

BIG BIRD AND JESUS
July 12, 2015 –John 12: 20-26
The Church of the Covenant

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” is our scripture verse from the Gospel of John. (John 12: 21) I have shared with you before about being “Big Bird”, the Sesame Street character. It began when a former church of mine had a Fall Festival, basically a Christian substitute for a Halloween party, and each year I would dress up as a different character for the kids. I went to Sears in order to get white control top pantyhose for the costume, Jumbo size, of course. And I was rather uncomfortably standing in the checkout line with my purchase. So I nervously said to the clerk, “Its for a Halloween costume.” And she dryly replied: “Sure it is.” Great. So I was visiting room by room in the Sunday School wing of the Fall festival and the Big Bird head became warm and uncomfortable, so I decided to take off the very large Big Bird head in the one Sunday School room. And one little girl tugged on her Mommy’s skirt, all wide-eyed, and said incredulously, “Mommy, Stu is Big Bird!” The Mother told me the story and then added that every time her daughter watched Sesame Street and Big Bird came on her little daughter Rachel would say, “Mommy, Stu is Big Bird.” And every time she saw Big Bird on television she believed it was Stu.

Some Greeks came up to the disciples and said to them, *“Sir, we would see Jesus.”* (John 12: 21) I’ve been in a lot of pulpits in our denomination and almost invariably there is a small brass plaque somewhere on the pulpit that has this verse inscribed on it. *“Sir, we would see Jesus.”* And I think in a way that is always our hope. We will come to church and we will see the Lord. We will hear in the proclamation of the Word of God, which is always a proclamation about Jesus, always a pointing away from ourselves and toward the One who has given us life, and there in that spiritual transaction that is a sermon somehow we will SEE JESUS, we will know him better, we will understand faith more, we will see and experience the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God right before our eyes. John 3: 3 records Jesus stating: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot SEE the kingdom of God.”* Unless something has spiritually happened to us, we will not SEE JESUS nor see and experience the Kingdom of God. Unless we are born anew, unless we are spiritually reborn by the Living presence of Jesus alive within, unless the Holy Spirit comes to have us be born from above, we will not SEE JESUS. He may be in plain view. He may be present in all His glory. He may be seated right next to you in the pew but if something spiritual isn’t alive in your heart you will not SEE Him. So some Greeks come up to Philip and say, *“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”* And Philip told Andrew and Philip and Andrew told Jesus and we know they were all Presbyterians because it took at least one committee meeting just to take these Greeks into the presence of Jesus!

So the progression of this passage is this: First there is SEEING JESUS, then there is the desire of BEING WITH JESUS, and only then is there the possibility of BEING LIKE JESUS. Transformation occurs in people’s lives when first they seek to SEE JESUS in their lives and being born anew they do. And then transformation occurs in people’s lives when they seek to BE WITH JESUS and hang out in His presence and to be with Him. Then transformation occurs in people’s lives when in SEEING JESUS and BEING WITH JESUS they become transformed and are BECOMING MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM in their daily lives.

So Jesus says to these Greeks, *“If anyone serves me he must follow me; and where I am there my servant will be also.”* (John 12: 26) If we have SEEN Jesus our Lord then we want to FOLLOW HIM. We want to figure out where He is and show up and participate in what He is already doing. We want to show up for worship because Jesus is there and where HE is His servants will be also. We want to do mission out there in the community because Jesus isn’t only in church He is also out there doing things and where HE IS HIS SERVANTS WILL BE ALSO. To SEE HIM then is also to want to FOLLOW HIM and to FOLLOW

HIM is then to show up and participate in what HE IS ALREADY DOING IN THE WORLD. SEEING JESUS necessarily then follows with BEING WITH JESUS. And when we SEE HIM and seek to BE WITH HIM then we will more and more BECOME LIKE HIM. So now we have been spiritually renewed and see Him and are hanging out where HE is and participating in what He is doing in the world, but how are we being transformed into His likeness? How are we not just to see Him and to be with Him but to be LIKE HIM? How are we more and more being transformed by the renewing of our mind and less and less conformed to this world? How are we being transformed spiritually more and more into the image of our creator and becoming less and less like the creation? The Greeks have an encounter with Christ. They see Him, are with Him. How now do Greeks become like Christ???????

Our righteousness as Christians is not our own. Being “right with God”, which is all righteousness is, is not something we earn, it is not something we deserve, it is not something we try harder to achieve, it is not something we work ourselves up to, level by level, until we achieve perfection. No, like everything else in life it is a gift from God. The only righteousness that we can ever attain to is an imputed righteousness, a righteousness that is Jesus’ righteousness that HE earned on the cross, that He fulfilled through His sinless life, that only HE as the only begotten Son of the Lord God Almighty could ever hope to do. His life, death and resurrection was righteous. His life is the One perfect sinless life. He was right with God because HE WAS and IS God. He alone was perfectly in synch with the Almighty. He earned it, He is the only One in human form to ever achieve it, and it is His gift alone to bestow. We can never be self-righteous; that was the problem with the Pharisees, they thought they were and indeed their self-righteousness was the very thing that stopped them from SEEING JESUS, and BEING WITH JESUS, and BECOMING LIKE JESUS. We can never be smug where our salvation is concerned, never think it is our own possession deserved by our own goodness. The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans, quoting Genesis 15: 6, noted that, “*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*” (*Romans 4: 3*) God looked at Abraham and because he believed, God reckoned Abraham righteous, looked at him and counted him to be righteous, not because he was, but simply because God viewed him as such. He RECKONED HIM RIGHTOUS, not because he was, but because God IS righteous. This is, as Romans notes elsewhere, “*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*” (*Romans 3: 22*) This action of God in “reckoning us as righteous” is what transforms us and daily transforms us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. SEEING JESUS, BEING WITH JESUS RESULTS IN BECOMING LIKE JESUS.

Now back to Big Bird. Wearing a Big Bird outfit doesn’t make me Big Bird any more than being reckoned righteous by Jesus makes me Jesus. It is a covering, a reckoning, a putting on of Christ, an imputation of right relationship; its not mine, it is more like a costume than the true person I am. I am still a sinner, just a sinner reckoned righteous by Jesus. It is Christ’s righteousness, not mine. It is Jesus, not me. You say, that’s hypocrisy! That’s appearing to be something you’re not! No, beloved, that’s humility. That’s knowing that what Christ has done for me is not my own doing. That’s knowing that it is always about Jesus and never about me. That’s knowing that when I stand up in a pulpit and proclaim Jesus, if people see Him and are drawn to Him and become more like Him, it is not about me. It really is about Him.

The world is always showing up asking to SEE JESUS. I guess the only variables in the equation are whether we will show them Jesus, take them to Jesus personally, and whether or not they will SEE JESUS in us. Good Sir and Madam, we would SEE JESUS! And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*