

I find it fascinating that in some ways the Bible sounds like it's describing life not only a long time ago, but in a galaxy far, far away—a wilderness big enough for thousands of people to wander for forty years; demon-defying missionaries traveling without money, provisions, or even a change of clothes—but at the same time it can be so relatable and relevant that it sounds like it was written last week. Of course, in some cases, that means that 2000 years later, we are still struggling to understand the same lessons that Jesus tried to teach his very first disciples.

Today's gospel takes place during the last week of Jesus' life, after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem in the days leading up to the Passover. Some Greeks approach Philip with the request, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip consults with Andrew, then Andrew and Philip go together to tell Jesus. Jesus, predicting his death, claims that when he is lifted up, he will draw *all* people to himself, and by this the name of the Lord will be glorified. John never gets around to telling us whether the Greeks got to see Jesus or not.

This story makes better sense when we understand the Temple where they were gathered for the festival. If you have a good study bible, you might find a diagram of the Second Temple in the appendix that shows an outer courtyard for gentiles, a courtyard for women, a court for the Israelite men, a court for the priests, and the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest was allowed to enter, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to make a sacrifice on behalf of the people. God's presence resided in that holiest of places, and who you were determined how close you could get to the presence of God. The Greeks, who would have been converts or aspiring converts to Judaism, would only have been allowed in the court of the gentiles—farthest from the action.

This might be why, when the Greeks approached Philip, he didn't lead them straight to Jesus. To the extent that Philip and Andrew understood Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God, it would have made sense to them, standing in the shadow of the Temple's courts and gates, to question whether these gentiles should have access to Jesus. And as one of the chosen twelve, Philip may have had an inflated sense of his own importance. But John injects a bit of ironic humor in this scene, identifying Philip's hometown of Bethsaida in Galilee. A few times in the gospels the disciples are recognized by their Galilean accents: it's never a compliment. Here it's another way of saying that Philip, this nobody from nowhere, decided that maybe

these Greeks weren't good enough to get to see Jesus. Yet one of the clearest themes running throughout all four of the gospels is that God's incarnation in Jesus broke down the manmade barriers that excluded people from the family of God: pagan magi, smelly shepherds, good Samaritans, Canaanite women, Roman centurions, the demon-possessed, lepers, tax collectors, children, bandits on crosses, clueless disciples, and curious Greeks—all are welcomed in Jesus' boundless embrace. When Jesus breathes his last, the curtain in the Temple that divided the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary is torn in two, from top to bottom, destroying forever the boundary between God and all God's people.

Before we criticize Philip for spending three years in Jesus' service yet still missing the radically inclusive invitation which Jesus lived and taught, we should consider how, after 2000 years of studying the story of Jesus, *we* still confuse discipleship with gatekeeping. In so many ways, if not in so many words, people say to us "We wish to see Jesus" but instead of reflecting the limitless love of God, we question whether or not we should let them in. *They wish to see Jesus...but...they're not Lutheran. They wish to see Jesus...but...they don't look like me, or vote like me, or their family isn't like mine.* We're good at pointing out how the world needs Jesus, yet we have all sorts of qualifications for who we think should get to be part of the body of Christ. Just this week, some of our Roman Catholic siblings were told that God's love does not include them. Just this week, yet another domestic terrorist, raised in a Christian church, committed mass murder, unable or unwilling to see the image of God in his victims. How long, oh Lord, will we rebuild the walls that you lived and died to tear down?

Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also." This was the instruction Jesus gave just days before his crucifixion, knowing that there would always be people seeking him—saying, *we wish to see Jesus*—but that he would no longer be here. The way people see Jesus now is in his servants who follow him; it's up to us to show Jesus to those who are seeking the love of God. We're not always as good at it as we think we are: as Gandhi famously critiqued, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." We know we will not be perfect as we learn to follow Jesus' way of love, mercy, forgiveness, healing, justice, humble service, and boundless inclusion. But when people come to *us* and say, *we wish to see Jesus*, may we never be what is standing in their way.