

"SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
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New York, New York 10028  
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### INTRODUCTION

One Sunday morning a minister was showing a painting of Jesus to a group of Sunday School children. Holding up this painting, he said to them...

"Now, boys and girls, you must understand that this painting came from the imagination of the artist. He really didn't know how Jesus looked". Whereupon one child said, "Well, pastor....it sure looks like Him to me!"

Which brings us to the question of this Fifth Sunday of Lent: what does Jesus look like?

Some Greeks were attending the Festival of the Passover. One of them came to Philip and said, "Sir...we would see Jesus". To me, that's the universal need of humanity...."to see Jesus". ~~Would somebody, somewhere show us what Jesus is like!~~ It's a hunger that gnaws at the heart of every person who has ever walked on the face of this earth, even though they may not be able to give name to it and even though - because of the baggage the name of Jesus carries in the world - some may violently disavow such a compelling need. But the beggar in the slums of Calcutta as well as the banker in Beverly Hills...both have this same basic craving...."Sir, we would see Jesus!"

~~Yes, we need Jesus for life.~~ There are those moments when we need His touch on our lives to give meaning to our existence. There are those times when we need His healing touch to forgive us of our sins. And so we come in here on a Sunday saying with those Greeks of old, "Sir, WE, TOO, would see Jesus."

### WHERE DO WE SEE HIM

First-off, then, where do we see Jesus? I can think of several places, but let's start with the historical record. We first encounter Jesus in the record made of His life by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It's not complete, as you know. For example, we have no idea how Jesus really looked. People visualize Him differently. As Huston Smith puts it,

"To some He will remain the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, surrounded by children and lambs...others will visualize Him as a rugged, red-bearded prophet swinging over the hills of Palestine toward Jerusalem."

Was He tall, short, slender, chubby? You may be offended by the idea of an overweight Jesus...but we really have no idea. Most of us tend to see Jesus according to our own ideals....and our own prejudices.

There was a best-selling business book recently titled, Jesus CEO. Jesus has been portrayed as an executive, a salesperson, as a hippie, as a fire-brand, as a black man, as a blue-eyed blonde and every other way imaginable.

Cal Samra, in his book, The Joyful Christ, tells of a time when he needed healing and found it in a new vision of Jesus. His life, his health, his job, his marriage...all had fallen apart...terribly depressed he had moved to the warm climate of Arizona. At the age of fifty...lonely and with no hope, he considered suicide.

Cal bought a length of rope and drove around in the Arizona desert looking for a sturdy tree from which to hang himself. But most of the growing structures in the area were either palm trees, which are too tall to hang from, or cacti, which are pretty impossible from which to hang one's self. Next, Cal decided to throw himself into a river and drown, but he had no luck there. It was summertime and most of the rivers were dried out from the heat. Cal's luck had really given out if he couldn't even find a way to end it all.

He slowly came to the realization that perhaps he needed a less permanent solution to his problem and so he drove to a Franciscan retreat. He entered the chapel of this retreat center and began to pray in earnest. A warm, cheerful Franciscan by the name of Father Gavin Griffith welcomed him and invited him to stay for dinner. Father Griffith kept Cal laughing throughout the dinner with his sense of humor and some good jokes. He happened to see on the wall of the kitchen a picture that he had never seen before, a portrayal of a vigorous, joyful Jesus, titled, "The Laughing Christ."

Before Cal Samra left this retreat center, a Father Lambert, gave him another picture of Jesus...a smiling Jesus. It was like the first picture of the laughing Christ in certain ways. Instead of a pale, blond, sorrowful man with a glowing halo over his head, this Jesus was dark skinned, strong and healthy looking. He had a broad smile and He glowed with warmth and good cheer. His gaze was straightforward, honest and twinkling with mirth. This picture, painted by a Joyce Martin, showed a warm, personable and real Jesus...the kind of man anyone would want to follow. As Cal contemplated these two images of Jesus, he recognized and realized that he had never known this side of Christ.

This new way of seeing Jesus, the Saviour, was the beginning (he tells us) of his emotional healing. You may recognize the name of Cal Samra as the head of the Fellowship of Merry Christians.

