



Sunday March 17, 2024
John 20:20-26 (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

A few weeks ago Pastor Chris and I and two of our friends were making plans to get together. We try to do this a few times a year. We gather at someone's house and enjoy some appetizers and spend time catching up on each other's lives.

Only this time Pastor Chris suggested we break out of our usual routine and go out to a restaurant. Everyone agreed, so we started searching for some options. It took a while to find somewhere that was actually open on a Sunday night, but once we did, we settled on an upscale steakhouse in downtown Milwaukee.

Now, I've shared lots of things about myself over the years, but probably not anything about my dining preferences. Sure, I like good food and dining at a restaurant now and then, but in general I like to cook, and I like being at home, so I typically just prefer eating at home. That said, I'm a pretty simply guy and I'm content eating just about anything – to be clear – peanut butter and jelly, cereal, or frozen pizza are pretty high on my list, so, "upscale" doesn't often cross my mind.

So now that my friends decided on a restaurant, I did what I always do – I went online to check out the menu. And as I began to look over the menu...I'm sorry, wait...did I read that correctly? \$22 and up for an appetizer. \$18 for a starter salad! \$16 plus for a side dish! Main course options *starting* at \$52! And knowing these guys we'd be getting dessert too...so don't get me started on the price of *seasonal berries with cream*. I had to resign myself to the fact that my dinner was going to cost as much as a week of groceries for our family. Oh...and to top it off, this obviously wasn't going to be a sweats and t-shirt night either...so, there's that.

However, only a few hours later everything would change. A text came in from one of our friends offering a drastic shift in plans from our initial upscale steakhouse.

Our friend had acquired four front row tickets including the club level buffet at the Marquette basketball game for the following afternoon. Seats so close, our friend said, "*that you could help yourself to the players Gatorade.*" So, college basketball *and* a free buffet...are you kidding...what are we waiting for...let's do it!

When my friends initially decided on the upscale restaurant...let's just say, I was excited to get to spend time with *them*. But now, college basketball *and* time with friends – *this* is the kind of stuff I desire doing. *This* was like manna from heaven – a blessing straight from God. But...*but*, one of us in the group is far more into upscale restaurants and fancy food than basketball and buffets...and let's just say...*he who shall not be named* was all of a sudden very silent in the group text.

Well, our gospel reading this week also begins with *desire*, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" The setting is Jerusalem. The occasion is Passover. And the people expressing that desire are Gentiles visiting the city for its religious festivities. The gospel, however, never specifies how many of them come seeking Jesus or even *why* they're interested in him.

Maybe they're curious about his parables and the message he's been spreading. Maybe they hope to see the rumored miracle worker walk on water or heal a blind man? Or maybe they're just skeptical and looking to instigate a fight with the controversial Messiah. Whatever their reason, they've been hearing things about this man named Jesus and they wanted to see him for themselves.

The phrase "*we wish to see Jesus*" can't be simply and neatly translated into English. But the literal translation, as awkward as it might sound to our ears, would help us get a better understanding of what they meant. Here's what they were 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.*" But *we are willing*. We *desire* that this encounter is going to change us in some way, and we are willing to take the risk.

And so I think it's safe to assume that they were hoping for more than just a glimpse of a celebrity. They were hoping for more than just an autograph. They not only wanted to *see* Jesus, but they also wanted to *experience* Jesus.

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 recognize him as the Son of God. And we realize this isn't a



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one-and-done sort of thing. It's an ongoing relationship. We are willing to be perceiving Jesus now and forever. "*Mister Philip, sir, we are willing to know Jesus personally – whatever that means.*"

"*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" At first glance, it seems like such a simple request doesn't it? And yet, the motivations behind the request – both of those first century Gentiles and our own, are really quite complex. "*We wish to see Jesus*" – *this is* what we all want isn't it? Especially during this season of Lent when we've been reflecting on this Jesus that we've heard so much about. We're all here this morning because we want to see Jesus don't we?

"*I wish to see Jesus.*" Is the desire of the Samaritan woman in search of living water who has a chance encounter with Jesus at the well.

"*I wish to see Jesus.*" Is the desire of the leper who kneels before Jesus and says, "Lord if you are willing you can make me clean."

"*I wish to see Jesus.*" Is the request of the thief who hangs on a cross next to Jesus and says, "*Jesus, remember me when you come in to your kingdom.*"

"*I wish to see Jesus.*" Is the desire that led Michael to be baptized earlier today and follow the call of the Holy Spirit and trust in the grace and love of God.

"*I wish to see Jesus.*" Is the same desire that led Kai, Joel, Wesley, Caralin, Collin, Howie, Joseph, Madeline, Elsa, Henry, and Brooklyn to remember the lengths God would go to prove God's love for them by celebrating their First Communion today.

We want to see Jesus for who he is and feel his love and experience his grace, his welcome, his hope, and his forgiveness. Saying that "*we wish to see Jesus*" puts us on the road. It opens our eyes to the world around us. It prompts us to ask hard questions and investigate things more closely. It calls us to pay attention to the ways Jesus may be revealed *even* in unexpected places in our lives.

But most of all, it sets us on a course for living as followers and working toward a deeper relationship with God...even if we don't have it all figured out yet.

At times I wonder though, "*do we really want to see Jesus?*" Because sometimes in life we're blinded by what we think and believe, and because of this we go looking for Jesus in all the wrong places and for all the wrong reasons. And what we find isn't Jesus at all, but rather reinforcement for what we already believe to be true – to validate ourselves.

But despite our occasional blindness, we shouldn't be discouraged. All isn't lost. Seeing Jesus is just something we have to learn. Remember, even the witnesses to Jesus' Resurrection – those who came face to face with him didn't recognize him. So, we simply have to learn how to recognize him.

And when we truly mean "*we wish to see Jesus,*" we are acknowledging the depth of such a request – a request that may take us to unexpected places and may ask us to let go of things and ideas that we once held on to as sacred. Coincidentally, this is precisely the goal of our Lenten practice – letting go of our own expectations and preparing to embrace the realities God places before us.

My friends, if we truly wish to see Jesus, then there's only one place that we must look – the cross. I know that's probably not the image that you had in mind...it's not what any of us had in mind. But if we see Jesus on the cross, then we will see Jesus everywhere. Because on the cross Jesus sees all of us and says, I not only desire to see you, but I desire to love you, and to save you, and for you to be with me in my Father's kingdom for all of eternity.

We love because he first loved us. We love because the cross of Christ draws us towards love. The cross pulls us towards God and toward each other. And regardless if *we* desire to see Jesus – he desires to see us. "***Sir, we wish to see Jesus.***" I pray that this statement would guide our journey toward Palm Sunday and carry us through Holy Week and the crucifixion all the way to the empty tomb. And as it does, may we be "*willing to be perceiving Jesus*" with open eyes and minds and hearts so that we too can experience the fullness of God's great love story for the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.