

Sunday December 28, 2025
@ FGBC
30 minutes
“Seeing Jesus” Series
John 2:23-3:2

Experiencing Jesus with Your Senses

- If you had to give up on of your five senses, which would it be?
 - I’ll give you 10 seconds, then I am going to poll the crowd...you are allowed to vote once for one of the five senses (taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing)
 - Taste
 - Touch
 - Smell
 - Sight
 - Hearing
 - Why did you choose the sense that you did?
 - *30 second conversation with the person beside you.*
 - Each of the 5 senses are important to life, but aren’t necessary.
 - A person can live without each of those senses, albeit, some are more difficult to live without than others.
 - As we use each of our senses, we experience life around us.
 - Each of the senses allows us to experience more fully.
 - I need a volunteer to come forward...your goal is to use your 5 senses to figure out what is in the box.
 - **HEARING**
 - **SMELL**
 - **TOUCH**
 - **SIGHT**
 - **TASTE**
 - Each of your senses helped you figure out what it was right?
 - At touch you had a pretty good idea, but it wasn’t until sight likely that you knew completely.
- For the next number of weeks, we are going to be digging into a sermon series entitled, “Seeing Jesus”.
 - The reality is that when it comes to faith, we often focus on the sense of sight...how do we see Jesus at work in the world around us with our eyes.

- That doesn't mean though that we should discount our other senses when it comes to experiencing the fullness of God through Jesus at work in the world around us.
 - Because of my work at a funeral home, one of the things that I get to experience fairly often is funeral mass at a Catholic church.
 - For any of you that have been to a funeral mass before, you will know that each of the different senses are engaged as the Kingdom of God is shared in relation to the deceased person.
 - Sight – there is a fair amount of movement as the priest moves across the altar throughout the mass.
 - Taste – a key part of funeral mass is the eucharist, or what we know as communion...the opportunity for people of Catholic faith to physically taste and see that the Lord is good.
 - Hearing – obviously a part of funeral mass is hearing what is said, but moreover, prior to the sharing of the eucharist there is a ringing of bells emphasizing the mystery of God's presence in that meal.
 - Smell – the final blessing of a deceased person before they exit the church is with incense, as incense is used as an offering that rises to the Lord.
 - Touch – and for those that go to the funeral prayers, often the evening before the funeral mass, there is the opportunity to touch the deceased person as the casket is opened.
 - Not often do we see all 5 senses used in such close proximity as we “see” the presence Jesus in a situation.
- As we are working through the Gospel of John, first looking at “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God”, then looking at Jesus interacting with his disciples, we are now transitioning to stories of people seeing Jesus, not just simply with their eyes, but experiencing Jesus with their senses as they walk alongside him, observe him, share meals with him, and witness him perform miracles.

READ John 2:23-3:2

- According to the Gospel of John (2:13-22), as Jesus heads to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover he comes across people who have turned the temple courtyard into a marketplace.
 - This is more than just a bake sale going on...
 - It was customary that there were animals nearby the temple for sale.

- It wasn't practical for someone traveling from hundreds of miles away to the Passover to bring their animal sacrifice with them, so animals were sold for these travelers.
 - The issue was that priests were greedily turning this into a business...bringing the market into the temple disrupting temple worship...marking up livestock and maybe even reselling previous livestock sacrifices that they had been given to them just to line their pockets.
 - In the other gospels this story comes after Jesus has taught and performed many miracles, but in the Gospel of John it comes right near the beginning...after Jesus flips the tables, he is approached by a man named Nicodemus.
- I probably wouldn't consider Jesus clearing the temple as a "miraculous sign" which is what leads me to believe that there are other things going on during this Passover gathering that John doesn't see necessary to record.
 - Miracles stand out because they are spectacular.
 - Nicodemus notices something spectacular, but we don't know what that is.
- While everything is going on, Nicodemus is observing from a distance...Nicodemus only shows up in the gospel of John so we know very little about him.
 - As a Pharisee he can't get too close to Jesus because his comrades would notice.
 - Pharisees were the religious elite who were focused on following the religious rules to a T.
 - Jesus, on the other hand, took the rules and shifted them such that the Pharisees weren't a fan.
 - Nicodemus could get close to Jesus to condemn him, but he couldn't get too close to inquire, to wonder, and to learn, so he lurks in the distance for a while and watches with his eyes, smells the smells of temple life, feels the crowds brushing by him as he watches, eating the food that was common in the marketplace while he observes Jesus, hearing the things that Jesus says (even if he has to strain to hear from a distance).
- Finally Nicodemus makes his move and goes to talk to Jesus...hoping that he can remain somewhat hidden from the prying eyes of the other Pharisees while they chat in the dark.
 - Nicodemus has noticed Jesus, and acknowledges that Jesus is sent by God and that God is with Him, which is a bold statement.
 - While every other Pharisee was trying to condemn and trap Jesus, this Pharisee is aware of the intimate relationship between Father and Son that the rest of the New Testament lays out...a story that Nicodemus is not yet familiar with.
 - He would have been very aware of the Old Testament foreshadowing of the one to come and save the world...and maybe, in this moment, he knows that Jesus is that one...or maybe not.

