

Lent 5, 2012. Nigel Taber-Hamilton

Do you know what Oscar Wilde's last words were? They were – reportedly – “either this wallpaper goes, or I do”. Today is the start of Jesus “last words” – there are a lot of them, certainly - they run to chapters – but they are, never-the-less, “last words” – and we should add “famous” to that phrase.

Today, John tells us, the hour has come. All through John's gospel Jesus has been saying that “this is not my hour.” And now, today, that has changed. The hour, says Jesus, has finally come. What has changed?

Some Greeks have shown up! While they could have been Greek Jews more likely they were simply Greeks – Gentiles. Don't you wish that you could have been around to hear the conversation that Philip and Andrew must have had about their request! It must have been a lively discussion about outsiders who had the nerve to approach Jesus hoping to actually speak with him. However it went, they decided to go and tell Jesus.

And that's when Jesus says, “the hour has come”. We don't get to know if these Greeks got their audience - John doesn't seem to be bothered by that omission. Their presence and question “can we see Jesus?” is the trigger for what amounts to Jesus' last words – a lot of “last words” I'll grant you, but nevertheless the final things that – according to John, anyway – Jesus wished to communicate to any who would listen.

“Can we see Jesus?” Now there's a question for us, too! In fact, isn't that the question of Lent for which Easter is the answer? Can we see Jesus in our lives, in our world?

Why yes, this Lenten journey will confirm at it's conclusion, you can see Jesus – if you can see and follow what Jesus does and says about a life of faith in God.

The passages that follow this one in John's gospel focus on the conflict between a life of discipleship and a life lived at the behest of the ruler of the world – which, if we wanted a more contemporary translation, means, anything that takes us away from a focus on the transformative consequences of following Jesus. We can see Jesus if we live our lives in accord with the vision of a transformed, just world that we see throughout the bible – Old Testament as well as New. We can see Jesus if we understand that being a disciple will be costly but also joyful, hard work but also a greatly satisfying endeavor.

Conversely, we won't be able to see Jesus if we allow ourselves to be captured by all trappings our consumer world seductively offers us – “buy this new TV/that new car/drink this drink and your world will be complete.....!” Every time we give in, every time we choose ourselves over God's world and God's people, we lose sight of Jesus.

The Lenten journey contradicts the accepted norms of our world. If you understand that you have grasped a fundamental truth about Christian faith – it challenges and contradicts the accepted norms of our world.

What we are taught about the way the world operates is not the way that the Kingdom of God operates, John says. That's driven home even more by John's continual reference to Jesus as a "king" because it's saying, by implication, that "the emperor is not king".

So what about those seeking Greeks who wish to see Jesus? For John the ability to see what is not accessible to ordinary sight is a significant theme—sight here, in other words, isn't a literal thing. **THAT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR WHAT WILL COME LATER!**

And sight, John will later tell us, is also not necessary in any literal sense in order to come to faith – in John's language, to "believe." Remember what Jesus says to Thomas? It's at the very conclusion of this Gospel (John 20: 29), so it has to be important! "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe". All of a sudden this stuff about "seeing Jesus" takes on a whole new meaning. In this simple question of these Greeks, "Can we see Jesus?" we've therefore stumbled over one of **THE** purposes of this gospel as John intends it: to present a record of Jesus' signs for those who have not seen yet come to believe.

So in the end these rather obscure Greeks represent all of us – we for whom this gospel was written in the first place. Remember, they didn't receive a personal audience with Jesus, they didn't get to "see" him, but the truth is revealed to them, along with us, in Jesus' speech that follows: and it's about the meaning of his death.

As we walk the final days of Lent through Holy Week, this truth both sustains and challenges us as we contemplate Jesus' death and exaltation.

My hope for you is that you not only ask "may I – may we – see Jesus?" but that the gift of that even asking that question will transform your lives, so that you – like all those generations of Christians who have gone before us – may understand that even though we have not seen yet we still are blessed by God - **AND THAT THIS RECOGNITION WILL CHANGE OUR LIVES.**

Amen..