

Lent 5, March 17, 2024

**JOHN 12:20–33.** (EHV)

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.

There’s a difference between *making plans* to carry out difficult tasks and actually *doing* those tasks when the time arrives, isn’t there?

There’s a difference between making plans to do your taxes at the start of April and actually doing them when April 1 arrives.

There’s a difference between making plans to have the talk with your child about adulthood when he turns ten or twelve, making plans not to let his friends or teachers or the internet or Hollywood do it, but to do it yourself, and actually doing it once he reaches that age.

There’s a difference between making plans to do a thorough spring cleaning of your house and garage and actually doing it once spring arrives.

April 3, 33 AD is one of our best educated guesses for the date Jesus died. It had been a date on Jesus’s calendar for a long time. It was why he came into this world. When he came into this world, it was still more than thirty years off. When he stayed behind in the temple as a child, he still had over twenty years left. When he began his ministry, it was still over three years away. On Palm Sunday, he certainly knew it was coming, but it was still five days away.

Now it’s Tuesday. He has spent a whole day teaching his disciples, teaching the people with parables, defending himself before the Pharisees, teaching and correcting the Pharisees and Sadducees, and pronouncing woe on them for their hard hearts. He’s been so busy he hasn’t had time to think about what’s coming. Then he gets a tap on the shoulder. He turns around. It’s Andrew and Philip. “Jesus, some Greeks would really like to see you. Is that okay?”

Greeks. Non-Jews. Gentiles. They want to see him. The world grinds to a halt and time freezes. The entire scope of his ministry presses in on him and lies before him in full view. The prophecies of God reverberate in his mind. “I will make a *new* covenant. . . . They will *all* know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” “He himself carried the sin of *many*.” “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

This is it. The transition from the old covenant with the Jews to the new with Jews *and* Gentiles. It's really here. The time has really come. And he really has to die to usher it in. What will he do?

It's easy enough for us to *make plans* to carry out difficult tasks. But when the time comes actually to *do* them, it's a different story. Jesus was in those shoes. And our future, the future of the whole world, rested on his decision. That's why it's so relieving, so refreshing, so motivating to hear him say as he comes back to reality, "Father, glorify your name!" and to hear the Father respond, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

## 1.

We're not exactly sure why these Greeks were compelled to ask to see Jesus, and why Andrew and Philip felt they had to ask Jesus's permission first. We're told that these Greeks had come up for the festival of the Passover, just like the Jews. They seem to have been true converts to Judaism. But with all the Jewish laws regarding interaction with unbelieving Gentiles, perhaps there was a stigma on all Gentiles that even converts couldn't shake. Perhaps this stigma even influenced Andrew and Philip, so that they treated Greeks differently without even realizing it. Maybe they just thought it was better to be safe than sorry.

Ask yourself: If a foreigner just so happened to walk into the church while you were here and asked you in broken English if he could talk to the pastor, would you say, "Oh sure! I'll take you over to his house"? Or would you say, "Hang on, let me check with him first"?

But more interesting than Andrew and Philip's response to the Greeks is Jesus's response to Andrew and Philip. It almost seems like Jesus, or John, who wrote about this, had an attention deficit disorder, because we don't hear about the Greeks any more, and we don't hear any direct answer regarding their request. Instead, Andrew and Philip tell Jesus, "Some Greeks would really like to see you," and Jesus responds, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

It doesn't seem to fit, but we know that neither Jesus nor the Gospel-writer John were dummies. John wouldn't have recorded the Greeks' request and Jesus's response if they didn't belong together. Something about Greeks wanting to see Jesus triggered in him the realization that the time had come for him to be glorified.

And what he means, first and foremost, by being glorified is clear from what follows: "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." In order to be glorified, Jesus has to die. He has to not love his life. He has to hate his life in this world, so to speak.

Why does the request of the Greeks remind him of this? Jesus has spent almost the entire day so far dealing with Jews who do *not* want to see him, at least not for the right reasons. He has spent almost the entire day dealing with Jews who want to trap him in his words, who are looking for a reason to arrest him. He has spent almost the entire day dealing with Jews whom he longed to gather under his wings, but they were not willing. Jesus's death would pay for their sins, but his death would not bear fruit with many of them, because they refused to believe.

But these Greeks—these Gentiles—buck the trend of the day. They pass along a request to Philip that is so simple, so beautiful. It sums up the call you have issued me as your pastor. It sums up our entire purpose as Christians: "We want to see Jesus."

This is the fruit that the Savior's death will bear. Like a seed, if Jesus did not fall to the ground and die, he would be left alone. There would be no harvest. Neither Jew nor Greek nor anyone else would believe in him, and if they did, their faith would be like husks without corn. But if he dies, there will not just be Christ, but also Christians. Though many of the Jews would oppose and forsake him, there was an abundant harvest of faith to be reaped among the Gentiles.