We have a tendency to see the historical Jesus according to our needs and our ideals. We have a tendency to see Him, too, according to our own prejudices. In recent days a church not far from here which for 82 years has presented a well-attended passion play during Lent invited people to come and "see Jesus". Proudly and innocently the host church announced that the role of Jesus would be taken by a young African American. Many who came to see "this Jesus" were angry at what they saw and the threats and the cancellations and the villifications were shocking, heart-breaking and have created a rather sad story.

#### LIVES OF PERSONS IN NEED

But let me move on and suggest that the second place we see Jesus may come as a bit of a surprise to you. We see Jesus in the lives of persons who are in need. Remember what He said,

"When you do it unto the least of these...you do it unto Me....." We see Jesus "in the least of these...."

Check Your Commitment is the title of a book that provides me with this story...this illustration that follows. The author, Knofel Staton, describes something quite unforgettable that happened when he was a control tower supervisor in Japan. Two jet fighters were flying in formation and had just started their descent when the lead pilot radioed, "I've just lost my Wing Man." This meant that one of the two planes had gone down. Immediately workers in the control tower picked up the RED CRASH phone connected to the rescue helicopter team on stand by duty. When the phone is lifted, a rescue team is to be in the

air in 120 seconds. Two minutes.

The lead pilot descended below the clouds looking for his Wing Man. When he found him, he saw that he had bailed out and was in the ocean. The radio communication from the pilot circling helplessly overhead while his friend struggled in the water stabbed the hearts of the control tower team as they listened.

"My Wing Man is tangled in his parachute. Have you notified the helicopter?" he said desperately. "He's floating, but having a difficult time getting his life raft inflated. Have you commissioned the helicopter?"

Minutes later they heard another message: "He's still not inflated...he's beginning to sink...where's the rescue team?" Minutes later came another plaintive plea, "Now he's above the water, but still struggling...where's the helicopter?" Still later...."He's under water again, where's the helicopter?" Then seconds later they heard, "He's about four to five feet under....I don't know if he'll come up again...where's the helicopter?"

And seconds later...."I can't see him now....I fear we've lost him....where 's the helicopter?"

Where was the helicopter? It never did get to the scene. At the investigation and hearing that followed, it was discovered that the rescue team had decided to do some Christmas shopping at a PX fifty miles away. That team was so busy taking care of themselves that they never heard the cries for help. The author, Knofel Staton, comments in his book,

"The multitudes are all around us. Many are already in the water without an inflated raft and the parachute lines of complex living are entangling them. Some are still floating. Others are beginning to sink. Where are the rescue teams?"

You and I are part of God's rescue team. And friends, there is a multitude of people who need to be rescued. Families are coming apart and teenagers are losing themselves in drugs and suicides....the list is getting longer. Can you look into the eyes of someone who is hurting and see Jesus there? That is the real test of discipleship. Discipleship has little to do with perfect attendance in Church. Church is but a place we come to to sensitize our heart-sight so that hopefully we shall be able to see Jesus. First, in the historical record. Second, to see Jesus in others.

IN THOSE WHO ARE HIS DISCIPLES

Third...finally, we see Jesus in those who are His disciples, and brothers and sisters, that's us! We ought to be able to see Jesus in one another. Sometimes we do and unfortunately, sometimes we don't. We need to remember that,

"You are the only Bible that some people will ever read"

And to that we can add: "And yes....you are the only Jesus that some people will ever meet."

Now, we could get discouraged at this point for not every person who bears the name of Christ has the heart of Christ. "What a pity" observes Annie Dillard, "that so hard on the heels of Christ come the Christians". And Philip Yancey writing in the book, The Jesus I Never Knew, tells of a T-shirt that he spotted at a political rally that said, "Jesus save us...from Your followers", and of a line from the New Zealand film, Heavenly Creatures in which two girls describe their imaginary kingdom,

"Why it's like HEAVEN...only better...there aren't any Christians....." Said a missionary, "One of the bitterest moments of my life was when an earnest young Buddhist boy said to me, 'I want to believe in Christ, but I have never seen Him in those who profess Him. How can I believe in someone Whom I have not seen.' That causes us pain and hurt..."

