

Sermon – We Want to See Jesus – 3-18-18

Grace and peace – Pause and reflect...

People who claim to see "Jesus in toast" may no longer be mocked in the future thanks to a study by researchers at the University of Toronto and partner institutions in China, dated May 6, 2014. These Researchers found that the phenomenon of "face Pareidolia (/pæri'doʊliə/ parr-i-DOH-lee-ə)"--where onlookers report seeing images of Jesus, Virgin Mary, or Elvis in objects such as toasts, shrouds, and clouds--is normal and based on physical causes.

"Most people think you have to be mentally abnormal to see these types of images, so individuals reporting this phenomenon are often ridiculed," says lead researcher Prof. Kang Lee of the University of Toronto. "But our findings suggest that it's common for people to see non-existent features because human brains are uniquely wired to recognize faces, so that even when there's only a slight suggestion of facial features the brain automatically interprets it as a face," said Lee.

In the first study of its kind, researchers discovered face Pareidolia (/pæri'doʊliə/ parr-i-DOH-lee-ə) isn't due to a brain anomaly or imagination but is caused by the combined work of the frontal cortex which helps generate expectations and sends signals to the posterior visual cortex to enhance the interpretation stimuli from the outside world.

These researchers also found that people can be led to see different images--such as faces or words or letters--depending on what they expect to see, which in turn activates specific parts of the brain that process such images. Seeing "Jesus in toast" reflects our brain's normal

functioning and the active role that the frontal cortex plays in visual perception. Instead of the phrase "seeing is believing" the results suggest that "believing is seeing."

Those who are making the request; "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" in our Gospel reading today are making this statement because they know or believe something about Jesus. Because of this belief they want to see, and meet this man they have heard so much about. This request by these people who were Greeks is very important, because it spans social and cultural norms of the time and says something to us about doing the same in our own time.

Often churches will declare on their beautiful signs, banners, webpages and news ads, that all are welcome, but what they really mean – all are welcome if you are like us. Even the friendliest of churches see and make distinctions based on gender, color, sexual orientation, culture and ethnic heritage. In our Gospel the Greeks asking to see Jesus would be like a group of Jewish people joining us for worship, saying we want to see the pastor – many of us wouldn't know quite what to do at first and it would be uncomfortable.

The people asking to see Jesus, seem to have a driving need to see him. They don't ask for any sort of credentials to make sure it is Jesus; no ID or other degree or certification. They trust that the person they meet is Jesus who speaks to them and the others who have gathered - the way only Jesus can: *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."*

Then comes the validation of who Jesus is: *"Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'"*

Is this what Greeks expected when they wanted to see Jesus? Even those who have been with Jesus for a long time seemed to be surprised at what they had just witnessed. Have you ever anticipated going to a place on a vacation or a weekend trip and dreamed about it for years, and after finally getting there you say to yourself or traveling companion; "This is it?" "I was expecting more!" These Greeks got to see Jesus and we don't know their response, but we hear about the disciples response often when they react to Jesus discussing the suffering he would experience for the sake of the world and God's plan of salvation. This was not what they wanted to see or hear as the destiny for their friend and their Messiah.

What does seeing Jesus mean for you? There is the literal understanding where people expect the person of Jesus to come walking down the street one day and embrace them with the best hug ever experienced. That may seem far-fetched, so I will look for him in my toast instead. Some may see him in a cloud formation, or the Shroud of Torun. Remember Believing is Seeing. In order to see you must believe – something is possible. Maybe Jesus won't be walking down the sidewalk ready to give you the biggest hug you need but maybe you see a friend who is in distress or knows you well enough to know you are in distress and gives you that big hug – then I believe you have seen or experienced Jesus.

It seems to matter what you/we are looking for and willing to see. Sometimes we live with blinders on not seeing Christ in our neighbor, not being Christ to our neighbor, not thinking that one person can make a difference. // But after this week when more than an

estimated 1 million students stood up and walked for something they believe, along with many of their families and friends something happened. Maybe not a major change, but these well-spoken young people made their voices known and their presence seen. No matter what you think of their cause or the issue at hand, it is important to note the passion and intentionality of what they did and how articulate they were with their message. Their recent past is impacting their present and future.

Each of us has a past – of course we do – the brain function is called Synaptic Shadows. These are the effects of prior learning on present experience. This is the way the past, embedded in our learning-induced synaptic connections, casts shadows or influences shaped by our earlier experiences which directly impacts how we perceive, feel, and think in the present and even how we anticipate, plan, and create the future. These shadows are neither bad nor good; they are simply the way that the past shapes the present and future and repeat themselves unless addressed. One can look at the past in several ways; it's over and down with or one is bound to repeat itself unless certain issues are addressed and integration and growth is encouraged.

The healthy mind leads to a healthy soul and spirit. It also leads us closer to the place that is discussed in our first lesson for today. The last part of verse 34 of the Jeremiah text: *"Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*" God knows us so well and yet also forgets our wrongs and whatever we consider imperfections and iniquities. God loves and forgets. We rarely do, whether it is about others or ourselves.

This is our spiritual challenge to allow what has happened in our lives to be and to move forward as forgiven and loved people, loving, forgiving, moving through the hurt and iniquities that feel so unforgiveable and truly live and love because of God's ability to connect with us in Jesus. Sometimes we may not want to see Jesus, but Jesus see us for who we are and loves us so we can love each other. Amen