

John 12:20-33

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.
21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.'
22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.
23 Jesus replied, 'The **hour** has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
24 Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.
25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.
27 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this **hour**"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this **hour**.
28 Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'
29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.
30 Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine.
31 **Now is the time** for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.
32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'
33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The hour has come John 12:20-33

So we've come close to the end of Lent, and Jesus has come to the point of no return. The lectionary readings do a bit of a flip around here because this incident comes just after the events of Palm Sunday, which we celebrate next week. But this is a crucial moment in the story and there won't be time for it in Easter week. Just before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem he's raised Lazarus from the dead, and this has everyone talking, and others trying to track him down. We already know that the Pharisees and the chief priests have decided that Jesus must die. Just for context, I need to read a little bit of John 10: 47...*the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."* 49 *Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You don't realize that it's better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."* 51 *He didn't say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.*

Things are really coming to a head. In the verse immediately

before our reading the Pharisees are furious with all this interest in Jesus

19 “... *this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!*”

So this is a big moment. We discover that news of Lazarus being raised from the dead has gone beyond local ears. When some Greeks come wanting to see Jesus, the disciples Philip and Andrew rush to find him. It's significant it's Philip, because as we're told, he happens to be from the Greek speaking town of Bethsaida in the Decapolis region in the north of Galilee, and so these people may have been friends of his.

But in his usual cryptic fashion Jesus doesn't answer them. First he says *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* I'll come back to that in a minute.

Then he goes off at a tangent with three seemingly unconnected statements. Bear in mind though that at this moment, unsurprisingly, 'his soul is troubled' v27. He's scared. God's plan is coming to fruition, but it's not in the way the disciples would hope. He already told them he has to die. But they still don't really grasp it, or believe it. We're told earlier in this chapter (v16) that they only understood all this much later, after Jesus had returned to the Father.

Now, in this moment, the future fate of the world hangs on his actions.

And the Greeks arriving has flicked the switch in his mind.

That his ministry is coming to a close, and he has to go through with it. To the terrible conclusion now coming rapidly towards him. And so firstly he says 24 *unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.*

This answer now makes sense to us. A seed which remains in a packet or on a shelf is no use. It has to die to produce fruit. Many multiples of its single self. This is an echo of the parable of the sower. Jesus is applying it to his own death.

Secondly 25 *Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

Jesus knows that this truth that he has taught them repeatedly depends on his actions now. Our lives are only as valuable to us in the extent we are willing, not to hate them (that's just hyperbole) but to let go of them. Our lives belong to God, and if we give them back to Him they are returned in a form infinitely greater than if we desperately cling on to everything we've got. Or think we've got. The truth is that it was all given to us by God in the first place.

Thirdly 26 *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.*

These are the crucial points for those like the Greeks who wish to 'see' Jesus. John, by 'see', means something more than just 'get to meet.'

'See' in John's gospel always means 'know and understand'.

Understand that to follow Jesus is to let go of self interest, because the message of the gospel is that in the Kingdom of God we all serve God and serve others. And this is how God created human community to work, in the same way that Father, the Son and the Spirit work together in mutual love. If we put ourselves first it always, eventually, falls apart. And so we don't know if these Greeks ever met Jesus or if they 'saw' him, if they became disciples. And so Jesus' *human* instinct is to avoid what is going to happen, to preserve himself, and so he's troubled because the temptation, as it was in the desert and as it will be in the garden of Gethsemane, is to avoid what he knows is the Father's will. And so he appeals to the Father, glorify your name! Earlier he says that 'now is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified.' The Father's reply is that both will be true. The theologian Leslie Newbigin says that in Jesus's act of obedience unto death, 'the glory which is the flaming heart of the universe is revealed'. God's glory is the revelation of his majesty as creator, and Jesus revealed that in his ministry. So to be glorified means to be honoured for who you are. The hour has come, the coming to fruition of the whole story from Genesis onwards of God's rescue mission for humankind. The hour of judgment. v31 In other words the hour when the one Jesus calls 'The prince of this world', who has misled us and led us to believe that we

know how to rescue ourselves, and persuaded us that God is not who he says He is, will be driven out and defeated. This is the only way, for God himself to die despite the fact that for God death is an unnatural thing, because we were never created to die. All of our religious practice and moral effort, all our human intellect and invention cannot help us. Ultimately we will always fail without Him, and death itself is the result of our rebellion against God.

28 Father, glorify your name! Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'

The crowd are divided - some think it thundered, others that an angel spoke. Jesus leaves them to answer for themselves. To decide whether they will follow him, and whether they'll see the importance of what he's about to do.

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

Jesus combines this idea of death and resurrection, the seed dying and bearing fruit. The idea that life comes through death, that we're born of the spirit when we die to our former selves, the idea which is symbolised in baptism. That through worship of the self we die, but in dying to self we become life givers. And so this whole passage, this hour of realisation for Jesus, is a reflection of our own decisions on which path we take. Ultimately it comes down to the choice of whether we will achieve our goals by religious practice, or human moral effort

or whether we accept Jesus for who He is and for what he has done, and believe. He has opened the gates of the kingdom for the whole world to pass through.

He died so that we might live.

That's the good news of the gospel. Amen.