**Sermon: Finding Jesus (Preacher: Rev Mike)**

**Readings:** Hebrews 5: 5-10

John 12.20-33

Today’s readings can perhaps feel a little misplaced. Our Gospel places us in Jerusalem, but immediately after the triumphal entry that will be the theme for next week’s Palm Sunday readings. And the themes of suffering and death that we’ve heard this morning, may well feel at odds with the Mothering Sunday readings that we encountered last week. It is a bit of a jolt from celebration and joy to hardship and despair, but this, perhaps, reflects well the harsh reality of Passiontide that would have been experienced by the disciples and still by us today.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem in triumph, as a King, as a saviour, as the Messiah. He’s welcomed and cheered, and even visiting pilgrims from Greece take note and ask Andrew and Philip if they can be introduced to Him. And Jesus seems to agree that it’s time for Him to step up and fulfil these expectations – “*the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*” – but then, almost immediately, the tone changes.

Jesus’s understanding of “glory” is clearly not what the people are expecting. They possibly have in mind the defeat of the Romans, the restoration of the Jewish Kingdom, a fairer deal for the poor…not unreasonable expectations, but not what Jesus has in mind. All that He has set out to do has been to glorify His Father in Heaven – through his life, his teaching and now, his death – and this will not necessarily tally with the expectations of the world.

“*We wish to see Jesus*” say the Greeks, but what Jesus reveals to them will not have been what they expected to find in an inspirational teacher who has seemingly become the people’s champion. If people want to see the real Jesus, then they must be prepared to meet with challenge, with adversity and a call to follow God’s ways above and beyond the ways of the world. They must be prepared to mirror His example of love, even if that leads to danger and, ultimately, to death. And they must have faith that recognises that following the Son will lead to the Father.

In a matter of a few days, very few remained who still wanted to see Jesus and, as he died, betrayed by those who purported to believe in Him, John counts only 4 who still wanted to see Jesus. This perhaps isn’t any great surprise. If seeing Jesus means seeing only death, then the instinct to run away and hide is perfectly understandable. But what many have come to realise is that seeing Jesus is seeing love in its completed form, it’s seeing fear of death overcome, it is seeing the fulfilment of life itself and the restoration of our relationship with God.

I often wonder what we each see when we talk of Jesus – after all, the reactions to the name are so many and varied in our world today – but perhaps more than that, I wonder what we would show people today if they asked to see Jesus. What would you do if someone approached saying “Sir/Madam, I wish to see Jesus”?!

Well, I’m sure that alarm bells would ring for a good few of us! We may just turn and move rapidly in the opposite direction, or being British, politely excuse ourselves, perhaps claiming to have left the oven on or saying that we’re late for a Zoom meeting! Some may choose to engage, perhaps telling them that they’re 2000 years too late or, those searching for a slightly more religious response, may say that Jesus is now in Heaven.

However, if we are willing to trust in Jesus’ words that he will be with us always to the end of the age, and if we are prepared to take seriously those words from Hebrews - that through his loving example, to the point of death “*he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*” – then we may wish to show something a bit more real and tangible.

So, I wonder, if Jesus really is with us in our world, in our Christian lives here at St Paul’s, right here, right now, what might we be able to show if someone asked to “see Jesus”? Would we point up to the crucifix? Would we give them a timetable of services? Would we hand them a Bible?

Well, maybe – we’d certainly hope that something of Jesus would be evident in our worship and, clearly, the Bible must be a key ingredient in helping people to see Jesus. But the problem we’re facing today is that so much of the language we use in worship and so many of the scriptural references we might assume knowledge of, are just entirely alien to the majority of people out there.

The physicist, Robert Oppenheimer once said that the best way to communicate something is to “*wrap it up in a person*”. That is how God communicated His love for us in Jesus – in the incarnation, He became human and revealed how we should live and respond to Him - but this must also be how we communicate our faith to those who wish to find out more.

Where might people see Jesus today? Well, this must be in us, in how we present our everyday lives of faith to our local community and beyond. If we don’t get this right and come across as unhospitable or mean-spirited or condemning, then it won’t matter how beautiful our church is or how exciting our events are or, even, how many Bibles we give out. If people cannot see Jesus “wrapped up” in how we live our lives, they are unlikely to want to look again.

Yet, if they see instead a constant welcome, a concern for their wellbeing, a love for who they are, no matter what their background looks like, and an obedience to God that surpasses all else, then they may wish to follow on a little further.

In the weeks and months to come, we have some exciting possibilities for our church life – hopefully a return to regular worship, singing, community events and seasonal celebrations; fundraising and maybe the start of some landscaping in the garden and even a major project around the Hall and outbuildings. And you might even officially get a new vicar! Many of these things offer the possibility of bringing people through our doors, but they will only really see Jesus if we, His people, reflect His ways of love. Amen.