- He sees something...he notices something...Jesus comments about needing to be born again that follow and confuse Nicodemus, don't actually scare him off.
 - A couple chapters later Nicodemus makes a comment standing up for Jesus when everyone else wants to condemn him (7:50), and then later in the Gospel of John, Nicodemus returns once again, bringing gifts to anoint Jesus after he has died on the cross.
 - What Nicodemus saw, heard, felt, tasted, and smelled stuck with him, and changed his life enough that he was willing to come back to anoint Jesus body, which was typically only done by those who were closest to a dead person.
- This leads us to a question that is often met with an aversion of eyes and a blank stare as so many people try to think about the entirety of the last 6 months, coming up with something good...where have you seen Jesus show up in your life recently...where have you seen God at work?
 - Each of us has numerous moments where we experience Jesus at work, whether we notice it or not.
 - These can be large, grandiose circumstances.
 - These can be simple and seemingly insignificant circumstances.
 - Either way, they are ways and evidences that Father, Son, and Spirit show up in our day to day lives.
- As this is the last Sunday of 2025, we are going to spend some time reflecting on the past year...how has Jesus showed up in your life?
 - Where have you seen God at work?
 - Can you think of a time in recent memory when you experienced the Holy Spirit surround you?
- Over the last year, the Table at FGBC (aka the board) has been prayerfully discerning the vision of where God is leading us...I am going to share that vision briefly this morning and we are going to continue to talk about it in the weeks to come.
 - The vision that we feel God calling us to and that we want to lean into as a church is that we are "recovering the abundant life that Jesus calls us into."
 - We all get lost in brokenness...this morning in Lectio 365, the comment was made that we are naturally hardwired to remember negative, not positive experiences in life.
 - We need to recover the goodness that God shows us.
 - And God invites us into an abundant life not just to come in the future, but now, as we join Father, Son, and Spirit in what God is doing yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

- I have asked a few people to record a story of an experience where they saw God at work in their lives within the last year...the goal of these stories is to get you thinking about your life and how Jesus has showed up in big and small ways for you.

WATCH VIDEO

- We want to remember together what God has done in 2025.
 - o This past year may have been an amazing year for you or it may have been a really terrible year.
 - o Part of recognizing what God has done is wading through the good and the bad experiences, searching for Jesus' fingerprint in the midst of it all.
 - o Each of you are likely thinking one of three things at this point in time:
 - "I hope he doesn't call on me to come forward and share a story."
 - "I am ready to share something...I have all the stories of God working in my life."
 - "I don't even know where to begin in thinking about this."
 - o In answer to those questions:
 - No I won't call on anyone in particular.
 - You are going to have to wait a little bit to share...we are going to share stories in smaller groups in a couple minutes.
 - Let's talk about how to think about discerning God stories...
 - First, stick to your 5 senses:
 - o Sight – you likely won't look through your living room window and see God lifting a car off of a cat that got trapped underneath.
 - When it comes to sight, have you seen someone experience healing or newness in their lives?
 - Have you seen something happen that causes you to pause and be still, like a storm or a sunrise.
 - o Hearing – You also will not likely hear the audible voice of God, although it does happen on occasion.
 - In times of stillness though, have you heard the voice of God whisper a reminder to you... "I've got this" or "You are worth so much to me" or as Pat said in the video "Get out of my way" or Roger, "Be patient."
 - o Smell – You are not going to smell God, no matter how much you try.
 - Growing up on a farm we had a very large yard that meant a lot of grass to cut, which was one of my jobs...I came to love the smell of freshly cut grass, which still to this day reminds me of God's presence in the middle of something as simple as an insignificant piece of grass that gets stepped on, ripped up, and chewed on by a dog...God isn't the grass, but the grass is evidence of God's creation, especially as I smell it.

