

Midweek Lent
March 15, 2023
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 12:20-33 (EHV)
His Final Steps Led to Some Greeks

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew came with Philip and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain. Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, this is the reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" A voice came from heaven: "I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again."

The crowd standing there heard it and said it thundered. Others said an angel talked to him. Jesus answered, "This voice was not for my sake but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus' final steps have taken him from the tomb of Lazarus to a dinner celebration with the resurrected Lazarus to his Father's house where he turned over some tables and drove out those who turned the temple into a marketplace. Now we come to a very interesting account during Holy Week of some Greeks wanting to see Jesus. But it seems like Jesus does not meet with them.

This group of Greeks were in Jerusalem to worship the true God. They were converts to Judaism and would have been allowed in the court of the Gentiles at the temple compound. This was the court which Jesus had cleared of animals and merchants the day before. Certainly, these men had heard how Jesus not only healed and taught the Jews, but also the Gentiles. Christ had spoken to the Samaritan woman at the well. He drove out a demon from the daughter of a Canaanite woman near Tyre and Sidon. He healed a centurion's servant in Capernaum. Jesus came for the Greeks too.

The Greeks who asked to see Jesus would have been hoping that Jesus was the Messiah, for they also knew the Old Testament. They wanted to see the Savior promised to the Jews and to the Gentiles. They wanted to see their Savior. So, they ask Philip who asks Andrew, and these two disciples bring the request to Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

He does not grant their request to see him. He does not talk with the Greeks who wanted to see him. He does not even seem to acknowledge their request. I don't know how these men felt but we might feel ignored, abandoned, alone.

Maybe there are times in our lives when we want to really see Jesus. We are scared and we want to feel Jesus' presence, so we aren't scared anymore. We are sad and even depressed and we want to see Jesus take away our sadness. We have doubts and concerns and worries and we want to see Jesus clearly, so

those worries disappear. We want more than the written Word of God to tell us that Jesus is with us. We want to feel his presence, to experience Christ being with us. Maybe we want to feel goosebumps or waves of joy or a sense of peace. We go to Jesus with a problem, and we want some sign that he is listening to us and will do something.

But the next day we feel the same. The next day, the problem is still there. The next day, nothing has changed. And the devil whispers in our ears that Christ has ignored us, that Jesus can't do anything to help, that Christ wants you to continue to suffer.

Though Jesus did not grant their request to see him, he still did what was best for those Greeks and for all people. Jesus continued his final steps to the cross. He tells the crowd what he is about to do for the glory of his Father and the salvation of all.

"The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it continues to be one kernel. But if it dies, it produces much grain. Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, this is the reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" A voice came from heaven: "I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again."

Christ knows what is soon to come. He knows the suffering he will endure, the mocking, beating, scourging, crown of thorns, nails and crucifixion. His soul is troubled by the suffering to come upon him, by the wrath of his Father that will be poured out on him for the sins of others. And he calls this the time of his glory! His suffering and death is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified. His suffering and death will glorify his Father's name. And his Father agrees!

Here is the answer to the Greeks and to us who want to see Jesus. See Jesus in his suffering. See Jesus in his death. For his glory is shown in suffering. At the cross, Christ did more for those Greeks than he did for anyone who got to see him and talk with him one on one. At the cross, he completed the payment for sin. At the cross, he finished the work he was sent to do. At the cross, forgiveness for the sin of the world was obtained by Jesus.

See Jesus on the cross and you have the answer to sin, doubt, worry and loneliness. For the suffering and death of Christ is a fact that does not change with our feelings and emotions. Jesus has paid for all of your sin whether you feel joy or sadness at the moment. Christ loved you enough to die for you whether you are confident of this or have some doubts. Your eternal life has been secured by Christ whether you are at peace with your situation in life or have big worries about the future. And Christ suffered being forsaken on the cross so that your Father in heaven will never leave or forsake you.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

About three years before this, Jesus told Nicodemus that he would be lifted up like Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness. He repeats this image just days before he is lifted up on the cross. And he draws all people to himself. This is a strange thing for a crucifixion to draw people. Surely some would go to a crucifixion because their loved one was being executed. Others may attend a crucifixion to see the gruesome sight. But most would avoid such a sight at all costs. It is even difficult for us to watch a movie that portrays the crucifixion of Christ.

And yet we are drawn to the One upon the cross. We are not drawn to the suffering and gruesome details. We are drawn to the Son of Man and Son of God who is lifted up on the cruel cross. We are drawn to his sacrifice that saves us. We are drawn to his selflessness in carrying out his Father's will to rescue sinners. We are drawn to his innocent death because by his death, life eternal is given to all who believe in him. That includes the Greeks who wanted to see him before Good Friday and us Gentiles today who want to see our Savior too.

Especially in Lent we sing songs like:

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted
Upon the Cross Extended

One would not describe these as happy songs, upbeat songs, or what are often called praise songs today. These hymns are somber, serious and make us look at Christ's suffering and death. Our eyes of faith are drawn to the cross of Christ in such hymns. We can and should describe these hymns as glorious hymns. For the death of Christ is the time of his glory and gives glory to his Father in heaven.

Soon we will sing some upbeat, happy, praise songs as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. That too is glorious. But don't miss the glory in the cross, the glory in his suffering. Seeing Jesus face to face would have to wait for the Greeks that day in the temple and for us as well. As we wait, we see him in his suffering and death that gives life to all who believe in him.

Glory be to Jesus.

Amen.