

SERMON FOR LENT 5B ALL SAINTS 2018

Seeing is believing, or so we are told. The evidence of our eyes is still an important aspect of our faith. Many people still say they cannot believe in God unless they can see God. To some degree I suppose we all seek some kind of proof which we claim our eyes can see. But we also have to admit that our eyes can deceive us. Optical illusions help us to realize that seeing is not always enough. Seeing with our eyes is only a part of the process of coming to know. We also have to see with our minds eye, which means we understand. We also have to see with the eye of the heart, which means we can be moved to act when we confronted by truth. Learning to 'see' God involves all three, our outward eyes, our minds and our hearts.

Perhaps the beginning of faith came for us through "seeing" Jesus with our minds. In my own case it was through hearing the stories of Jesus life, of building up a picture in my mind of what he was like, which led me to faith. Along with that looking at Jesus with my mind went the physical looking at Jesus.

To see the physical Jesus is to look at him in the life of the Church. The Church and its people help us to see the outward form of Jesus. In the Church we see the life of Jesus lived now in others, however fleeting the sight of him may be. We see Jesus too in the sacraments of the Church which are expressions of what Jesus would do if he were present among us in the flesh. He would be giving us the grace of God as the sacraments give us the grace of God.

It would seem that the most difficult way of seeing Jesus is with the eye of the heart. This means we will learn to see Jesus within ourselves. We cannot leave Jesus simply as a figure from the past, reading stories about his life on earth. Nor can we leave Jesus as an external figure who works on us through the church community, as important as that is. Jesus also works within us and is to be found at the very centre of our being, a place we describe as our heart. This is what moves us to acts of love.

When the Greeks asked to see Jesus they were seeking a meeting with a known person. They were looking for the sight of a man they could see with their eyes. It was as if by seeing they could gain proof of what they had heard about him. Jesus response to the Greek's request leads them to look beyond what their eyes could see. His answer was to teach them that they could not see him until after his death. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit." Jesus was telling them his true life was yet to be revealed. What they saw with their eyes was only part of the truth. They still had to learn that it is only through Christ's death and resurrection that his real life could be seen. That is seen with the eye of the heart. Through death and resurrection God made a new covenant with people. Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant in the first reading. "I will write it on their hearts" says God. No longer will they have to learn laws to live by, they will know in their heart how to live.

We are the people of the new covenant. And do we know how to live? Sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. I think it's not so much a matter of beating ourselves up for not living well; its got more to do with looking at the places in life where we do see Jesus expressed in our living. How can we know Jesus is within us? It all depends on bearing fruit. So where do we look to see the fruit that Jesus death and resurrection bring for us.

I think there are a number of ways of seeing Jesus in our own hearts, seeing the fruit of his presence.

The first way is through compassion. Whenever we respond to need, whenever our hearts are moved to help, there we demonstrate the compassion of Jesus. In actions such as these we see Christ in our midst.

When our compassion moves us to self giving service then we see the process of death to life. Our own needs put to one side so that others might have life. This we see demonstrated most clearly when good parents put aside their own needs for the life of their children. Here is Christ in our midst.

When ever we are able to forgive, or to receive forgiveness we are following the example of Jesus. Forgiveness was at the centre of his life and was the purpose of his death. Forgiveness sounds so nice, but it is so difficult and demanding. Jesus himself shows how demanding it is. Forgiveness required his life to be given. No wonder we can find forgiveness difficult.

There is of course another place where we need to see Jesus. After this service we participate in the AGM of the parish. It may seem like a formality, a bore, a time to stay away in case we get a job. It may be those things but it is also much more.

It is the time to look at our past year's work and reflect on how much we have proclaimed the Gospel of God's love as seen in Jesus. Our Church community exists so that others may see Jesus. So the AGM is also our chance to look back and assess whether or not others might see Jesus in what we do. It's a time to look forward to see how we might do better in the future.

Then each week we come here to the Eucharist to hear Jesus speak to us in the words of the Gospel. Each week we are asked to take to heart Jesus words that we might live by them. And God, ever generous, also gives us the gift of his son in bread and wine. Here we receive the very life of Christ to dwell within us and aid us on our journey. Will our hearts be so moved that Jesus will be seen in us in the way we live? We pray that will be so.