

The Secret Is Out!

[Text - John 12:20-26]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, receives a request from some Greeks who are in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. It seems to be a simple request, yet as we can detect from Philip's hesitant response, there may be more to it than one might initially think. John writes, "Now among those who went to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' So Philip went and told...*Andrew*...."

Philip and Andrew are the only disciples of Jesus who have Greek names [the rest have Hebrew names]. They both come from the same hometown - Bethsaida - a multi-cultural community that probably had a fair number of Greek residents. Maybe it's some of those hometown Greeks who approach Philip; though since they address him as "Sir", it's more likely that they're travelers from some remote region, or even from Greece itself. In any event, these Greeks have heard about Jesus, so they find a fellow-Greek who they hope will be able to introduce them. However, for some reason, Philip hesitates. "You want to see Jesus? Well...I *suppose* that's O. K....You wait here and I'll get back to you." Then Philip goes, not to Jesus, but to Andrew.

Apparently there's some concern, or nagging fear, that causes Philip to hesitate. Maybe he suffers from a lack of self-confidence: "These people want to see Jesus, but I'm not sure I can deliver. After all, I'm no Saint Peter, Paul or Mary! I've only been following Jesus for a relatively short time, and I'm not sure I'm qualified to introduce him to others." [Maybe that concern sounds familiar to some of us!] Or perhaps Philip thought that *these* Greeks might

not be the kind of people that Jesus would warmly embrace. After all, they are outsiders - foreigners with different language, clothes, customs, and all those strange Olympian gods. They just might not fit the proper profile for true believers. [That rationale may also have a familiar ring today.]

Whatever the reason, Philip is unsure about bringing these inquisitive Greeks to meet Jesus. So he does a smart thing: he seeks the advice of another faithful follower. "Andrew, what do you think I should do?" Andrew advises him to bring the request to Jesus, and he's also willing to go with him. If these Greeks really want to meet Jesus, then Andrew realizes that he and Philip shouldn't stand in the way. He understands that Jesus is certainly capable and competent enough to determine for himself who he will welcome and embrace.

I think Philip and Andrew's approach is a pretty good plan of action for you and me to keep in mind. Although it's extremely unlikely that you or I will ever be asked to introduce Jesus to a group of strange Greeks [or even to a strange group of geeks], there are all kinds of individuals who may look to us as a way to learn about, or even to meet, Jesus Christ. After all, we're part of a Denomination [and a congregation] that's known for being a bit "out there" in terms of offering an extravagant, inclusive welcome to *all* people. It's right there on the first page of our bulletin, and as the opening words of our website! Therefore, every time we gather for worship, there may be individuals among us who are hoping - and even hungering - for an authentic encounter with the Compassionate Christ. People who are hurting or weary from the on-going struggles of their daily lives. People whose sexual orientation has prompted repulsion and condemnation from those who they had hoped would offer compassion and acceptance. People who may not have much use for organized religion, but who look at us and say, "Well, they're really not that organized, **or** rigidly religious!"

The exciting truth is, that you and I can meet people - right here - who truly want to know Jesus more fully. And it's not only here that we encounter those who "wish to see Jesus." In fact, many people who wish to see Jesus may not feel comfortable walking into a church! They may have no Church background whatsoever. Or they may have a Church background, where Jesus was portrayed as God's Ultimate Enforcer - just waiting to return as the Righteous Judge, who will send people to hell for not having "correctly" believed! It's not likely that these people will go into *any* church, to seek that Judgmental Jesus. However, they may be able to recognize a Gentle Jesus, a Compassionate Christ, in the caring and loving lives of Christ's authentic followers. Regardless of religious background, many people today are still looking for that genuine peace, wholeness, and acceptance which can be found in Jesus Christ. And like Philip and Andrew, you and I can help these people make that critically important connection.

If you or I, like Philip, are too timid to introduce others to Jesus, we can ask a more confident Church member to help us. If we're worried about what to say or how to say it, then maybe a simple invitation to come here for worship would be an easier thing to do. And if we are concerned that an "outside stranger" might not be welcomed here, then we just need to look around at all the strange characters already involved here [some of them even in leadership positions!] But most importantly, you and I should pay close attention to Jesus' dramatic response to those Greeks.

When Philip and Andrew tell him that a group of foreigners want to see him, Jesus responds, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified! Truly I tell you, 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!" Philip and Andrew are probably thinking, "Huh? What's up with Jesus? Maybe he didn't understand us. All we said, is that there are some Greeks here who want to see him,

and he gets all fired-up like a Greek thespian: “The hour has come! Now will the Son of Man be glorified!” All this, because some outsiders want to see him?” Yes, absolutely!

Up to this point, most of Jesus’ ministry has had a localized focus. Jesus was a Jew, who basically stayed within the borders of his own country, bringing his message of hope to the people of Israel. That’s where the Messiah’s message of Divine love and grace was to originate. However, that Gospel message is intended for all people, of every race, culture, social standing and life condition. In fact, that’s what makes this *Gospel* truly *Good News*: that there are no “outsiders” to Jesus Christ. Anyone and everyone who truly wishes to encounter and experience the Life-changing love of Christ is invited, encouraged, and warmly welcomed to do so.

For Jesus, this request signals that the Divine Realm is ready to burst-forth into every corner, country and culture of the world. Therefore, he is absolutely ready to receive those Greek “outsiders” - even though it may prove extremely dangerous for him. Opening one’s heart or one’s religion to people who are regarded by that religion’s institutionalized leadership as being suspect or unworthy, is a risky thing to do. Yet as Jesus says, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus is willing to stake his life upon the universal promise of Divine love and grace. And he understands that at this Passover Festival, he will encounter intense resistance to his message of Divine acceptance and love for all people. Yet he is willing to sacrifice his own life, so that the seed of that Good News might live and grow and spread and “bear much fruit.”

Jesus *lives* to bring peace, joy, and wholeness to every person who will welcome it. Jesus dies, showing us that fear, hatred and divisiveness can be overcome by Divine forgiveness,

compassion, and inclusiveness. And Jesus Christ lives anew, to encourage and inspire you and me to carry forward that Good News. All you and I have to do is to invite and include others; and then joyfully walk *with* them on this marvelous journey of Faith, Hope, and Love. The hour has come! The time is right! The opportunity is ours to embrace and fulfill!