

We would see Jesus (John 12:20-33)

This is a fearful time, especially for those who are being targeted by some of the currents of our cultural wars.

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In my *Century* lectionary column for this Sunday, I talk about the plaque in my seminary's chapel that sits just below the pulpit. Viewable only to the preacher, it reads, "We would see Jesus." It's a reminder to the one who stands in that place that their only task is to make Christ known to the ones who come to hear the Gospel preached.

When I have a vacation Sunday, I often try to attend worship somewhere else. Generally I look online for a church that is a part of a mainline Protestant denomination such as my own. I like hearing and seeing what's happening in other congregations. But although I'm hoping to hear a sermon about Jesus, sometimes I instead hear one about banned books, or drag shows, or why God's pronouns are they/them.

Don't get me wrong. This writer whose books would be tossed out of the high school I attended, who has attended drag shows for years, and who uses they/them pronouns is not a reactionary. I want to stop book bans, protect drag kings and queens, and respect everyone's pronouns. (I do think that God's correct pronoun is "God," but that's another article.)

I just wonder whether sometimes all of us preachers could use one of those little signs on our pulpits reminding us that our job is helping everyone see Jesus.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus talks about what it means to gain your life by losing it. He tells his disciples, who are still so unaware of what is about to happen, about a strength they cannot imagine. He shares with them a promise of a future, but he also asks of them a commitment that will require them to be ready to follow him to fearful places.

This is a fearful time, especially for those of us who are being targeted by some of the currents of our cultural wars. I'm not being melodramatic when I say that sometimes using a public restroom can be a scary experience for a nonbinary or trans person. When I go to church on Sunday, I don't need another reminder of what I'll find on my Facebook feed. I don't need a legislative action alert. I need a reminder of Christ, who loves me and calls me to him, who gives me strength even when I am called to do hard things.

The church is at its best when what we do best is what only we can do. Yes, we must speak up about the issues of justice that we encounter. But we can never do so at the expense of our deepest identity, nor can we do so at the expense of the spiritual needs of the very people we think we are helping. The ones who come through our doors, they would see Jesus. As preachers, our first task is helping that to happen.