

“*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*” A simple request, and understandable. After all, Jesus had been making quite a name for himself. But Jesus does not get out his calendar to set up a meeting with the curious foreigners. Instead, he starts talking about the need to follow Him even to the point of giving your life.

Do we wish to see Jesus? Plenty of folks just want to hang around Jesus, maybe collect an autograph or snap a selfie. But true Christianity is not a spectator religion. When the talk turns to Losing One’s Life, well then, the crowd tends to thin out in a real big hurry.

It’s a whole lot easier to see God in the grand moments of life: Spring daffodils, trees blooming, falling in love, greeting a new baby, a prayer for healing answered. It is much tougher for us to acknowledge that we *often* meet God *most powerfully* at the *not-so-grand* times-- in the afraid and ashamed times, the lonely and sad times, the broken and forsaken times. I saw this on Facebook: “*Sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so that you can discover that God is the Rock there, at the bottom.*”

Do we wish to *see* Jesus? Where should we look? We get the same answer as the disciples: Look on the cross. “When I am lifted up from the earth—*that’s the cross he’s talking about*-- I will draw everyone to myself.” The love of God that we see in Jesus goes the distance to draw us, to reach us. A loving God invites us to follow Jesus in the self-giving way of the cross. That death of Jesus draws us into the gift of new life in Christ.

The magnetic power of the Cross pulls us most powerfully toward God *precisely* when death seems to be getting the upper hand. And this is a great mystery. A crucifixion might draw a small crowd of spectators on a road ruled by the Romans, like gawkers at a bad traffic accident. But Jesus has the power to draw *us all* to His cross, not as *spectators*, but as *disciples* -- players on the court, and not simply fans in the stands.

Jesus doesn’t nail down a time to meet with his curious Greek seekers. Yet their request triggers a keen awareness of the “*time*” for Jesus. Not clock or calendar time—in Greek, that’s *Chronos*-- but rather, *Kairos*: “*the hour* has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” I would say the difference between *Chronos* and *Kairos* is the difference between saying, “it’s 3 a. m. now” and saying “Honey, my water just broke.” *Kairos* marks an occasion that calls for a response.

Apparently, interest from “the nations” -- the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus -- is for Jesus a sign that his ministry is entering a new season. He starts to talk about the grain of wheat buried in the earth, about losing your life to gain it-- about how he was going to die.

These are not easy words, of course. Humans really hate being vulnerable; we don’t want to have to face the painful negative stuff—and the daily barrage of bad news dumps the realities of death on us in excruciating detail.

But here's the surprising upside-down paradox of the cross: Jesus says that until it dies, buried in the earth, the kernel of grain remains a seed with potential, yet bearing no fruit. Self-serving actions isolate us; fear fuels prejudice, where God would have us foster trust and cooperation. Fierce competition undermines our openness to sharing, and everyone just seems greedy to grab their own and get ahead of the next guy. Marriages fail; families fight or try to hide abusive secrets, passing wounds from one generation to the next. This power of sin keeps us isolated from the abundant life that God promises.

Empowered by the cross of Christ, our dying to such brokenness brings us back into the community of hope and reconciliation. Drawn by the cross, there *we see Jesus*, in his serving and his suffering. Those Greeks who wanted to see Jesus stand in for the whole world. And we're included. God's vision is so much greater than our limited human view. If, seeing this lifted-up Jesus, we trust the love poured out for us on that cross, then we can connect with new hope and renewed life.

Sometimes the "dying" we experience happens simply because our lives change as God gives us new work to do, or new places to be. Or maybe the world changes out from under us. Sometimes there are losses beyond our control, yet God calls us to go on, to grieve the old and keep on watching for Jesus, who helps us to embrace the as-yet-unseen new thing.

What are some of the things that we "die to?" Maybe a role we have found meaningful, switching jobs, moving from work to retirement, or just moving, or maybe an empty nest. Dying to a relationship, a breakup of what you thought would be your "one true love," a marriage separation, or divorce. Growing older and more painfully aware of our own mortality. The rock bottom of suffering and dying can turn out to be the solid foundation of new life in Christ.

We don't need to go out and seek new suffering. We are freed to see what is already there, through the eyes of a God compassionate about the deaths we must face; and wise to our ways of trying to avoid those deaths. Avoidance doesn't work, as we often find ourselves muddling into *different versions* of the dying--ones that don't help us heal, because we have turned away from the real wound. Our self-styled attempts at cures-- disappointing and dysfunctional relationships, overwork, diversions, addictions -- they often tragically turn out *worse* than the original disease.

On the cross, we see Jesus drawing us into God's embrace. What's the drawing *power*? It's the magnetic force of God *forgiving and forgetting*, as we heard in our 1st lesson from Jeremiah, where God promises in a New Covenant: "*I will remember their sin no more.*" Forgiveness can reconnect us with God, with each other, and with our own best selves. And like that kernel of grain, there must be a *dying* that makes way for the life-giving power of forgiveness.

Repentance is a kind of dying to the desire to micro-manage our own lives for our own benefit; drowning the old self and rising again "*marked by the cross of Christ forever,*" daily relying on God's powerful promises, trusting the life in the buried seed.

Do we wish to see Jesus *now*? We can see Jesus present in the people who, forgiven in Christ, are then freed to forgive those who have wronged them. People who can inspire *us* to forgive.

A young family moved onto a farm next door to a farmer who kept very much to himself. He kept two vicious attack dogs to discourage visitors. They were behind a fence and couldn't get out, but they also made sure no one else came in. One day the young farmer's three-year-old son wandered near the neighbor's fence. He saw the dogs and he wanted to pet them. He climbed the fence and entered the hermit's yard where he was viciously attacked and killed by the dogs.

The whole community turned against this old hermit. The grocer wouldn't sell him groceries. The banker wouldn't lend him any money. The seed store wouldn't sell him any seed. He was facing ruin because he couldn't put his crop in. Then one day he was surprised to see a tractor working his land and seeding wheat. He went out and saw that it was the dead boy's father. He asked *why* he was doing this and the father said, *"I have seen that if I do not forgive you, I cannot heal and be free to follow Jesus. Ruining you won't bring my son back. I know that God loved my son and that God loves you too. I want you to know that also."*

Because Jesus first loved us, unconditionally, we can dare to share that love with others. We are *called* to share it. A wise person once said, *"You may be the only Bible someone will ever read. You may be the only Jesus someone ever sees."* When people look at us, let the Jesus they see be caring and compassionate, holding no grudges, growing toward forgiveness and open even to those who have wounded us. Let the Jesus they see be willing to risk and sacrifice for the sake of others.

At the cross, we see Jesus drawing us to God's healing. So we pray: Lord, let us receive renewed life in you, united in You, comforted and daily transformed by your Spirit. Forgiving Lord, give us the joy of your saving help again, and sustain us every day and in every way with your bountiful Spirit.