

“Jesus in Our Midst”

John 12:20-33

VI of IX in the Sermon Series “Jesus”

The Rev. Joanna Samuelson
Designated Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

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O Ever-present and Ever-near God, come to us, and inspire us through Your Word – and through the words that you place on each of our hearts. And, O dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name.

In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen!

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I’d like to begin this morning by drawing your attention to the front cover of your bulletin. Now, as many of you already know, throughout this Lenten season, our bulletin covers have featured some of the medallions from the exquisite stained-glass Jeffrey Window, up here, in our chancel.

And so, this morning, the image on your cover is known as “Blessed are the Pure.”

Now, as you may know, these are words of Scripture that come from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 when Jesus said to his disciples: *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will SEE God.*

Earlier this week, I spent some time, sitting quietly, here, in the sanctuary – studying *this particular stained-glass* image of Jesus – in which we see him teaching and preaching to his disciples.

And, after a while, I began to meditate on these words of Jesus which were part of his Sermon on the Mount – when he said: *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will SEE God.*

And then, during the next day or two, I realized that *these* words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount were beginning to blend together – for me – **with** our Gospel reading from John for today from the 12th chapter!

Now, at the beginning of our text from John, this morning, we learn that the crowds had been gathering together to worship at the festival of Passover.

And, by this point, according to the Gospel of John:

- Jesus had already raised Lazarus from the dead;
- Mary had already anointed Jesus’ feet;
- And Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem had already taken place; (earlier in John chapter 12).

And so, now, here, in our text for today, Jesus was in Jerusalem for Passover once again ... but *this would be his last time*.

And so, our lectionary reading for today from John 12, beginning at verse 20, signals a significant shift in tone – and begins to prepare us for Jesus’ Final Discourse for the world (which will begin in the following chapter – in chapter 13).

So, having said *all* of that, our text this morning from John 12, describes an emotionally charged scene including:

- some of the people who were *eager* to hear from Jesus;
- and some who were *curious* to learn more about him;
- and then, there were others who were plotting to **destroy** him.

And – according to our Gospel reading for this morning – there were also some Greeks who approached the disciple Philip and pleaded with him, saying, “**Sir, we wish to SEE Jesus!**”

They wanted to SEE Jesus!

What do you suppose they meant when they said that?

And WHY did they want to see Jesus?

During this past week, I've been reflecting quite a bit on those words spoken by the Greeks in this pericope: **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus!”**

Now, there has been a lot written in Biblical commentaries about the significance of the Greeks in this particular story – especially at that particular time – during the Jewish festival of Passover in Jerusalem.

Many Biblical scholars agree that the Greeks represent “the other” or “the outsider” or “the foreigner” in this text.

And yet, despite their significant cultural differences, they, too, had a deep desire to experience the love and healing and forgiveness made known through **the presence of Jesus** in their lives.

The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsey, who is a United Church of Christ pastor and public theologian, recently wrote about this text, and I so appreciate her insights:

She writes: When the Greeks assert that, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” the Gospel writer of John invites his audience (including us) to view Jesus in his fullness, and in his humanity as well as his divinity, and in his presence as well as his purpose, and in his passion as well as his glory.

Dr. Lindsey's words, here, are an invitation for deeper reflection and contemplation on Jesus' presence in our personal lives.

I also appreciate the wisdom and the insights of the Biblical scholar and award-winning author, Diana Butler Bass who, in her recent book, *Freeing Jesus*, invites us, as the readers, to consider who Jesus is to each one of us -- on a deeply personal level.

- How do we name Jesus?
- How do encounter Jesus?
- How do we experience Jesus?
- How do we respond to Jesus?
- How do we rely on Jesus?
- And how are we transformed by Jesus?

In her lifelong walk of faith – *and* through her academic lens – Rev. Dr. Butler Bass describes the deeply personal ways in which she most often relates to Jesus.

And over time, throughout an intentional and reflective process, she identified the most significant names – or roles – that Jesus has in her life. For her, she has come to know Jesus as:

- Friend
- Teacher
- Savior
- Lord
- Way
- Presence

What about you? In this contemplative and reflective season of Lent, how are you experiencing Jesus in your day-to-day lives?

In what ways do you encounter him?

What role does he play in your spiritual journey?

And what are the names of Jesus that are most meaningful for you?

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Throughout this Lenten season, I've been reflecting quite a bit about who Jesus is in my life. And I am so appreciative of the wisdom and thoughtful insights of Henri Nouwen in his book, *Following Jesus: Finding Our Way Home in an Age of Anxiety*, that many of us have been reading together as a congregation this Lent.

I'm eager to hear your response to Nouwen's book and your experience of your small group conversations.

In recent days, as I've been preparing for this sermon, I've also been reflecting quite a bit on what it means to experience the presence of *Jesus in our midst as First Church* – and how we recognize **his passion and purpose** in the ministry that we share **together** as a congregation.

How do YOU experience Jesus in our midst?

I experience the presence of *Jesus in our midst every* Sunday through the faithful worship and sacred music that connects us one to another on a deeper level.

I am comforted by *Jesus in our midst* as we lift the Prayers of the People together – which includes an ever-widening circle of our members, families, and friends.

I recognize *Jesus in our midst* through the compassionate care and companionship of our growing Stephen Ministry team.

I am amazed by *Jesus in our midst* as made known through the intentional ministry to and with our unsheltered neighbors and friends.

I am in awe of *Jesus in our midst* as lived out by our deeply dedicated commissions and committees and staff members that offer leadership and structure to our ministries and programs.

I am encouraged by *Jesus in our midst* who connects us one to another in new ways including our recently-formed Neighborhood Care Circles.

And I am delighted by *Jesus in our midst* who we experience through the laughter and relationships among and with our children and youth.

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I'd like to close this morning with some thoughts about the words, "Christ is in our midst" which is a greeting that is used in part of the liturgy in other church traditions.

"Christ in our midst" are words to remind us
that at the same time that Christ is at the center of our lives –
or our relationships or our church –

Christ is also in the midst of the solar system and every other living being.

The Old Testament book, Zephaniah 3:17, inspires is us with the following words:

The Lord, your God, is in your midst; the Mighty One who will save.

God will rejoice over you with gladness.

God will quiet you with God's love; God will rejoice over you with singing.

Thanks be to God, amen!

