

10-3-21  
Pentecost 19  
Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12  
World Communion

## We See Jesus!

I guess we all do our share of thinking about the state of the world these days. Most of us try not to anymore of that that we have to because the issues that face us are so overwhelming that we get maxed out pretty quickly. Setting individual politics aside for a bit (As if we can!), the lack of clear leadership on which we can all agree enough to be able to get behind seems to be a big part of our problem. I guess it's always been there to some degree, but when we look back at the other times of crisis we've faced, we like to think things were different.

Maybe it's just a delusion, but it's one that brings me some hope. The lens through which we see and reflect on the Civil War, the War Between the Saints, the War of Northern Aggression, that Recent Unpleasantness, whatever we decide to call it, the lens through which we see that time of tumult always seems to center on one central figure: Abraham Lincoln. Being a Kentuckian by birth, as he was, I always feel a sense of kinship with him. I know there were people in Kentucky and everywhere else who thought he was the Devil incarnate, but the way most of us have learned that history, his primary accomplishment and gift to all of us was that he was able to preserve the Union at a time that many didn't think it would survive. I know there were lots of people on both sides of every argument involved in that effort, but the figure of Lincoln looms over all that and is the one most of us credit with the outcome, whether we like it or not.

I'm not a historian, so I know this probably sounds unscholarly and immature, but sometimes I long for a Lincoln. Someone we could look to for a steady hand, someone who was

willing to work with strange assemblies of people, what some have called a team of rivals, to work for the common good instead of what was politically expedient or what advanced his own career. I don't know who I think that Lincoln I wish we could see might be, but sometimes I long for one.

Washington, Roosevelt, Churchill—I know that none of them were universally accepted or even universally popular, but, like Lincoln, they all seemed to be figures who dominated their day. Some wanted to make Washington King. Thankfully, others remembered that they had gone to great lengths to get away from that, and didn't let it happen. I'm sure there were others who despised him and wanted him gone, but when we look back at the events that make up Revolutionary history and the establishment of this country, it's Washington's face that comes to mind. I know there are a lot of issues from that day, like any other, that we might not know all about, but we call him the Father of the Country. Sometimes, I long for a George Washington. Rich, white, planter from Virginia, well-connected—I know all those things and the problems that come with them. But when you think about that time in our history, it's Washington that dominates the landscape. Sometimes I wish I could see a face like his. One I think I could trust to lead.

Sometimes, we all get to that same place when it comes to thinking about our faith and how it informs our life and how it guides through divisive times like these and gives us hope for a future we want to claim. I think the writer of Hebrews may have understood exactly how we felt. He begins this letter with some words that speak to our need: Long ago, he says, God spoke to our ancestors in many and varied ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

I suspect people of faith have always longed for a leader; someone they could depend on. By the time Jesus came into the world, people of faith were living as pawns of the more powerful Romans and practicing a faith that demanded much of them and

offered little in the way of sustaining hope for the future. Many of them looked back and the stories they told and believed that sustained and identified them as a people. They longed for a Moses, someone God would call to lead them maybe not out of slavery this time, but out of bondage of a different sort, bondage to the Roman occupation force and bondage to a system of ritual and sacrifice that demanded much and promised little beyond more of the same. Others longed for a David. Yes, there were issues with David. But those were the Golden Years of Israel.

The years when they prospered. The years when they didn't live at the whims of others.

Even when that didn't last—when the Babylonians came and carried people away—even then God always sent someone to be a guide to the people. Just like our minds and hearts go to Lincoln and Washington and those others, the Hebrews had heard the words of Isaiah for generations. It won't always be this way, the Prophet promised. God has not abandoned us. God will call us home. And God did. And there were other guides. Prophets like Micah who assured people then and now that regardless of what some may try to tell us, what God really wants from us is for us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Prophets like Hosea, whose story was about as unsavory and unpleasant as anyone's, but who assures us that God is not nearly as much like us as we try to make him. That God loves us and will not come in wrath, regardless of how much we deserve it. I am God and no mortal; Hosea has God say. I will not come in wrath.

The list could go on and on, but the people who tried to figure out what to do with Jesus and his way of thinking were longing for someone to believe, someone to trust, someone to follow. They had the stories of the great leaders. They had the words and the promises of the Prophets, but they longed to see someone who not only could, but also would lead them to better days.

Many of them found what they longed for in Jesus. Of course, God had spoken long ago through prophets, but there

was something about the things Jesus said that gave hope. They came to understand that when they saw and heard Jesus they were seeing and hearing the very Word and intention of God. When Jesus spoke, it was different than all the other voices that clamored for their attention. When he spoke peace, they experienced it. When he spoke grace, they claimed it as a foundation for a new way to live. When he spoke peace, they found peace. And when he had done all that God sent him into the world to do, that work was over, and he sat down by the right hand of God, confident that the work of reconciliation, the work of our salvation, was done. What people had longed for for generations had come in him. And, in him, all people could find it and share it.

