

They're All Greek to Me [Text - John 12:20-26]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, Philip - one of Jesus' disciples - receives this request from some Greeks who are in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. "We wish to see Jesus!" We wish to see Jesus! Now while it's highly unlikely that you or I will ever be asked to introduce Jesus to a group of Greeks [or even a group of *geeks*], it is quite possible that a diverse variety of people may look to us to learn about - or perhaps even connect with - Jesus Christ. After all, we are part of a congregation - and a denomination - that's known for being on the forefront when it comes to welcoming, accepting, and including all kinds of people.

Our extravagant welcome is proclaimed on the first page of every Sunday bulletin, and is the opening message of our BUCC website. Therefore we should anticipate that any time we gather, there may be people among us who are hoping - or even hungering - for an authentic encounter with the Compassionate Christ. People who are weary from the on-going struggles of their daily lives. People whose sexual orientation has prompted condemnation and exclusion 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 truth is, you and I may encounter people - right here - who essentially "wish to see Jesus". And it's not only here that we encounter them. A lot of people who might wish to see Jesus may not feel comfortable walking into a church! They may have no Church background. Or they may have a Church background where Jesus is portrayed as God's Ultimate Enforcer - an angry judge, who sends people to hell for not having "correctly" believed! It's unlikely that these people would enter *any* church, to seek that Judgmental Jesus. However, they might be able to recognize the Compassionate Christ,

in and through the caring lives of Christ's authentic followers. Regardless of religious background, there are many people today who are still looking for that genuine peace, acceptance, and wholeness which is embodied in Jesus Christ. And as the Body of Christ, you and I - like Philip and Andrew - can help these people make that critically important connection.

If you're not sure how to do this, then perhaps a simple invitation to come here for worship or for some other event, would be a good starting point. If you're concerned that an "outside stranger" might not fit-in here, then just look around at all the strange characters already here [some even in leadership positions]! And if you're concerned about the outcome of encouraging others to connect with Jesus, just listen to Jesus' excited response when he hears about those Greeks: "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 a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit!" Philip and Andrew are probably thinking, "What's up with Jesus? All we said, is that there are some Greeks here who want to see him, and he gets all fired-up. All this, because some 'outsiders' want to see him?" Yes! Absolutely!

Up to this point in John's Gospel account, most of Jesus' ministry has had a limited, local focus. Jesus is Jewish, and he basically stays within the borders of his own country, bringing his message to the people of Israel. That's where the Messiah's Message of Divine peace and love is expected to be delivered. However, that Message of good news is too vital to be constrained. It is intended for all people - of every nation, culture, gender, social standing and life condition. In fact, that's what makes the *Gospel* truly *Good News*: that there are no "outsiders" to Jesus Christ! *Anyone* who truly desires to encounter and experience the Life-changing Love of Christ is invited, welcomed, and encouraged to do so.

For Jesus, this request is a sign that the Divine Realm is ready to burst-forth into every country, culture, and corner of the world. Therefore, he is absolutely thrilled to receive these 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 inclusion and love. Yet he is willing to sacrifice his own life, so that the seed of that Good News might spread and grow and “bear much fruit.”

Jesus *lives* to bring peace, wholeness, and joy to every person who will welcome it. Jesus *dies*, showing us that Divine compassion, forgiveness, and inclusion can overcome fear and selfishness, hatred and divisiveness. And Jesus Christ lives anew, to inspire and encourage you and me to carry-forward that Good News: to welcome and include all those around us; 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!