

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 18, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: John 12:20-36

“To God Be the Glory”

In the Gospel of John – just before today's reading, the Pharisees are frustrated because they had just witnessed Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and were dealing with the aftermath of Lazarus' being raised by Jesus from the dead. People were still talking about the waving of palm branches and how the city was crying out words from Psalm 118:26 *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* *“Blessed is the King of Israel!”* (John 12:13) This was distressing the Temple leadership greatly and they were becoming very uncomfortable with this Galilean who was literally taking the city by storm!

Remember that this is at the time when the Passover is just days away and people have come from all over the surrounding world to celebrate the feast in Jerusalem. Adult Jewish men were required to come to Jerusalem each year for the Passover. The city must have been at a fever pitch.

Andrew and Philip came to tell Jesus that there are some Greeks – foreigners, who were apparently attracted to the God of Israel and the Jewish festivals that celebrated His works in the past and His promises for the future. They had heard of the works of Jesus and His ministry and wanted to meet Him. But instead of saying, ‘How wonderful, bring them here and then I can talk to them!’ Jesus goes into a deep comment about seeds and plants, about life and death, about servants and masters. Why was He saying this? Let's look at verse 32. Jesus says, *“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”* At that point Jesus declares that, if He is ‘lifted up’ from the earth, He will draw all people to Himself. And if the Greeks want to see Him and want to be a part of what Jesus has been sent into the world to do, then His response is to complete the work the Father has given Him. They couldn't just ‘see’ Him, as they'd asked; they would eventually **‘come to’** Him, being drawn by the powerful love of God, drawn into fellowship and new life. This should also bring to mind what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15 *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”* As you might have noticed Jesus said this just before Jesus told Nicodemus what we know as John 3:16. It is always worth repeating: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* (John 3:16-18)

God's plan for the world is about to be revealed when Jesus is *‘lifted up from the earth.’* Jesus would be crucified in just a matter of days – and then His ministry would be opened to the whole world – and not just the people of Israel – through His death and Resurrection. The fact was that it was not yet time. In fact, Jesus' words about seeds falling into the ground and dying is the beginning of His answer. We can see that God will save the world through the death of Jesus – which has been hinted at in so many ways since the very first chapter of John's

Gospel, but Jesus' death will be more like sowing a seed into the ground. It will look like a tragedy, but in fact, it will be a triumph: the triumph of God's self-giving love, the love that looks death right in the face and defeats it by meeting it voluntarily, on behalf not just of Israel but of the whole world, the Gentile world represented by these 'Greeks'.

At the Wedding Feast at Cana, Jesus said to His mother '*My time hasn't yet come,*' in John 2:4. '*Nobody arrested him,*' the Gospel says in John 7:30, '*because his time hadn't yet come.*' Now Jesus realizes that His time has indeed come: Jesus told His two apostles "*the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*"; the time when all of the preparation has been completed, and the world's greatest event, the most incredible moment of complete love and liberation, was about to take place. The fact that these Greeks, these foreigners are asking to see Him, here in Jerusalem, is as a sign, like when the first leaf of spring shows us where we are in God's planned timetable. There can be, there will be no holding back. Needless to say, Jesus does not meet with these Greeks, but what happens next is Jesus putting things into perspective for Philip and Andrew – and eventually for us. Jesus makes the connection with a kernel of wheat having to die to become a seed – which will become so much more as it grows into new life – and multiplies. A vision of what Jesus' death will do for the world that He loves so much – and the many who will come later as His disciples or followers.

Jesus goes on to say "*The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*" (John 12:25-26) These are words that will probably not make total sense to these Apostles until after Pentecost – but Jesus leaves them for us all to realize the humility that is required to truly follow Him – not putting ourselves first – but God first – where He belongs in our lives. Jesus' followers are to be like Him – and not bring glory to ourselves – but to God.

We have the advantage of knowing what Jesus will be doing in the days that follow – leading to His ultimate sacrifice at Calvary, bringing completion to God plan of salvation for those who believe in His Son, but the words of today's Holy Gospel show us that Jesus will now be doing whatever is necessary to bring GLORY to the Father. He has come all this way – He has spoken the Father's will, and "prepared the ground." And so, He prays "*Father, glorify your name!*" That is the prayer that gets answered by what appears to be thunder. God has glorified His name – He's done so already, in Jesus' extraordinary three-year public ministry, in His mighty signs and loving works. And He will do so again. He is saying "be obedient, follow the way and watch."

It is time for the task that Jesus came to do - the days ahead would carry Him much sorrow and pain – but He must be obedient and lead His disciples through the Passover supper, the Priestly Prayer in the Upper Room, give the gift of His Body and Blood, and be betrayed. All of this must be done so that Satan is defeated. Jesus tells them "*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.*" It cannot be done unless during

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His crucifixion, He can forgive those who did such despicable things to Him, and He can declare *“It is finished!”* The Light of the World will ultimately defeat ‘darkness’ but it has to happen through His passion, suffering and death – so that we, who believe in Him can be called *“sons of light”* or ‘children of light.’

In closing, Jesus’ reference to the light makes me go back to the words in the beginning of John’s Gospel – in which John described Jesus and how His last days would ultimately bring Glory to the Father, and salvation to believers. He wrote: *“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:10-14) To God be the Glory!