"Sir, we would see Jesus" says a hurting world. We need to remember, as Robert Gibson has put it, "that a Christian is the KEYHOLE through which other folks see God."

I came across a story of a pre-med student who became a Christian after a long journey through doubts and questions. This actually happened at the University of California at Berkeley. Earl Palmer who shares this account in a book asked the young man why he had chosen Jesus Christ. The young man said that what had tipped the scales for him in his spiritual journey were the actions of a Christian classmate.

During the previous term the pre-med student had been very ill with the flu and, as a result, had been forced to miss ten days of school. He said that without any fanfare or complaint his Christian classmate had carefully collected all his class assignments and took time away from his own studies to help him catch up. This pre-med student told Earl Palmer,

"You know...this kind of thing just isn't done. I wanted to know what made this guy act the way he did. I even found myself asking if I could go to church with him!"

A small act of love, but a friend "saw" Jesus there. And so you and I are confronted with a question: can others see something of Christ in us? If we were the only Jesus people ever met, would it be enough to "tip the scales....??"

Charles Shedd, in his book, Brush of An Angel's Wing, tells of a collection of the various faces of Jesus that he had put together across the years. Now, one of Shedd's favorite diversions was smoking a pipe. And one day as he was studying the faces of Jesus, he heard a voice from "the inner chamber of his spirit" asking....."in which of these faces of Jesus would a pipe look good?" Interesting...right? JESUS...with a pipe in his mouth...smoking.

Now he knew that his pipes had to go, but not right away and so he took them with him when his wife and he were on a vacation on a lake in the Ozarks. He told the Lord,

"I really haven't quit, you know....but this is my vacation, isn't it....far from the many faces of my Jesus

collection....and far from the youth groups and all those I might influence....what's wrong with a dreamy pipe full....up here at this beautiful lake...relaxing."

He got out his fancy pipe box and caressed the pipes smoothly and lovingly one by one. A voice inside whispered...."Now...hand them over." Shedd said that he had it "out with the Lord once and for all...and that was it...it was settled...the Lord's way....no more smoking of the pipe". And so the next morning, quite early, he took his pipe box and all those beautiful pipes out on the lake, at least half a mile from their cabin and holding them over the water.... dropped them into the lake. But you know what happened...the very next morning, there they were on the beach in front of their cabin...the box with all his pipes.

At first he thought that it was a "sign", but then that argument with the "inner voice" began again. And so, the morning after along with his wife, Martha, they rowed back to the middle of the lake. This time, with Martha holding one hand, and Shedd with the other hand took each pipe out of the box and dropped it into the lake....each particular "old friend"...and he watched each one sink to the bottom of the lake. He whispered, "They're yours, Lord...this time, they are yours!"

CLOSING

There may be some things in your life that need to be dropped... gotten rid of...that are preventing others from seeing the Christ that is there in you. You know what they are...and some of those things are so hard to let go of....

Who you are may depend on what kind of face you see on Jesus. Hopefully, it is a loving face, a forgiving face, a saving face. "Sir, we would see Jesus" said the Greeks to Philip. It's the cry of so many. If you want to see Jesus, begin with the historical record...there in the Gospels...by yourself reading it...or perhaps with others in a group, a class. Look for him in the poor, the outcast, the helpless and the hurting of our world. He is there. And hopefully, we see something of Him in others....and others see Him in us....in our actions, in our attitudes. Yes...remember that the only Jesus some people ever may see is the Jesus in you.

PRAYER

Sensitize our heart-sight, O God, in these moments here in this church this day.....that we may depart from here having seen Jesus better than we have in days and years gone by. Let His spirit rise up from the pages of the Gospels and touch our spirits. Help us to see Him in others...those we pass on the streets of this city...those hurting and in need. And may others see Him in us....in the giving of ourselves...in our gifts and graces...in our love and loyalty to Him. In the spirit of Jesus, we now pray. Amen.