

Lent 5 B 2018

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

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[John 12:20-33](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Last Sunday, we talked about the not-so-famous verse, John three *fourteen*: “*And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*” This concept of lifting up indicates Jesus’ crucifixion, as well as his rising from the tomb and his ascension.

Today, Jesus repeats those words “*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*” The evangelist adds, “*He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*” And so this statement in today’s gospel illustrates the true meaning of what Jesus meant in his talk with Nicodemus in last week’s gospel. (Last week’s sermon.)

Today’s gospel begins with some Greeks. You wonder who are these “Greeks”? Are they men wearing togas? Do they smell like garlic and gyros and souvlaki and tzatziki and spankopita? Some Greeks!

Well, “Greeks” has a way of meaning “Gentiles” in the Bible. The Apostle Paul can use the terms interchangeably. Greek was the language of the Mediterranean world, the international language, the dominant language of trade. The way English is the international language in our own time. It’s not just the British who use English.

So these Greeks were foreigners in the land of Jesus. Probably Gentile, or Gentile converts to Judaism. And they seek out Philip. Now of the twelve followers of Jesus, Philip has a Greek name. And so does Andrew. Do you what Andrew means in Greek? It means “manly.” Do you know what Philip means in Greek? It means “horse-lover.” Someone who loves horses. I don’t know if I’d rather be Andrew or Philip, but with a name like Andrew, “manly,” I’d say your chances of getting a date on a Saturday night might be better.

Philip and Andrew are Greek names. Names like Simon, John, Judas, Jesus, Bartholomew, Levi— those are Hebrew names. So the Greeks find Philip, and Andrew and Philip take that request to Jesus.

The request of the Greeks is: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Or in the King James version, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Verse 21. In my last congregation, on the surface of the pulpit facing the preacher was a brass plaque engraved with the words, “We would see Jesus.” That pulpit was not the only one with those words. It’s a reminder to the preacher that his or her audience is

seeking Jesus, and that like Andrew and Peter, we have to bring the audience to Jesus, perhaps across a different language, a different culture, and a different time. “Sir, we would see Jesus.” “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

It’s a striking phrase. “I want to see Jesus. I want to meet Jesus. I want to know Jesus.” These so-called Greeks. The foreigners. “I want to see Jesus.” On one level, the gospel reading today says, “If you want to see Jesus, look to the cross.” Some Greeks say that they wish to see Jesus. Jesus replies by saying that he is going to be lifted up. That unless a grain dies in the earth, nothing will grow. At the opening of John’s gospel, the evangelist tells us: “*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*” You can’t see God. But you can know him in Jesus. And Jesus now says that if you *want* to see him, you will see him lifted up on the cross. Because that is the place to know God.

As I say every week, we are in Lent, the season of preparation for Holy Week. So these lessons from scripture are selected to orient us toward the events of Holy Week. Holy Week begins next Sunday, Palm Sunday. However, today’s reading from John already takes place in Holy Week. It takes place *after* Palm Sunday. Or maybe *on* Palm Sunday after Jesus has entered Jerusalem. And that explains the urgency in Jesus’ words. *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ...Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.* The last supper and the arrest of Jesus are imminent. That urgency is one reason that we encounter these words on the last Sunday before Palm Sunday. *Now is the judgment of this world.* It’s interesting and important that in the fourth gospel, the judgment day is not in the future. Judgment takes place when we see Jesus.

What happened on Palm Sunday is in the past. And in the verse right before today’s gospel, verse 19, the Pharisees throw up their hands in frustration with these exact words:’ *Look, the world has gone after him!* So on Palm Sunday, the Pharisees are expressing their frustration that Jesus is drawing the world to himself. And immediately, verse 20, today’s gospel reading, “some Greeks” try to get through the crowds in order to see Jesus. Like I said, Greek doesn’t necessarily mean toga-wearing philosophers like Socrates. It means the broader, bigger world.

When Jesus says today, “*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself,*” this is already beginning to happen. *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ...Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.* Now it is beginning to happen. The Greeks, the foreigners, want to see Jesus. He is drawing all people to himself. When he dies on the cross, Nicodemus, who came to him in John chapter three in the middle of the night— Nicodemus will come to the cross and the tomb in broad daylight. Jesus. Drawing all people to himself. The foreigner. And the Pharisee.

You know, when you fly on an airplane. Two things happen to get ready for arrival. The initial descent. And the final descent. Are you familiar with these two steps? Way before your land, the pilot begins the initial descent. I have flown into Tucson many times from Texas. From Houston and from Dallas. Cities on the other side of the state. When the plane passes over El

Paso, the pilot comes and announces our initial descent. That's the polite message where the pilot gives us an ETA, and tells us about the weather. That starts at El Paso. While we are still over Texas. The far end of Texas, but still Texas. And the plane slowly loses altitude. All across Las Cruces, Deming, Lordsburg.

And then somewhere over Arizona, around the Chiricahuas, the pilot comes back on and announces the final descent. The plane is going to drop down out of the sky and land. That's when the chimes go off on the airliner, and the flight attendants pick up the trash. Table trays must be put away. Seats must be upright. Electronics must be turned off. Seat belts must be fastened.

In the church, our journey ends at Easter. At Good Friday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter we reach our destination. Like the Greeks in today's gospel, we see Jesus. We see the will of the Father. On Ash Wednesday, when Lent began, we recited Psalm 51. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." We began our initial descent. Lent is the initial descent toward Good Friday and Easter.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God." We repeated that same psalm this morning. After hearing Jeremiah's message about God's transforming our hearts, of making his covenant internally with us. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." With the arrival of Palm Sunday, we begin our final descent. Tray tables up. Seats locked. Seat belts fastened. *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ...Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. Amen.*