- Touch – You are unable to go outside and touch God...that is just not how God works.
 - We are however surrounded by all sorts of things in the world...some are naturally occurring like the snow, and others are made by humans, like a bike or a house...the next time your hands are holding something, ponder that thing in relation to God...did God create it? Did God allow you to enjoy it?
- Taste – Again, you cannot taste God...grabbing a mouthful of snow or taking a bite out of a tree does not mean that you have tasted God.
 - I have a bad habit of devouring food without taking the time to taste it...unlike me, when you go home for lunch or go out for lunch today, savour each bite and thank God for the gift of food in giving you the energy for another day.
 - Psalm 34:8 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”
 - Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled *Eat This Book* which was a reflection on that theme of eating...to chew on and meditate on the words of scripture, allowing those words to form and shape you.
- “Where have you seen God” can be a very ambiguous question.
 - If you think of that question from the position of your senses, hopefully it becomes a little bit less ambiguous and a little bit more practical to ponder.
- Another way to think of this question is through the themes of Advent.
 - Traditionally, there are four themes that pair with the four Sundays of Advent leading up to Christmas...hope, peace, joy, and love.
 - Where have you seen God?
 - Where have you experienced hope in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation?
 - Our world is filled with chaos, but is there a place that you have seen a glimmer of peace shining through?
 - Think of a time that you were filled with joy...you couldn’t wipe that goofy grin off of your face if you wanted to.
 - *Think of a time in the last year that you were loved...someone gave you a hug, someone gave you a gift or said something kind to you.
 - When you experience hope, peace, joy, and love, it is likely that you are seeing God break through in your life.

- The last Sunday of the month is our interactive worship Sunday.
 - For those of you that have been here before, you have an idea of what is going to happen...but it is still going to look a little bit different.
 - Once I pray, you are going to break into groups of 3 or 4 to share together stories of how you have seen Jesus in the last year.
 - Remember your senses...where have you seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled the presence of God?
 - Or where have you experienced hope, peace, joy, or love over the last year?
 - These stories don't need to be fancy...you don't need to share all of the details...keep your stories short so everyone can share (1 minute max)
 - There will be a 5 minute timer going while you share.
 - Once that timer ends another timer of 8 minutes will begin...I will not give you instructions...those of you that are helping out with the stations, please keep an eye on the timer.
 - If your group is still talking and sharing stories of God at work, keep doing so.
 - That 8 minute timer is also the start of the interactive worship time, where you can use your body to engage with what God is doing instead of just sitting and listening.
 - There are a few stations for you to check out:
 - Communion
 - Cups
 - Intinction
 - Cross
 - Is there someone that you know who you want to see God at work? Write their name and pin it to the cross.
 - Giving station
 - Meditation station
 - Prayer station
 - Write a prayer down
 - People who can pray with you and for you
 - Kids station where you can try to use your senses.

 - Parents, take your kids with you to explore the stations...invite the kids around you into the conversation of where you have seen God at work.

 - Recap

- 5 minutes – groups of 3 or 4 to share stories of God at work (senses, hope, peace, joy, love)
- 8 minutes – interactive...no instructions – get up and go if your group is done talking.

“Lord, awaken our imaginations. Teach us to see glimpses of your kingdom in everyday images. Help us to tell stories that point people to you. Amen.” (Lectio 365)

I recently heard about a professor at a seminary who starts off his class at the beginning of the semester by asking the students to look around the room to find all the yellow objects. After they spend a few minutes scanning the room, the professor tells them to close their eyes. He then asks them to name all the *blue* objects in the room.

The goal of this exercise isn't to trip up the students; the professor is trying to illustrate a point about God that so many of us spend our lives learning and relearning.

Our brains are built for pattern recognition. This means every story about God at work in the world we've read in a book, listened to in a sermon, experienced, and heard from others builds a framework around which we expect God to work in the future. This means when we come upon similar experiences or certain kinds of people, we pay special attention to them, expecting to see God at work yet again.

But all that time spent looking at one thing causes us to miss out on a whole host of other areas where God is actively at work. We're too busy looking for the yellow that we never notice the blue right in front of us.

Before Jesus arrived on the scene as a newborn in a manger, the people of Israel expected God would work *in* them, *through* them, and *for* them, just as he had in generations past. They were expecting a Messiah who would build a Jewish empire. Yet God was not concerned with only saving the Jews; God was working *in* and *through* them in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but it was no longer *for* them alone.

During Jesus' years of ministry, as well as in the years short after his ascension, most of his disciples and followers saw Jesus as the savior of the Jews. But as the apostles and others began retelling the story of Jesus, and began receiving visions from God about what is clean and unclean, like Simon Peter in Acts 10–11, they also began to realize the death and resurrection of Jesus was not just for Jews; this was salvation for the entire world.

The disciples were so busy during the years of Jesus's ministry paying attention to yellow – God at work *in*, *through*, and *for* the Jews, just like he had throughout history – they didn't notice the blue right in front of them – God at work *for* the whole world. The plan from the beginning was always for the benefit of the whole of creation, not just a single people group.

Think back on your own experiences seeing God work in your life. What are the people, situations, and ways he has worked through in your life, either for you or for the benefit of others? Take a moment to celebrate all God has done, but then spend a few minutes inviting the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the other ways God might want to work through your life today. Pray for eyes that are open to the possibilities that you might otherwise overlook...eyes that see the blue, not just the yellow. (NAB Advent Devo December 9)