But in order to produce the fruit—death! And the time is here! Good Friday is but three days away! This is really going to happen! Serving the Father, obeying his will, is not easy for Jesus. “Now my soul is troubled,” he says. “I have to not life my life in order to bear this fruit. I have to hate my life in this world to bear this fruit. I have to lose my soul, my life, to bear this fruit. And my soul is shaking just thinking about it!”

Jesus was fully God. But he was also fully man. And no man has ever had a task on his calendar more difficult than he had. And so we cannot even imagine what his turmoil was like as he had to face the reality of carrying out his plans, of carrying out his Father's plan.

“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.” One wave crashes against one side of his heart: “Get out while you still can!” Another wave crashes against the other side of his heart: “Don't back out now! This is precisely why you came!”

And suddenly, as he had done more than once on the stormy Sea of Galilee, the turbulence of his heart dies down to a quiet calm. A look of resolve appears in his eyes and he sets his jaw toward heaven. “Father, glorify your name!”

“Father, I will not seek what is best for my life on earth. I will submit my life to what is best for your name. You wish to glorify me through my death. You wish to reap a harvest through my death. So be it then! Your will be done. Your name be hallowed. Glorify your name.”

How does Jesus overcome his turmoil? How does he resolve to carry out his difficult task, now that the time has actually come to do so? He thinks of what this time means. He thinks not of the process, not of the hard work for himself, but of the outcome for others, the outcome for the world. “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 thinks of the fruit of his crucifixion. He thinks of those Greeks. He thinks of you. He thinks of me. His hatred for the devil and the false, fleeting love that the devil has brought to us; his love for us; his desire that we be with him forever in eternal life, will not let him turn aside from his difficult task or put it off.

“Father, glorify your name!”

And the Father answers his prayer for all to hear, though the hearts of some would not allow them to hear. This is the third and final time that the Father speaks from heaven during his Son's ministry. He spoke at Jesus's baptism. He spoke at Jesus's transfiguration. And now too he speaks in a voice like thunder: “I have glorified my name, and I will glorify it again.”

The Father sees Jesus's resolve. He sees the outcome as Jesus does. Jesus's mission is as good as done. He will draw all people to himself, both Jews and Gentiles, by paying for all of their sins through his death. “I have glorified my name,” the Father says. Jesus brings glory to the Father's name by carrying out his Father's will.

## 2.

“And I will glorify my name again.” How? By Jesus’s resurrection? By his rule at the Father’s right hand? By his return to judge the living and the dead? Certainly. But not just that.

Jesus tells us, “This voice was not for my sake, but for yours.” You see, Jesus can and does draw us and all people to himself by his death. But he draws us to himself so that we can serve like himself. If the path of service to the Father was better than the path of earthly ease for Jesus, then it is also better for us. And Jesus only wants what is better for us.

When he wrestled between loving or hating his life in this world, he was not just speaking for himself. “*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.”

Jesus is saying that God glorifies his name again when any of us serves his Son. And we serve his Son by following and imitating him, by not loving our life in this world, by hating our life in this world when compared to our life in the world to come, by considering the name of the Father, the will of the Father, more important than life itself, so that we are even willing to die for it.

Most of you have already made plans to do this. In your Confirmation vows you solemnly promised to suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from Jesus. That’s an appointment on your calendar every day of your life. But it’s easy enough to make plans, to speak words, even promises. When the time comes for actually putting them into practice, it’s a different story.

Where is the hating our life in this world when we join in mercilessly picking on the weird schoolmate or coworker, just so that we don’t have to be unpopular like him or her? Where is the hating our life in this world when we give into the coercion of our boyfriend or girlfriend and soil the marriage bed? Where is the hating our life in this world when we keep silent about religion and our faith under our roof merely to keep earthly peace under our roof? Where is the hating our life in this world when our excuse for not taking advantage of the opportunities to hear God’s word is nothing more than inconvenience? Where is the hating our life in this world when we are obsessed with the people and things of this world? Where is service to Jesus?

Is your soul in turmoil? This is a difficult task, isn’t it?

But not so difficult as Jesus’s task. And Jesus found resolve and strength for it in his love for you. We can also find our strength for service to him in his love for us. We can find it in his perfect resolve, which the Father counts as ours to the glory of his name. We can find it in Jesus’s death, which bore the fruit of our eternal life to the glory of the Father’s name. We can find it in Jesus’s being lifted up from the earth on the cross, which draws us away from the earth to himself, to receive forgiveness for all our lack of service to him, for all our self-service, for all our loving of our life in this world. We can find it in the Father’s name, which is really nothing more and nothing less than his eternal love for you and your name in his Son.

We can find it there, and then say resolutely with Jesus, “Father, do not glorify my name. Glorify yours.”

And we can hear his answer, his promise, “I did glorify it in Jesus. And I will glorify it again in you.”

And the turmoil and trouble of our own heart dies down to a quiet calm. “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. . . . ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’”

So be it, Father! Glorify your name. Just as you glorified it through Jesus’s obedience to you on my behalf, so also glorify it through my obedience to you in his name. Amen.