

5th Sunday in Lent

March 17, 2024

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

John 12:20-33

Rethinking Devoted Commitment

John 12:20-33 (EHV)

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Festival. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew came with Philip and told Jesus.

²³Jesus answered them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Amen, 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. ²⁵Anyone who loves his life destroys it. And the one who hates his life in this world will hold on to it for eternal life. ²⁶If 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.

²⁷“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. ²⁸Father, glorify your name!” A voice came from heaven: “I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said it thundered. Others said an angel talked to him. ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice was not for my sake but for yours.

³¹“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Glory is winning an Olympic gold medal. Glory is winning a battle over the enemy. Think of the glory of David after defeating Goliath. Glory is a first responder saving someone’s life. Glory is winning an Oscar or Grammy or Tony or Pulitzer or Nobel Prize. When humans glorify someone on this earth, it is almost always because that person achieved great success or won some kind of victory.

Most of us sitting here today will not win a gold medal or a Nobel prize. But in our sinful human nature we still crave some kind of glory for ourselves. We want others to glorify us for something. Parents might seek glory through their children. We look for others to tell us what great parents we are to have raised such a great athlete, musician, student, human. Some look for glory through work. I try to impress others with my success at work so they will tell me how great I am at what I do. Maybe I even embellish my work accomplishments to get more glory from others. Some might seek glory through possessions. We want people to see us driving an impressive vehicle, wearing the “in” brand of clothing, going to the right events, and looking like we have lots of money to burn. Wow, you must be doing really well in life.

Of course, many in this world don’t have the victories, accomplishments, and possessions to use to seek glory from others. The lack of these things does not stop our sinful heart from desiring glory. The sin starts in the heart. The desire for other people to give you glory is the sin. Some will have the opportunity and ability to get the glory. Others will not. But the desire in the sinful heart is the same. Those of us who don’t have the victories and accomplishments might think we are better because we seem humble, when in reality our hearts desire the same glory of this world. What deceitful hearts we have! Who will rescue us?

The One who is glorified by his Father and always sought the glory of his Father.

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to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.”²² Philip went to tell Andrew. Andrew came with Philip and told Jesus.

²³ Jesus answered them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

We don’t know if the Greeks got to see Jesus. We don’t know what they were looking for in Jesus. Instead, Jesus takes this opportunity to explain the true nature of glory and his true purpose for coming to the earth. It is Tuesday of holy week and finally the time has come for him to be glorified. Throughout Jesus’ ministry others had tried to bring about this hour sooner.

Jesus attended a wedding with his mother and his disciples some three years earlier. Mary knew Jesus could do something miraculous when they ran out of wine for the wedding celebration. It would be a glorious revelation that the Christ had come! Jesus said to Mary, “My time has not yet come.” Of course, he graciously turned water into wine, but only a handful of people knew what happened.

In John 7, Jesus’ brothers urged him to go to Jerusalem and publicly reveal himself at the Feast of Tabernacles by performing miracles. Jesus said to them, “The right time for me has not yet come.” Instead, Jesus went to the festival quietly. But while there, he spoke with the Jews and claimed to be sent from the Father. They attempted to seize him but could not because “his time had not yet come.”

The same happens in John 8 when Jesus testifies that God is his Father. They again try to seize him but could not because “his time had not yet come.”

But on the Tuesday before Passover, in John 12, Jesus tells us “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” The disciples have to be excited. Finally, the time has come. Finally, Jesus is going to receive the glory he deserves. Maybe he’ll shine like the sun again as he did not long ago on the mountain of Transfiguration. The crowd standing there (perhaps including those Greeks who wanted to see Jesus) must have been thinking they were about to see amazing things. Jesus had healed the sick and most recently raised Lazarus from the grave. What will Jesus do that will be more glorious than that?

²⁴ 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.

Jesus will die. Well, that had to take the excitement out of the air. But Jesus does not seek worldly glory. He only seeks to glorify his Father in heaven. The Father’s great desire is to save those who have earned eternal death by our sins from this death. Jesus glorifies his Father by offering himself unto death to save us and all sinners from death. Jesus has to be the kernel of wheat that dies in order for many to receive life eternal. There is no other way.

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Jesus glorifies his Father by willingly going to his own death which he knows is happening in just a few days. It will not be easy for Jesus. He already has a troubled soul. He will pray earnestly in the Garden on Thursday evening for the cup of suffering to be taken from him. But always, he glorifies his Father. Always, he desires for his Father’s will to be done. Always, he carries out the Father’s good and gracious will.

The Father verifies that the death of Jesus is what must happen. He speaks as he did at the baptism and Transfiguration of Christ. The crowd may not have understood the words, but they understood that what Jesus said was approved of by the Father. Jesus had come to this hour to

glorify his Father by willingly dying to pay for the sin of the world. He even tells the crowd how he will die.

“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die.

Jesus will be lifted up from the earth. He takes us back to his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 and to the bronze snake on the pole in Numbers 21. He will be crucified, lifted up from the earth on a cross of wood. But he tells us why this will glorify his Father and in turn why the Father will glorify the Son at the cross. The ruler of this world will be thrown out. The ancient serpent, the devil will be crushed at the cross. His power to accuse us of sin will be overthrown for every sin will be paid in full at the cross. What this world glories in – power, fame, victory, money – will be shown to be false glory when Jesus dies. For his victory over sin was completed by the cross. That is glory!

In addition, Jesus draws all people to himself through the cross. It is counter intuitive to be drawn to someone who was put to death in one of the most painful, humiliating, and shameful ways man has ever devised. Who would want to be associated with anyone executed in such a manner? But we are! We are drawn to the cross. We are drawn to Jesus on the cross. We are drawn to his sacrifice for us. We are drawn by his love for us. We are drawn by his devoted commitment to glorify his Father in all things. We are drawn by his devoted commitment to us, to willingly suffer and die to give us eternal life. All glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we can see Jesus’ answer to Philip and Andrew now. The Greeks wanted to see Jesus and Philip and Andrew brought their request to Jesus. We don’t know if they got to see and talk with Jesus that day. But on Friday, they would either see with their own eyes or hear eyewitnesses tell of the glory of Jesus at the cross. He was lifted up from the earth to glorify his Father and draw all people to himself including those Greeks.

If they were drawn to Christ in faith and became some of the living grain produced by the death of Christ, their lives would have changed. The better we see the glory of Jesus at the cross, the more we will seek to glorify God in all we do and the less we will seek the glories of this world.

Amen.