

WITNESS

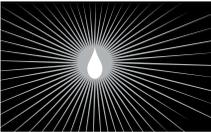


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E x t r a c t





Can We “See Jesus” Today?

Prof. the Rev. Greg Bloomquist

Our bishop, Donald, chose as the theme for the 2010 Synod of the Anglican Network in Canada the verse from John's Gospel: “Sir, we would see Jesus,” drawn from John 12:21.

This request, made by “some Greeks” who had come to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship, could easily have been granted by the disciples of whom it was asked. They could simply have brought the Greeks who asked the question to Jesus himself. They would have then been able to “see Jesus” right in front of their eyes.

But, two questions. First, what would they have seen? In other words, would they have “seen” in the way that John's Gospel talks about seeing? Second, in his last appearance to the disciples, Easter evening, the risen Jesus says to Thomas: “Do you believe because you have seen? How much more blessed are those who believe without seeing?” So, even if we could see Jesus today, should we want to?

All of the Scriptures make it clear that God cannot be seen, and that even wanting to see God is dangerous. Yet, in John's Gospel not only do we find people wanting to see Jesus, but that same Gospel also makes it clear that

“ Sir, we would see Jesus ”

the one we encounter in Jesus is none other than “very God of very God, begotten not made, of being one with the Father, through whom all things were made.” In Jesus of Nazareth we do not simply meet a mere man, even though he was a person of history. In

him we meet God the Son, the Word made flesh, the one who spoke with Moses from the burning bush and announced Himself to Moses as “I am.”



Most of those who meet Jesus in the Gospels do not get this, but we find some, the most unimaginable, who definitely do. For example, when Jesus asks the Roman cohort and Temple guards who have come out to seize him in the garden (John 18), “For whom are you looking?” and they respond simply “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus says just two words in Greek: “I am.” Now, if he had said what most translations of John suggest he said, namely, “Yes, that's me” or “I am he,”

you would not expect the reaction from the Roman soldiers and Temple police that follows: “They fell to the ground.” This is not a reaction to the self-identification of a mere man; this is the reaction, even of ignorant Romans, before the name that God Himself revealed to Moses on the mountain. In John's understanding, they “saw.” And importantly for us, they reacted appropriately.

If the Greeks, who had asked to see Jesus, ever did get to see Jesus (we don't know if they did), someone might have asked them: “So what did you see?” Would they have answered: “A great teacher, a Judaeon Socrates, a charismatic with great power in his eyes”? They might have added: “Yes, we chatted with him for a while and it was wonderful how wise he was.”

But, if they had really seen him, then they would have said what the “beloved disciple,” the author of the Gospel of John, also said about him: “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14b). And if they had seen, they wouldn't have just chatted with him. If the Greeks did see Jesus and really got who he was, they would have been like those ignorant Romans, or those antagonistic Temple police, or like the prophet Isaiah, who, “in the year when King Uzziah died” saw the Lord “high and lifted up,” fell to the ground afraid to raise

his physical eyes to look at the sight, and exclaimed: “Woe is me” (Isaiah 6). All of these – Romans, police, inspired prophet, Moses – could not, would not, dared not raise their unworthy eyes to look upon God who had made Himself known.

Do you still want to see Jesus?

Peter Kreeft, who gave the Weston Lecture at Augustine College in 2007, told the following story during his lecture. ¹ Kreeft spoke of how he had gone to Mass in Boston with one of his students, John, who was accompanied by a Muslim friend, Isa, who had asked to attend. After the Mass, Kreeft found the two friends at the back of the church arguing. Kreeft asked John what the problem was. John said that, after going forward to the altar for communion, he had gone back to his pew where Isa was waiting for him. Isa had asked him what he had just done. John looked at his Muslim friend puzzled – since he had simply gone forward to take the bread and the wine – but then happily realized that Isa must be asking about the deeper significance of what he had done. So, John told Kreeft that he had told Isa that he had received the body of our Lord Jesus, given for us, and the blood of our Lord Jesus, shed for us.

Isa then broke in.

“And you believe that?”

“Yes,” John replied

Isa made as if to say something, but

stifled it. John assured him he would not be offended.

Finally, reluctantly, Isa said, “I don’t understand.”

“...wanting to see God is dangerous.”

“I understand how you feel. It sounds very shocking.”

“No, you don’t understand. That’s not what I mean. You will take it as an insult, but I don’t mean it to be.”



“I promise I won’t take it as an insult. But I really want to know what’s on your mind.”

“Well then. . . . I don’t think you really do believe that. I don’t mean to say you’re dishonest, but...”

“I think I know what you mean. You can’t empathize with anyone

“They fell to the ground.”

who believes something so shocking. You don’t see how

you could ever get down on your knees before that altar.”

“No, I don’t see how I could ever get up. If I believed that thing that looks like a little round piece of bread was really Allah Himself, I think I would just faint. I would fall at His feet like a dead man.”

At that point, Kreeft turned to us in the Weston Lecture audience and said: “I realized that John’s Muslim friend Isa really knew what was at stake.” To put it in our words: he knew what he would see if he were to look.

We, as a diocese, as the Anglican Network in Canada, have said that we do want to see Jesus. If we really do, then we must be prepared for the consequences... at the altar rail, in our parish life together, in our families, in our diocese, even in our North American province.

At the altar – especially at the altar, where we are invited to see Jesus every Day of Resurrection– we are both to be drawn in to see the greatest mystery the world will know and, having seen, to fall back in awe. Here, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the first day of Resurrection, we are to see and know Him in the breaking of the bread, He who daily satisfies us,

and gives us life forever. This is He in whom we indeed die and He in whom we will be raised up to a new and unending life, beyond anything we could ask or imagine, a life in which we shall not only see but also we shall gaze upon the fair beauty of our God in all of His fullness for all of eternity.

1. The essence of the talk has been presented in Kreeft’s “What I learned From a Muslim about Eucharistic Adoration,” *Crisis* 16.11 (March 1998), available at <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0016.html>.

The St. George’s Scholar is indebted to his equally scholarly wife for her significant contribution to this answer.