

I wonder if you've ever done one of those tests for color blindness. You're given a sheet with colored dots and a great big number 37 in green dots sticking out on the sheet. But of course, if you're colorblind, you don't see the number 37. You just see a sheet full of dots. Looking and seeing are not the same. Two people could look at the same thing and see something different. There's a line in our gospel reading which got me thinking along these lines today. It says this, "Some Greeks came to Phillip and said, 'We wish to see Jesus.'" What a wonderful request. It's a request that we could all make. We could all ask to see Jesus, to see him more clearly.

And as we head towards Holy Week, we might ask ourselves the question, what do we see when we look at the cross of Jesus? For many of Jesus' contemporaries who watched him die, they thought they were simply looking at another Roman execution. They'd have seen nothing unusual going on. Crucifixion was barbaric, but not uncommon. And yet here we are 2,000 years later getting ready to commemorate again his death on the cross. What some regard as a common or garden execution, we see as something of universal significance. Each week we proclaim that by the death of Jesus, we are saved.

For many of us who've grown up in the faith or been coming to church for a long time, we can lose sight of the scandal and the strangeness of Jesus' death. And my challenge and invitation this Holy Week is to look at again the events of Holy Week and try to see them all with fresh eyes. If we look hard, what do we see unfolding? Can we see afresh what's happening on the cross and its significance for today? So with this in mind, let me offer two things that Christians have seen when they look at the cross of Jesus.

The first thing is something that comes out of our Old Testament reading today from the prophet Jeremiah. The reading begins, "The days are coming," says the Lord, "When I will make a new covenant." And this new covenant that Jeremiah foretold was established by Jesus on the cross. Jesus himself says this in the words that we hear in our communion prayer. At the Last Supper we're told Jesus took a cup and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it all of you for this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the

forgiveness of sins", words that we hear rehearsed at each communion service.

Notice how the passage from Jeremiah begins with God's promise to make a new covenant and ends with a promise to forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more. And these twin themes of new covenant and forgiveness are picked up by Jesus at the Last Supper, as we've just heard. My blood of the new covenant is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The Old Testament talks about several covenants throughout that Old Testament period that God made with his people. And covenant is a word simply meaning an agreement between two parties. And the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures record several covenants. There are several of them because none of them really worked. The people with whom God made the covenant, the people of Israel, couldn't keep their side of the bargain. But under the terms of the new and final covenant made in Jesus, we see a covenant that sticks because Jesus fulfilled on our behalf, that side of the covenant which people for so long had struggled to keep. Jesus offered the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. And so he won for us complete forgiveness and brought us into a right relationship with God. That's why we celebrate in our Eucharist, what God has done for us in Christ Jesus in the pouring out of his blood and the establishing of a new covenant, a new and lasting relationship that God has brought in Christ Jesus.

So Christians see the cross of Jesus as the making of a new covenant, the establishing of a new relationship between God and his people. And we see in the gospel reading from St. John that we're also to understand the cross of Jesus as his glorification. Language that sounds peculiar. Glory is not normally associated with execution, but here it is. When Jesus says the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, that hour is the hour of his death. We saw this last week at the start of his ministry when Jesus is spoken of as being lifted up. And we saw that he was being lifted up to the cross and his glorification.

And if we're to understand this language, we need to know that glory in the Hebrew scriptures refers to a sign of God's presence. God was present when his

glory was there. In those letters, when the glory of God appears, it's a manifestation of his presence, which leads directly to the startling claim in the New Testament that God's glory is seen in the person of Jesus Christ and seen most clearly in his death on the cross. And that's because God is love. And his love is most evident on the cross.

It's on the cross that we see just how far God in Christ was prepared to go to redeem his people, to show the full extent of his love for them. It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the cross, it was love. And it's at this point that kind of, our language runs out, so I'm going to turn to the language of a poet, to Isaac Watts who wrote that great hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", which is so often sung on Good Friday. The final stanza reads as follows, "Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all," which takes us back to that theme of looking and seeing. What do we see when we survey the wondrous cross? Isaac Watts, the hymn writer, sees God's amazing love.

There was an old bishop of Paris who as a young man was a member of a gang. And once the gang, as a joke, went into the local church and the gang leader, this young man, went into a confessional and just abused a priest just for the fun of it and shouted at him and swore at him and the priest just took it. And then the wise old priest said to him, "Oh, that's fine. You can curse me as much as you want, but just do one thing for me. I want you to go to the front of the church and kneel before the crucifix that you see there. And I want you just to look into the eyes of the one who is crucified on that cross. That's all I want you to do for me."

So this gang leader, not wanting to appear small or afraid of anything, did exactly that. And he made his way to the front of the church, he knelt at the altar rail and he looked up at the cross and he saw the figure hanging there and he realized that he had to twist somewhat to be able to look into the eyes of the figure that was hanging on a cross. And as he did that, and as he looked into the eyes of the figure of Jesus depicted on the cross, he felt his heart melt. And he suddenly was overwhelmed with this

realization that there was an element of truth to what the priest said, to what the church stood for.

There was a reason to have this crucifix at the front of the church. He realized in that moment for the first time that the story of Jesus had a relevance to him, that the figure on the cross was dying for his sins. And he said in later years, "As I looked into the eyes of the figure on the cross, my heart melted and I knew that it was true and that he loved me." And that gang leader said, "I know that story is true because that leader was me." And he went on to become the Roman Catholic Bishop of Paris.

The power of the cross is the power of love. That Bishop found himself, not just looking, but seeing and being seen. God is not glorified by imposing a death sentence on Jesus. God is glorified as Jesus goes to the bitter end to draw people to God's gracious and loving heart. To quote a saying from last week's gospel, "When I am lifted up," Jesus said, "I will draw all people to myself."

So as we move closer to Holy Week, as we turn our attention to Jesus' death and resurrection, let's not be content to merely look at the events again. Let's attempt to see, to see their deep significance and the difference they can make to us today. Let's see the cross as establishing a new covenant, as bringing us into a new relationship with God. And let's see it as a revelation of God's love, a love that extends to us. Let's see in such a way that Jesus might draw us to himself this Holy Week. Amen.