what it means to follow Jesus. To give of ourselves for the good and healing and benefit of others.

This ties in so clearly with the mission of Jesus which is the healing of all things. The bringing good to everything. That's what Jesus did. That's what his followers do.

And finally, verse 26, 'whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also'. Where is Jesus to be found? Jesus is found among those lost from God. Those who are marginalised and in need. The sinners and the sick. Those who might be breathing but are short on life. That's where Jesus was to be found in his ministry and that's where his followers will be found today. Bringing hope and healing and life to those who are running short of those things.

We are all in the process of 'seeing' Jesus. We are all in the process of understanding him and understanding the implications of his service for us. Lent is a good time to move that understanding on, but also to hear again his call to follow. To follow his style. To follow his priorities. To be where he was and still is.

What this means for us in comfortable middle-class Australia requires some thinking as it can be challenging for us. The whole narrative of our society is opposite to the idea of self-offering and service in the style of Jesus. The narrative of our society goes the other way, so we as

followers of Jesus need to think about what it means to actually follow the one who washed his disciples feet. Who dirtied himself to cleanse others. Who gave his life so the whole world could have more life. Who died so that the whole world could be healed. And then we need to act, because that's what following Jesus always means.