

Sermon, St German's Cathedral, Peel 17th March 2024

Readings: Jeremiah 31 31-34; John 12 20-33

Theme: "I would see Jesus"

I'm going to start with a rhetorical question. How many people know that you come to the Cathedral or, to put it another way, know that you are a Christian? I suspect that the people you know best do, but there may be people who've seen you come and go but you have no idea who they are. I'd like you to imagine being stopped in the street by a foreigner – maybe someone from Bulgaria or India, the Philippines or Canada. And they ask you how they can meet up with Jesus. What would your response be? How would I respond?

You'll be familiar with the way that the media sometimes ask a question of the general public. It's often known as a Vox Pop - voice of the people. So I'd really like to know what you would say. I've asked a few people ahead of time and I'd like them to chip in now. If you haven't been specifically asked, but have a suggestion – please don't hold back.

Freddie, from the choir, isn't here today but he e-mailed me and said: *To be honest, I am not sure what I would say. I think I would try and use my own testimony as how, since I came back to Jesus (and confessed my sins...took a long time 😳!!) I have experienced many "God-incidences".* Freddie also finds it hard to think that all those who've followed Jesus over the years could be wrong.

Several members of the congregation then contributed their ideas which included reading particular parts of the Bible (particularly the Gospels), going to their happy place to discuss further over a cuppa, and saying that Jesus could be found where there was suffering and the support that people were giving.

Another thought from Freddie who has had many years as a pilot:

Another way of looking at the Bible and certainly the New Testament (new covenant) is that it is the "Flying Manual" for a good life. If there are people who are searching for Jesus, the Cathedral would be very happy to spend time with them, exploring the Flying Manual.

What did Philip do? He went to Andrew, and together they went to see Jesus. But in the context of John's Gospel we don't get a satisfactory answer – did the Greeks ever get to meet Jesus? We don't know. Jesus' answer was to tell the crowd that it was now time to enter into his Glory. He talks about a grain of wheat needing to die and fall into the earth before it could sprout to new life and bring forth fruit. He was clearly thinking of his own death (which he knew would only be a few days away) – but also challenging his listeners that any who wanted to follow him would need to be care-less of their lives, in order to be where he is and to be honoured by the Father.

I wonder whether the Greeks had gone with Andrew and Philip and heard Jesus say how his heart was troubled and how he wondered if there was an alternative future. But also his very quick conclusion that his imminent death was the very reason he had come to earth. He tells the crowd that when he is lifted up – a reference to the impending crucifixion – he will draw people to him.

I know it is different for us. Jesus isn't just down the road in person, teaching and healing people. But if our faith means anything to us, we should be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3 15).

Philip had been following Jesus for some three years but despite this he needed the confidence of asking his fellow disciple, Andrew/ to go with him. It is often good to work with someone else.

In his e-mail Freddie said it was a pity that our reading didn't carry on a little further in the chapter to include v46: *I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness.* If we have discovered that Jesus has brought light into our lives then surely, maybe in a very gentle quiet way, we should be able to point others to him.

Ten years ago there was a survey of 2,500 children aged between 5 and 16 were surveyed about the meaning of Easter. Nearly half did not know what Easter was about. A third of them thought it was the Easter Bunny's birthday and a quarter thought it was when Chocolate was invented. Just one in 10 was likely to go to church with their parents. And I expect that if the survey was repeated now, the figures would be even more disappointing.

There is a very big disconnect between the general public and their understanding of Easter. As we get close to the retelling of the Easter Story, could you have a conversation with one other person about what Easter means to you? Could I?

Rosemary Clarke

March 2023

Reference for survey:

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nearly-half-british-children-not-3419685>