

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
17 March 2024
John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”** (Come and see to the disciples of John at 1:39, and Philip to Nathanael 1:40-41.) Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** Mark 14:41, Matthew 26:44, (We have seen, “my time is not yet ready” at John 2:4, 7:20, 8:30. In two of these three occasions, the enemies could not get to Jesus because his time is not yet ready, in the other he is talking to his mother in Canaan. But his hour is finally ready, meaning he will die soon. This is the last passage before the long speech that starts at Chapter 13 and ends in chapter 17. After this, Jesus will be arrested and killed.)

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. (We have seen parables about grain in Matthew 13:8, Matthew 13:24, Luke 8:4-8... But in these parables the seed described is the Word of God. In John it describes Jesus' life. Like a seed he will die, be buried, remain buried for a while, but eventually rise again and produce much fruit. This will happen because his hour has come. In the same way, the disciples' lives are the seed that will grow an amazing harvest: the Church. As their master will die, so will they!)

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (See Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35, and Luke 17:33. In these passages we are talking about the cost of discipleship, but in John the word “hate” means “to reject”, so what Jesus is saying is that the disciples must reject the world's definition of life, or better, the world's definition of a “good life” as solitary, self-centered, self-directed existence, where the only thing that matters is the satisfaction of one's needs and wants. Jesus is saying, “Don't hold on to your seed! (your life) Rather, give it away freely that it may produce much fruit. Death is not the end. A death for the sake of the Son of Man can bear much fruit. Live a sacrificial life, giving yourself to the growth of the kingdom and producing much fruit, and if you die, see in that death also an opportunity to produce much fruit.)

Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. (Whoever spends his life in the service of the Son of Man will produce abundant fruit and will honor God through

the Son. The disciples are servants of the Son of Man, which means that they are servants whose serving honors Jesus and grows his kingdom. And Jesus will be with them to the end of the age. We have seen this in Matthew 28. We serve in his name not in our name. It is his mission we expand and grow. It is his words we preach and proclaim. It is his special relationship with the Father we bring into people's lives. The fruit we produce, which feeds the world, is ultimately his fruits. We plant and water, but it is he who produces the abundant harvest of the kingdom of God. By serving Jesus, we serve the Father because Jesus and the Father are one. Servants follow and model their lives in accordance with Jesus, our guide!)

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” (We have seen these same words at the garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:32-52, Matthew 26:36-56, Luke 22:39-46, but in John these words happen here when the “Greeks” arrive, not at the garden. These are communal words, not quiet words in prayer to his father as in the other three passages. Perhaps the indication here is that as he prays to the Father for courage at this hour, the disciples must also pray when they are troubled. They will be preaching the gospel in antagonistic times and places. Their lives will also be in great danger. Their hour will come soon enough. When they “come to their hour” they can too ask God for courage, realizing that their deaths are not the end of the story. God will produce great fruit out of their sacrifice. They must glorify the Father, as Jesus himself glorified the father.)

The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, **“An angel has spoken to him.”** Jesus answered, **“This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. (The fact that the “Greeks,” the foreigners, are here to see Jesus speaks to the realization of this prophesy. With his death Jesus will bring all nations to himself, and that has started already. The nations will “Look at the one who has been pierced.” (Zechariah 12:10). As all the Israelites who looked at the serpent lifted by Moses were healed, Jesus now will extend that blessing to all nations, as he said in John 3:14-15, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” The ruler of this world will be driven out. This ruler can have many names and be represented by many images: Satan, sin, death, hopelessness, egocentrism, complete isolation

from God, purposelessness... This (these?) enemy has been conquered through the work of Jesus on the cross.

The “Lifting up” of Jesus has three different dimensions: He will be lifted up on the cross on the day of crucifixion and those witnesses on that day will be drawn to himself at that moment. Three days later, Jesus will be lifted up (risen) from death and those who witness the resurrected Jesus will give testimony of what they experienced, bringing billions of people to the crucified Messiah. Forty days later, the risen Messiah will be lifted up to heaven in his ascension, bringing all future generations to himself. All men and women from all ages who lift up their eyes and see the one who has been lifted up will find a God who is mighty to save. Christ remains forever the “lifted up one”. A symbol of God’s love for sinful humanity. We too have come to our hour. It is here and now. We too are called to proclaim the Gospel in a hostile time, where the cult to the self makes it extremely difficult to “come and see” someone who is found inside and, especially, outside of ourselves. We have become “Nuclear Men and Women,” looking for truth and relevance inside ourselves and unwilling to look elsewhere. It is our job as disciples and servants of the Son of Man to direct people to the one who has been lifted up. It is our job to help people look outside of themselves for other sources of truth. It is our job to connect people to service of others, altruism, love of neighbor. Our time is now, the question is whether we will be willing to look at the one crucified or if we will continue to navel-gaze our way through existence.

Whichever option we take will determine the rest of our lives. May our Lord continue to bless you. Amen!