

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Holy Cross Day, September 13, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 12:23-33

"The Clock Is Ticking"

I don't know if you remember an old game show called "Beat the Clock?" It was one of those shows where they set a big clock and you had to do certain things before the time runs out. To put it plainly – the clock is ticking for Jesus – as in today's Holy Gospel we are in the midst of the days just before Jesus' crucifixion. Our Beloved Apostle St. Andrew along with the Apostle Philip have just come to tell Jesus that there are some Greeks – foreigners, non-Jews but who are attracted to Israel's God and the Jewish festivals that celebrated His deeds in the past and His promises for the future – they wanted to know more. Jesus doesn't say to Andrew and Philip, 'Oh, how wonderful! Bring them here so I can talk to them!' No, instead Jesus goes into a deeply serious teaching about seeds and plants, about life and death, about servants and masters. Why was He saying these things? Turn with me to page 1672 in our Pew Bibles; to the Gospel of John. Let's look at verse 32 of chapter 12. "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" What was He getting at when He said this? Jesus declares that, if He is '*lifted up*' from the earth, He will draw all people to Himself. In our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah – it is no mere coincidence that almost 700 years before Jesus was born these words were spoken by Almighty God: (Isaiah 52:13) "*See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.*" How was Jesus raised and lifted up? We are not talking about the Resurrection! Jesus was nailed to a cross, and then they lifted that cross up and put it into a hole in the ground so it would stand straight up! It was not a nice way to die – there would be some who would be tied to a cross, and some like Jesus who were nailed to the cross. It was a means of terrible torture, but even worse – it was ridicule. They would do it by a major roadway – people would walk by and sneer, and look. Can you just imagine what it must have been like? I cannot even go there – I shudder. It really is amazing that He would do that for us.

In essence, Jesus is saying that 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 that FIRST He must complete the work the Father has given Him. When that work is done, then they wouldn't just 'see' Him, as they'd asked; they would 'come to' Him, being drawn by the powerful love of God Himself, drawn into fellowship and new life.

Jesus' comments about seeds falling into the ground and dying are the very 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. We live in an agricultural area – we know the importance of seeds. If you don't put seed in the ground- you don't get crops – and then you don't get paid! When you put the seed into the ground – you don't make it crack open and grow – but God does. You water it, you fertilize it, you tend to it – you get the ground ready - but nothing happens unless God cracks open that kernel. It will look like a tragedy at first, but in fact, it will be a huge victory: the triumph of God's self-giving love, the love that looks death right in the face and defeats it by meeting it head-on, voluntarily, on behalf not just of Israel

but of the whole world, the world represented by these ‘Greeks’ – these Gentiles that came to visit. The clock is ticking!

At the Wedding Feast of Cana – when Jesus’ mother Mary asked Him to transform water into wine for the guests – Jesus told His mother ‘*My time hasn’t yet come.*’ (John 2:4) She came to Jesus simply to ask Him to make some wine for the guests. Jesus told His mother ‘*My time hasn’t yet come.*’ The Gospel of John in chapter 7:30, tells us that He was not arrested when Jesus spoke ‘*because His time hadn’t yet come.*’ Now, after His triumphant entry in to Jerusalem, on the day which we call Palm Sunday, which reverberated with the cries of “Hosanna,” Jesus realizes that His time has NOW come: the time when the preparation has been completed, and the world’s greatest event, the final moment of love and liberation, which is about to take place. There is no turning back – He is about to complete the job that He has been sent to do. The clock is ticking!

The fact that foreigners are asking to see Jesus, here in Jerusalem, is a pretty clear sign, just like when leaves start to turn colors it means we are going along God’s planned timetable. Look at the trees on the walkway – they are starting to turn color – we are entering the season of fall. There is no turning back. God’s time table is coming to fruition. Jesus will be going forward to meet the moment, with very symbolic actions (chapter 13), special teaching at the Last Supper (chapters 14– 16) and above all His High Priestly Prayer found in chapter 17) all leading to the Cross at Calvary. The most important thing is that Jesus will 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 like a good farmer He has “prepared the ground.” On page 1672 Jesus explains what will be happening from here on.

- In verse 26 Jesus explains His connection with His followers and how the Father will honor them.
- In verse 27 Jesus knows the clock is ticking and there is no turning back! He asks, like He did later in the Garden of Gethsemane, if there is a way out – but He quickly stops Himself and says that it for this reason that He came – to this very hour.
- Let’s look at verse 28; Jesus prays out loud for everyone to hear: *Father, glorify your name!* His prayer gets answered by a thunderous voice from heaven which says. "*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*" (John 12:28) I don’t know about you – but my knees would have been knocking! Some said it was thunder, some said it was the voice of an angel – but those who have ears to hear heard the voice of God say "*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*"

God has glorified His name – He’s done so already, throughout Jesus’ extraordinary three year public ministry, roaming the land healing anyone who came to Him, and preaching God’s Word, and in His mighty signs and loving works. And He will do so again. In essence God is saying “be obedient, follow the way and watch.” The clock is ticking – leading to the Cross.

In the cross of Christ we see the love of God expressed in a way that cannot be communicated

in any other way or place. (Romans 5:8-11) *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."*

God planned to save us from the worst possible sentence – being separated from Him for all eternity. I don't know about you but I don't want to go down that road! Christ died for us while we were still sinners and by His blood we are cleansed and saved – justified! We as Christians know that we came ask for God's forgiveness and know that we receive it! There is nothing that the Blood of Jesus cannot cover! That is why He died, that is what the cross is all about – He died for us – while we ARE still sinners, and by His blood we are cleansed, and saved, and justified. Later this morning at the end of our service - we will sing the precious Hymn "Rock of Ages" in which we will proclaim out loud in the very first verse *"let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side that flowed, be of sin the double cure; cleanse me from its guilt and power."*

Why did God do all this? He does this because He loves us THAT much, and He wants us to receive His forgiveness. Instead of judgement He wants to shower us with mercy and grace. We deserve judgment, but if Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, we receive mercy from God and we are delivered from judgment. Mercy means NOT getting the punishment we deserve. Instead of judgment, we receive by grace salvation, forgiveness of sins, abundant life, and an eternity in Heaven, the most wonderful place imaginable. God saves me by grace, which is his undeserved love given to me in and through Jesus. *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

Jesus' death on the cross is God's answer to our sin. The Apostle Paul – recognized the importance of the cross and its message and understood that it was so important that when he came to the pagan city of Corinth that he had nothing better to say – no other message than that of the cross. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2 *"For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"*

The Cross Carries the Message Of Victory. In today's Holy Gospel Jesus said that very thing: (John 12:31-33) *"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." "He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die."*

The cross of Jesus marked the defeat of Satan and the ultimate victory of God in time and in all eternity. At the cross we see the struggle between God and Satan, between light and darkness, between good and evil, and the GOOD NEWS is that Jesus Christ prevailed – good overcame evil – light overcame darkness – God defeated Satan.

My brothers and sisters – another clock is now ticking – ticking until Jesus comes again to bring a new heaven and earth and to banish Satan – the prince of this world. He will take Satan's game and throw it out! The new world that Jesus will bring Satan has no place in. God will abolish pain and sickness, fulfilling His promises to bring new life to those who believe in Him - in His words from Revelation 7:16-17 "*Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*" All because of the cross.