

## The Paradox Of Faith

John 12:20-33

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday



Grace to you and peace, from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. One of the great offenses of the Christian faith for many of the people in our world today is the fact that it contains so many paradoxes – things that simply make no sense to our fallen human reason. For instance, how can God can be three Persons yet still only be one God? How can Jesus be both God and man at one and the same time? How is it that a person can be both a saint and a sinner? How is it that death means life, losing means winning, shame brings honor, suffering produces glory, the first are last and the last first, or the harder you try *not* to sin the more you realize how sinful you are? And then, of course, there is today's Gospel lesson.

Here we find a number of Greeks – gentiles – who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Passover – the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was Holy Week – only a few short days before our Lord's Crucifixion. Upon arriving in Jerusalem these gentiles came to Philip with a request: "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and found Andrew, and together they went and found Jesus. When Jesus heard that these gentiles wanted to see Him He replied: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." In spite of the fact that Jesus' answer must have seemed rather out of place – after all, His response to their request seems to have had *nothing* to do with what they asked – it must have occurred to them that finally Jesus was about to show Himself as the One He had claimed to be – the Son of God, the King of Israel, the One who would finally bring about the revenge they had hoped would one day be heaped out upon their enemies. Finally, they may have thought, the hour had come! Now Jesus was going to display His true power and glory for all to see!

But all this earthly excitement probably came to a screeching halt when our Lord started talking about *how* He would be glorified. "I tell you the truth," He said, "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Huh? I don't get it, Jesus. You just said the hour had come for You to be glorified. What do dead kernels of wheat have to do with glorification? But then it got even worse. "Now My heart is troubled," Jesus continued, "and what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!" Okay, now I'm really confused, Jesus. Why would it trouble Your heart to come into Your glory? Why in the world would You ask the Father to save you from this hour of Your glorification?

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth," Jesus continued, "I will draw all men to Myself." Oh no. You can't possibly mean what I think you mean. You can't really mean that your glory will come only through Your crucifixion. We came to ask You about meeting with some Greeks who wanted to see You, and this is what You give us? Philip and Andrew were perplexed by Jesus' words, and so are we. But *this* – my dear brothers and sisters – *this* is the paradox and foundation of your faith. The Son of God, the King of Israel, *would* be glorified. He *would* be lifted up, but it wouldn't be on a throne. It would be upon a Cross. He would not wear a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns. Instead of hands adorned with fine gold, precious stones and works of art crafted by a jeweler and artisan, it would instead be hands cruelly pierced with the raw steel of an executioner's nails. Rather than being clothed in fine robes of scarlet and expensive fabrics, He would be drenched in the crimson covering of His own Blood.

**This** is how the Son of God would be glorified. **This** is the very thing which brings honor to our Savior. So if you, like these Greeks, wish to see Jesus, then **this** is the Jesus you must behold. Any other Jesus than this One is a false Jesus – a Jesus who does not and cannot save. So, what Jesus do **you** expect to see? Are you looking for a butler Jesus who will cater to your every whim? Are you hoping to find a power Jesus who will immediately fix every problem in your life? Would you like to find a glory Jesus who will give you every earthly pleasure and want? If any of these are the Jesus you seek, then you are looking for the wrong Jesus. Only the Jesus who suffers at the hands of evil men and shamefully dies on a bloody cross can save you from your sin and give you eternal life. Unless the kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it can bear no fruit. Unless Jesus is lifted up on the cross, no one can be saved.

And **this**, dear Christian, **this** is the great paradox of the Christian faith – and of your faith. Had Jesus refused to die this death, you would still be dead in your sin. Had Jesus given the people the power and display of glory they wanted, they – and you along with them – would be spending an eternity in hell – because **that** is precisely what you get when you demand a different Jesus than the One on the cross. If you insist on another Jesus – one you feel is more attuned to your own emotional, felt needs – one you think will give you an earthly life you can love – then you will lose. The man who loves his life will lose it. But the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **This** is the paradox of your faith.

There have been many times when you witnessed this paradox of faith being played out right here in this sanctuary – such as when you've had the privilege of witnessing a Baptism during the Divine Service. There, in the Red Sea waters of Holy Baptism many a sinner has been drowned only to be raised again to new life in accord with our Savior's promise in Holy Scripture. In the Passover of Holy Baptism, the Blood of the Lamb of God is splashed on the doorposts of the heart of the one receiving this treasure of

life and forgiveness. For it is at the font where sinners are covered in the Blood of the Lamb and saved from the Angel of Death.

St. Paul reminds us that those who have been Baptized into Christ have also died with Christ, and will live forever. Because the person who is Baptized is buried with Christ, they have also been raised with Him. Because in Baptism they share in the shame of the Cross and in the suffering of Jesus, they will be honored by the Father and gloried with Jesus. And just as all this is true for those who are Baptized, it is therefore also true for you. For you who have been Baptized – you who have been bathed in the River of Life, and have been given the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit – the kernel of wheat, Jesus, has indeed fallen to the ground and died. Jesus lay in the tomb after all His work was completed, but on the third day, that kernel of wheat who is our Savior burst forth as the true Bread of Life – His body broken and His blood shed – all of which He now gives to you in the Sacrament of the Altar, the medicine of immortality – which is yet another paradox of your faith.

So, do you wish to see Jesus? You can see Him, you know. He's present for you here in His Word spoken and sung in the Divine Service. He's present in the word of forgiveness spoken to You whenever you confess your sins and desire Christ's absolution. He's washed over you in the water of Holy Baptism – when you both receive and remember it. And, of course, He is here for you at this Altar and Table every week when we are able to gather here in His house, where the shame of our Savior and His glory is given to you in the simple, ordinary elements of bread and wine – under which is hidden His true body and blood for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sin. Here is where His shame is given for your honor. Here is where His suffering is given to you for your salvation, His death exchanged for your life, and the promise of heaven freely delivered to all who believe. All of this is done in the name and for the sake of Jesus – and all of it is done for you. Amen.