

Among those who went up to worship at the Passover festival were some Greeks, people of Greek language and culture, possibly Jews, possibly not. Why did they approach Philip? Philip and Andrew are Greek names. They are from Bethsaida in Galilee, where most people spoke both Aramaic and Greek.

These Greeks desire to see Jesus. The way John tells the story, we don't know if they ever met Jesus. Their request becomes an occasion for Jesus to declare "the hour has now come." Remember the story in John 2 of the wedding where the wine runs short. Mary informs Jesus *They have no wine*. Jesus responds *Woman, what is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come*.

In John 7 Jesus is teaching in the Temple and the authorities don't like what they hear. They try to arrest him, but no one lays hands on him, *because his hour had not yet come*. In John 8 we see Jesus teaching in the treasury of the Temple and again his hearers are not pleased but no one arrested him, *because his hour had not yet come*.

Now *his hour has come*, the moment when Jesus sets in motion the course of the final events of his life. His death no longer lies in the future; indeed, it is imminent. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. How? By being *lifted up*, an intentionally ambiguous phrase that can refer to his crucifixion and/or his ascension.

According to W. H. Auden if one who is in love is asked what gives the beloved such unique value over all other persons, the only answer is, *She/he is the fulfillment of all my dreams*.

But if a professed Christian is asked why she/he believes Jesus to be the Christ, the only objective answer is, *I believe because Jesus fulfills none of my dreams. He is in every respect the opposite of what he would be if I could have made him in my own image*.

No other figure in lore, literature, or history struck Auden as quite so offensive. Jesus made Auden anxious, defensive, and even angry. *Jesus manages to arouse all sides of my being*, said Auden, *to cry "Crucify him!"*

If Jesus does not strike us as a tough act to swallow, if we do not, like the authorities in the Temple, want to arrest him for disturbing the peace, it could be that we have reduced him to the size of our own imaginations, transforming his righteous witness into a kind of ghost friend who forgives our sins but will not pull us out of our comfort zones.

If Auden's standard is to be credited, we might even say that if we do not hate Jesus a little, we have yet to see him clearly or to understand the cost of following him.

It is not easy to see Jesus. We must be willing to let go of all we cling to for security, to let go of our preconceived notions of life and God, and like the seed buried in the

ground be transformed. To be sure the seed buried in the ground does not actually die, but “lets go” of one form of life to become an entirely new plant, laden with fruit. **The implicit trust required to *let go* of what is known for the unknowable is the essential precondition for seeing Jesus.**

The difference between loving life in this world and hating it, is the difference between a life governed by self-gratification and a life of self-giving for the welfare of others. The end of a life of self-gratification, of self-glorification, is death; the end of a life of self-giving is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law; with such things one sees Jesus.

*Where I am, says Jesus, there will my servant be also.* Where is Jesus? He is in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner. He is wherever human beings are being treated as less than bearers of the divine image. It is very hard to see Jesus in the poor and the persecuted because seeing him in these, our sisters and brothers, demands our service.

Why does John leave open the question of whether the Greeks ever see Jesus? I suspect it is because the Greeks represent John’s readers, you and me. Whether we ever see Jesus is answered only in a trust that lets go of certainty and security and embraces the unknowable, in a trust that lets go of self-gratification for a life of self-giving, in a trust that lets go “me first” for a life of service to “the least of these.” Whoever does so, Jesus promises, will be honored by God.