

## What Do You Think About Jesus?

John 12:20-33

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

March 27, 2013 – Passion Sunday



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. If you were to go into downtown Kansas City and conduct some “man on the street” interviews – and the question you were asking was: “What do you think about Jesus?” you’d get so many different answers it would be impossible to categorize them all. But in spite of what many think, the truth is that Jesus Himself requires that we think of Him properly. Some have protested, saying that since Jesus wore “lots of hats,” there should be no problem seeing Him in many different ways. However, when you picture our Lord, He doesn’t want you thinking of Him *simply* as a Good Teacher, a Moral Leader, an Inspired Preacher, a Divine Healer, or even a Good Shepherd. Yes, these things *are* most certainly true of Jesus, but they must not be the *first thing* you think of when you see Jesus. Jesus wants you first and foremost to see Him as the Crucified One, the One stretched out on a cross and laid dead in a tomb. And that’s precisely what St. Paul was saying when he wrote: “We preach Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

But some might ask: “How can anyone know what Jesus wants?” Well, look at this morning’s Gospel. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” He said, “I tell you the truth, *unless* a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and *dies*, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many more seeds. It was for *this* reason I came to this hour. When I am lifted up from the earth – lifted up on a cross – I will draw all men to Myself.” Jesus, you see, wants you to clearly see His crucified, dead body as it hangs from a blood-stained cross – a kernel of wheat falling to the ground, dead – utterly dead – without any life in it at all!

Today’s Gospel takes place on that day we call Palm Sunday, or Passion Sunday. Our Lord had just ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. A great crowd had gone out to meet Him, shouting: “Hosanna! Blessed is He

who comes in the name of the Lord!” *This* was the very same crowd that had been with Him on that day He called Lazarus out from the grave and raised Him from the dead. These are those who “continued to spread the word” about Him and rejoiced in His presence. And as we read, amid all the hubbub that day there were also some Greeks among those who had gone up to worship at the Feast. And it was these Greeks who came to Philip with a request, saying: “Sir we would like to see Jesus.”

Their request is hardly surprising. After all, who wouldn’t have seized the opportunity to meet a superstar like Jesus? Indeed, I suspect the reason these Greeks inquired of Philip was because they falsely believed Jesus was much too famous to be approached directly. They hoped Philip would get them a “backstage pass,” as it were. These men were not satisfied with simply watching Jesus pass by on the street, as Zacchaeus had once done from the crook of a Sycamore tree. No, they wanted to meet Jesus face-to-face, maybe even shake His hand. If cameras had been invented, you can guess what else they would have wanted. But when Philip brought them to Jesus, rather than immediately welcoming them, Jesus began with the words of the text. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. It was for *this* reason I came to this hour. When I am lifted up from the earth – lifted up on a cross – I will draw all men to Myself.” In good, Lutheran fashion you might be tempted to ask: “What does this mean?” Well, quite simply, it means that *no one*, without seeing our Lord’s cross, will ever properly know Him as He is.

Now you may have noticed that there’s something quite odd happening today in American Christianity. What I mean is, there are an increasing number of Churches that *purposely* no longer have crosses on display in their Sanctuary. They do this because they see the cross as a depressing image – negative, not very “user-friendly,” and

certainly not reflective of a theology of glory. One pastor on television who's wildly popular these days – as evidenced by the fact that his congregation meets in a former sports stadium, has upwards of 30,000 people in attendance, has millions watching on TV, and collects who knows how much every Sunday – has built his reputation on the fact that he regularly refuses to speak about such things as sin, suffering, and self-denial. His “good news” isn't the death of Jesus for the sins and sinners of the world, but rather the slogan: “I believe God wants us to prosper and have our best days now!”

Such a crossless portrayal of Christianity can only perpetuate the false view of God which much of our world already holds. The unbelieving world, if it has any idea who God is, can only picture Him as a white-haired old man who lets his children ignore Him completely – yet still leaves them in His will. This image of God cannot fathom anyone ever being sent to hell – except maybe those who commit the most heinous of crimes. For them, the image of Jesus nailed to a cross is a tragic error that could have been avoided. And maybe you might even be tempted to agree – especially when you experiencing crosses and suffering in your own life.

Jesus, however, carefully avoided any such notions. For our Lord wants very much that you and I to see Him one way – and one way only. That's why He continually points us to the moment of His death, so that we can see Him as He really is. “It was for *this* reason,” He says, “I came to this hour. When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to Myself.” Here is no tragic error, no lost gamble, and no miscarriage of justice. Rather, here is our God in all His glory – indeed, God in the act of glorifying His name.

Today's Gospel then is a good Gospel for Lent, because it gives us opportunity to focus once more on the main point of our faith – Jesus, the One who was crucified for sin. Knowing Him this way, you can set aside any concerns you might otherwise have about unearthing a Christian method for balancing your checkbook, finding prosperity, or whatever else is being prom-

ised and promoted these days in the name of Christianity. You can simply look to Jesus – for in Him and His cross you have a benefit far greater than anything this world has to offer. In Him you have the forgiveness of sins. In Him you have been washed clean in the water and blood which flowed from the wound in His side. In Him you have the Divine gift of endurance – not the removal of trials and tribulations, but the Divinely-given strength to bear up under seemingly impossible loads. In Him you have the glory of God's name given in Baptism.

But there's still another benefit for you here in today's Gospel. In addition to giving you the Jesus whom Jesus wants you to see, it also shows you the Jesus whom Jesus wants you to declare to the world. St. John the Baptist boldly proclaimed when He saw our Lord standing by the bank of the Jordan River: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” And as you see Jesus as the Son of Man lifted up in our midst, God has given you something with which to welcome the downtrodden, the overwhelmed, the regretful, and the embittered. You have the Jesus whom Jesus wants all mankind to see. You have the Jesus who is able to nourish His children with forgiveness, life and salvation – all of which are found, amazingly enough, in words, water, bread and wine. As you show them this Jesus, you're not only opening the door to heaven for sinners to enter into eternal life, you're also glorifying the Father's name. Dear Christian this is a joyful work and a Godly task which our Lord has given you to do, because it doesn't come from you. Jesus is the One who takes care of it for you – the One who gives you His Word to speak and His Holy Spirit to enliven your voice – the One who reminds you that when He is lifted up from the earth on His cross for all see, sinners *will* be drawn to Him and receive what He deigns to give us all – forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.