

**Chapel Hill United Church of Christ**

**Sunday Sermon**

# **Believing is Seeing**

**March 29, 2009**

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

*“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”*

By

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Pastor

*“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”*

Prayer: Holy God, wherever each one of us is on our spiritual journeys, will you please meet us here? We long for you to renew our faith as we make the effort to come to you as you come to us. In Christ we pray, Amen.

A common phrase and attitude among people in our society is “I’ll believe it when I see it,” right? “The economy will bounce back and your retirement losses will all return three-fold! Yeah, right! I’ll believe it when I see it.” The war in Iraq and Afghanistan will come to an end in the next 18 months and all our troops will come home. “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Politicians and bankers and Wall Street executives will return the money they received when many big businesses are failing. “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Jesus said at one point, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can tell this mountain to get up and move from here to there and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20 adapted). “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Yoda in the *Star Wars* classic “The Empire Strikes Back” tells Luke Skywalker to raise his sunken ship out of the marshy waters using the power of the Force, but Luke says that raising stones is one thing, but raising a ship is completely different. Watch how Yoda challenges Luke’s way of thinking.

[DVD scene from “The Empire Strikes Back”]

Luke was still in the ‘seeing is believing’ mode. Yoda was trying to move Luke into the ‘believing is seeing’ mode. This mode is a way of thinking, an attitude of the mind which says believing leads you to deeper seeing... makes you see with new insight, makes you understand new ways leading to healthier relationships.

One of the Praise! songs we sing is called “Open the Eyes of My Heart.” We sang it two months ago, so we’re not singing it today, but the lyrics in the song describe this ‘believing is seeing’ idea... seeing with insight and understanding: “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord... I want to see you.” “To see you high and lifted up, shining in the light of your glory.”

Quite likely, the Greeks who came to Philip were non-Jews who had heard about the marvelous things Jesus was doing. “We’d like to see Jesus,” they said. They probably simply wanted an audience with him, to be in his presence, maybe to hear him speak. Or perhaps they wondered about all the hubbub that surrounded Jesus. Maybe they were heard about Jesus and the non-Jew, Samaritan woman at the well, how many Samaritans came to believe in him because of her testimony (John 4). Maybe they were in the “I’ll believe it if I see it” mode that Jesus might possibly be the bearer of eternal salvation for everyone, not just for the house of Israel.

When the word does get to Jesus that some Greeks wished to see him, Jesus essentially says, “They want to see me? They are just in time. They will see me as the Son of Humanity about to be glorified.” How does that glorification happen? It happens when he dies and his word becomes much more highly productive and abundant. It’s like this says Jesus—consider how a single grain of wheat must go into the ground and die, only to sprout a new plant that will produce many more grains of wheat... each one to be planted and can sprout... bringing more grains of wheat. To believe that Jesus metaphorically is this grain of wheat is to see God’s wisdom. In death, one can become much more far-reaching and profound than in life on earth.

In George Bernard Shaw’s play “Saint Joan,” Joan of Arc knew that she had been betrayed and was to be burned at the stake by the leaders of her own people. She turns to those leaders and says, “I will go out now to the common people and let the love in their eyes comfort me for the hate in yours. You will all be

glad to see me burned; but if I go through the fire I shall go through it to their hearts for ever and ever” (G. B. Shaw, “Saint Joan,” <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200811h.html#C01>, retrieved March 27, 2009). So, it was for Joan of Arc. So, it was for Jesus, only much more so.

Jesus word was God’s word. His wisdom was God’s wisdom. His truth was God’s truth, and when we believe that about Jesus, a whole world of God’s insights open up to us. Then the metaphor that Jesus is the grain of wheat falling into the ground starts to make sense. Then his teaching that one is blessed and spiritually happy if one is meek and humble before God starts to have deeper meaning. Turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving your coat and your scarf all make no sense unless one believes that Jesus is who he says he is. Then we see how his wisdom reflects the good wisdom of God in helping us deal with people and building relationships with others.

I like this story by Larry Phillips that has gone around the internet a time or two. As we have discussed before, sometimes out of the mouths of babes come words that speak of the believing is seeing idea. In Larry Phillip’s own words: “Last week I took my children to a restaurant. My 6-year-old son asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads, he said, ‘God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!’ Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, ‘That’s what’s wrong with this country. Kids today don’t even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!’ Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, ‘Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?’ As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job, and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table. He winked at my son and said, ‘I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer.’ ‘Really?’ my son asked. ‘Cross my heart.’

Then, in a theatrical whisper, he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), 'Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.' Naturally, I bought my kids ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his for a moment and then did something I will remember the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman. With a big smile, he told her, 'Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes, and my soul is good already (told by Larry Phillips, lsphillips@aol.com, found at [http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustration\\_search.asp?keywords=God%27s+wisdom&imageField2.x=11&imageField2.y=8](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustration_search.asp?keywords=God%27s+wisdom&imageField2.x=11&imageField2.y=8), retrieved on March 27, 2009).

As our Praise! Worship team comes back and leads us in the conclusion of our worship today, hang on to the belief that a little of Jesus as our source of eternal salvation is good for our souls. Believe in that, and you will see more clearly the wisdom of God. Believe in that and the meaning behind God coming from heaven to earth to show us the way deepens for us—WHEN I believe it, I see it! There will be more insight into the process of going from the earth to the cross for our debts to be paid—[say it with me] **WHEN I believe it, I see it !** From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky—yes! **WHEN I believe it, I see it !** We will find deeper understanding of why we feel compelled to lift our hands and praise God's name on high! **WHEN I believe it, I see it !** Let us stand and sing! Amen