The writer of Hebrews presents a grammatically complicated argument about how God went about that. Sending Jesus, who was God in the flesh, to live among us as one of us was something the world had not expected. But Jesus didn't descend into the world on angel wings or in scenes of great power. Although he was God in flesh, he set aside some of that nature and lived as we live, died as we shall all one day die, but rose again to cancel the power of sin and death to control our lives. The old gospel song assures us that he could have called ten thousand angels to rescue him from the awful events of the cross, but he didn't. He died there, painfully, but willingly, because that was God's plan for our salvation and hope.

When we see this Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, who came to show us how to love one another fully and unconditionally and who commands us to love one another as he have loved us—when we see this Jesus, we are seeing the very nature of God.

So we need not long for one God might send to be a guide like those we think we may have followed from the past. We may not yet see everything God has promised. We do not yet see all things under God's subjection and direction. We cling to the promise and the hope that one day all that will come. That all the world will be just as God plans for it to be. A place where we can

all live long and prosper. A place where we can live together in peace and harmony even with all our differences and divisions. A place where we can each hear God's call to become things we never knew we could be and to do things we know we do not have the power to do on our own.

Longing for that vision, for that reality, is a frustrating part of living faithfully. We really do believe that that world will come, that that is the reality God wants us to know. But we can't help but wonder when God is going to get on with it. And so we wait.

But while we wait, we may not yet see all we hope to see. But we do see Jesus. And in him, we see the very nature of God, the very will of God for us and for all people.

This Table always provides a meaningful encounter with God, one of those places that some call a thin place, a place where the division between Heaven and God's perfect will and this poor, troubled earth and its imperfection, a place where that distance seems to be diminished some. And today as we come to this Table where those meaningful encounters happen for us, we challenge ourselves to remember that all around the globe today people who believe the same foundational things we do gather at Tables like this and at Tables much different from this one to have that same encounter. Everywhere Christians gather today, they gather to see Jesus. And at this Table, we see him, we hear him speak in ways that cut through all the differences that can divide us if we allow them to.

Some will gather with much more pomp and ceremony than we do today. Some will gather with much less. We have come to expect a particular form of prayer when we come to this Table, prayer in which we all participate and try to lift each other up before we come. Some approach this Table with only silence, understanding the awe and wonder of what we believe we commemorate when we come here. We have come to expect a spirit of welcome when we come here, a place where all are welcome. Others decided a long time ago to try to control who comes and who is not invited. That's one of those divisions we have not yet overcome and may not in our lifetime, but God will

have the final word when we all celebrate together in the Kingdom that will come. There will be no Presbyterian Table or anyone else's Table in that Kingdom. There will be Lord's Table and Jesus himself will be our host, welcoming us into the very presence of God.

I know, we don't see that yet. There are places not far from here where the Table is set today, but you and I are not welcome there. I continue to give thanks, first, that this not one of those places and that one day we'll all eat from one welcome table together. And what a day that will be.

We don't see that yet. And may not. But we do see Jesus. And, in him, we see God.

I'm about to start a new book about Abraham Lincoln. It's a book about his faith and how it informed his leadership and his life. I don't know much about his faith experience. I'm not sure what I'll learn from this new book. But in thinking through our time together this morning, I have come to understand that as much as I long for a Lincoln or a Washington or whoever else I think might be the place to turn to guide us to hope, we already have a better option. We see Jesus. And when we see Jesus, we see God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### Prayers of the People

We come to this time of prayer having heard God's Word, having been fed from God's own table. We have been challenged to look to Jesus as a guide and as our hope. Even with that intention firmly among us, we know that there is still much that is not as we believe it will one day be. It is about those things that we pray today.

We pray first for the sick, for all who suffer will illness, with loss, with grief and with pain. We pray for those who face those issues and others without the support of those who love them, however they arrived at that point. We pray for those for whom loneliness is a way of life. We pray that in Jesus and in us, his people, they might find hope.

We pray for all who feel like the smallest of the small, the weakest of the weak, for all who feel ignored and unloved and that others around them somehow achieve another station of life. Help us to understand that we all arrive at that place at one time or another, but that you call us to follow Jesus to another place, a place where all are loved and cared for, where all know both peace and potential.

We pray for all who seek justice, those who oppose evil and face rejection and opposition as thanks.

We pray for all who have been abandoned or abused, who have been neglected and can't find power to change their circumstance. We pray for all who face limitations imposed on them by others. For those who live with rejection and despair. Take all of these for whom we pray today, O God, and gather them along with us in your arms of mercy and grace. Just as, in Jesus, you gathered children and loved and encouraged them, so we need you to love and encourage us and to bless us every day so that once we know the security of belonging to you, we can be set free, loved, and accepted both for who we are and for who we will become.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, who welcomed children and who welcomes us. Amen.