

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

It was immediately after our Lord's triumphant procession into Jerusalem, and a day or so before the great event that led to his trial, his crucifixion, his death and resurrection, that a small party of Hellenic Jews made the request that introduces the Gospel for this morning. It was the custom among the Jews to make the pilgrimage, no matter how far, to the Temple at Jerusalem, for they had been taught that only there could God be fully and completely worshipped. And like sightseers the world over, they wished to make the most of this great event in their lives. They had heard of this strange teacher who healed the sick, who raised the dead, who cast out the moneychangers from the Temple, and who openly defied and insulted the most noble religious leaders of the time, the Pharisees and the Saducees. This was too great a thing to miss and so they came to Philip and made to him this simple request: *Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

Whether or not they ever saw him, we don't know. The story simply leaves this little group of travelers and does not return to them. But they left behind, in six simple words, the most important quest ever to pass the lips of human beings.

There was little old Zaccheus, the chief of customs at Jericho. He couldn't see through or over the crowd, so he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus. And he **did** see Jesus, with his eyes from the sycamore tree, but later in his own home, Zaccheus saw Jesus with his soul. And this is what we all come for: *we come to see Jesus*. We may be attracted by the friendliness of a Church, or its magnificent music, or its beautiful, spotlessly maintained buildings, or because its Rector is highly skilled at helping us solve our problems, or because he/she preaches well, but we do not stay for those reasons. If you will look at the motives which first brought you to this Church and compare them with what it is that binds you to it today, you will

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

realize that practically no one ever remains in a Parish Church for the same reason they first came to it. Sooner or later, we must *see* Jesus or we shall seek him elsewhere.

Often we hold on in a Church because of sentimental attachment: we were baptized there, or married there, or our children went to Church School there, or we served on the vestry, or we were ordained from that Church and celebrated our first Holy Eucharist there. But we must, with, ruthless devotion to the truth, turn our backs on the churches of our spiritual journey if we don't find our Lord Jesus present within its fellowship.

Often we hold on to a Church because of bias, because we have identified ourselves with it and its practices. Why don't the Presbyterians use the Prayer Book? How come they don't kneel? Why do they settle for a

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

little shot glass full of grape juice instead of the real thing at the Lord's Table?

So, the Jesus we seek is not to be found in sentimentality or bias. Nor is the culture in which we live very much help to us. Our early 21st Century American society discovered long ago that there was much money to be made by playing to our need for security in all realms of life, political, social, economic and private. We have not lacked those who would sell us religion as a means of mass peace of mind. And so all of us, some more, some less, have become concerned with our health and our wealth, our status and our pleasure. In none of this will we find the Christ who urged that we give no thought for the morrow; who slept where he could, who ate what was offered to him, and who displayed a fine indifference to the good opinions of the religious and political leaders of his day.

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

So, seeing Jesus is not easy. Knowing Christ is a relationship. It's not a philosophy, or a surge of temporary emotion. As in other personal relationships we enjoy, the things that are supposed to attract us and bind us are less important than the tie itself. It might be interesting to speculate about the appearance of Jesus, his voice, his personality, but this is not really of any consequence, simply because we are not a church erected to a dead leader. We are the living body of Christ, the continuation in time of the Ascended Christ.

I submit to you that there is only one real offering of Christ to all people through the Church, and that is through the corporate worship of the Church. All else proceeds from this. The Church is most truly itself when it is following the expressed command of our Lord, himself: *Do this in remembrance of me*. It is in this Holiest of Communion that we learn to know Christ as God. It begins with the washing of the hands

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

to symbolize the cleansing of intention, the washing away of thoughts and purposes. It moves along step by step to that moment each of us, intensely personal, yet completely corporate, with angels, archangels and the whole company of heaven together with every fellow worshipper here, and throughout all of Christendom, when we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord, and become part of him because he has become part of us.

Once we have become united with him, he is always with us, in the great crisis of life and the ordinary routines as well. Sometimes we are more conscious of his presence than at others, but always we have the complete assurance of his everlasting friendship and love. His perfections will shame our imperfections. We will do good things, not of some vague notion about the need for doing them, but because we see him in every starving child, or miserably ill hospital patient, or every outcast from society. For over forty years, wherever we have lived, I've had on my desk a

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

calligraphy entitled *The Celtic Rune of Hospitality* and it concludes with these words: *.....and the lark said in her song, often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.*

And finally I believe we are sustained in our faith, in our relationship with him, by the knowledge that some day, sooner or later, we shall see him face to face, separated now by the limitations of the flesh and the psychological process, but one day together for all eternity. *We are* living in the *beginnings* of eternal life here and now, not doing a very good job of it, probably, but still living in the eternal relationship with our Lord. To the Christian, life is well worth living and death is but an abrupt shifting of gears. The tremendously challenging, exciting, demanding, searching, fruitful, vibrating eternal life is ours, ready to be lived to the fullest now and all this is given to us freely, in the deepest love, if only *we would see Jesus.*

AMEN.

We Wish To See Jesus

April 02, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr