**John 12:20-24, 27-30** March 22, 2015

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lent 5

*John 12:20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. 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 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds…*

*27 “Now my heart 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is a classic tale of world missions – not WELS world missions, but world missions in general… A missionary went into the wildest jungles of New Guinea, a large island in the South Pacific. He found a tribe of people who had no contact with the outside world. None of them had ever heard any whisper of Christianity. There the missionary built a house and started to tell them about Jesus. But instead of going straight to Jesus, the Savior of the world, he spent weeks telling the life-story of Jesus as it unfolds in the Gospels of the Bible. He began with the angel Gabriel announcing Jesus’ birth, then the birth and so forth. He would tell a bit of Jesus’ life, talk about it, and invite people to come back a few days later. And did people come! They heard how Jesus was born, his teachings and the miracles. Jesus’ wisdom always refuted the nay-sayers and gave more wisdom to the followers. No sickness, even death, could resist his power. Crowds gathered to hear the story of this Jesus. Finally one day, the missionary came to the story of Jesus’ death. They never saw it coming. “How could Jesus die? He is the Son of God? He is so wise, so powerful!” He was supposed to be a conqueror or great leader. Good guys are supposed to win!

**An Unexpected Ending  
I. Expecting a Glorious Ending**

As it appeared to that tribe in New Guinea, so it seemed to vast crowds of Jews on the date of our sermon text. A week or two before, Jesus had resuscitated raised a man, a man dead for four days. Everyone expected this Jesus of Nazareth to be the deliverer.

Only three days ago, tens of thousands had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. They sang and danced and bowed before him. Everyone was sure that Jesus was some sort of deliverer, perhaps a king in waiting. That was Palm Sunday.

And now on Wednesday even foreigners were requesting audiences with Jesus. ***“There were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip… with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’”*** These Greeks were probably converts to Judaism. They wanted to know about this Jewish teacher. But why not go directly to Jesus? Remember that concept of separation that was built into the Old Testament faith, and reinforced by Jewish tradition. When a Roman centurion wanted his servant healed, that Gentile did not send word to Jesus except through the Jewish leaders of his town. Remember how the Apostle Peter would never have started his mission work to Gentiles, except that God gave him a vision with direct orders to do so. And so it was here. Even when these Greeks came to one of Jesus’ disciples, Philip did not take them directly to Jesus, but first had to compare notes with another disciple.

But back to the story. There was all this excitement over this Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and now even foreigners are rallying to his standard! It is a strong movement when even outsiders begin to get interested! Support from unexpected quarters probably made all parties feel more excited than ever!

And then, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, stood there in the temple courts of the God whom he called Father, and he declared, ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!”***

If they had televisions, what would they have put on the 24-hour news shows? It would have been non-stop live coverage. Here seemed a perfect storm of events, a wave that Jesus would ride into power. The entire city was buzzing with this – the screaming crowds, the singing children, the palm branches, and not least of all that sentence of Jesus, ***“The hour has come!”*** Those for him felt a thrill through their bones. His opponents were dismayed. It seemed that he, Jesus, had written the script and nothing could stop him.

The news commentators would have been talking about the genius of this Jesus of Nazareth. A few months previous they had had their misgivings. Up in Galilee, when the crowds had tried to make Jesus king, Jesus pushed back and refused the honor. Everyone thought that was a great miscalculation. But now even greater crowds had gathered in the most holy city for all Jews, Jerusalem. All the political commentators had to applaud the shrewdness of Jesus to wait until now to declare, ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!”***

As Americans, we really cannot understand the excitement. First of all, since our independence we have never chafed under the rule of a foreign power. We have never had foreigner tax collectors taking our money off to a foreign capital. Since the battle of 1812, foreign armies have never trampled our soil. These Jews, on the other hand had been experiencing that and worse for a hundred years.

And we do not appreciate this picture for another reason – we are far more diverse than the Jews of this time. Not that that is a good or bad thing. Here in the US, whatever politician walks the street, he can at best hope for the support of about 51% of the population. But when a homogenous tribal group sees its savior from foreign influences, the mood is electric.

And that is where most of the news coverage would have ended.

**II. The Unexpected Ending Is Death**

But that is not where Jesus ended. He did say, ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*** But he went on, ***“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds…”***

With all the cheering crowds, what is this? Riding a wave of popularity, no sensible politician gets all gloomy and starts talking of defeat and death. No better way to kill momentum than that.

Was Jesus just trying to hedge his bets? Like a basketball coach, knowing his team is favored by 34 points, but also knowing that an overconfident team can do some really stupid things, was he trying to manage expectations? To dampen the fires a bit so that things do not get out of control?

All seems right to strike at just this point, but Jesus talks of death. His disciples had heard it all before. Several times Jesus had brought up this talk of his impending arrest, suffering and death. They had learned to keep quiet when Jesus brought up this subject.

But this time Jesus would not let it go. ***“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds… Now my heart 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. Father, glorify your name!”***

He talks about the old dark subject of his death. But there is a difference. The other times it was somewhere off in the future. But here he says, three different times, ***“The hour has come.”*** Do you remember that tribe in New Guinea when they first heard of Jesus’ death? That was happening right now in the disciples’ hearts. But look at what was happening in Jesus’ heart.

If you are a soldier, you know that you might lose your life in service to your country. That is a danger distinctly greater than for most professions. Does that make you tremble? If you were one of those 19 year old kids who enlisted *and then* went home and told your parents, how did your parents feel? How about your spouse? But we still aren’t where Jesus was in our reading.

What if you as a soldier *knew* you would die in service to your country at a given time on a given day? *(Silence for a bit.)* Would you go forward? To go forward seems foolish! To refuse to serve is cowardice! What would you think as you lace your shoes the last time? As you say good-bye to your family for the last time? That is where Jesus is in this reading. ***“Now my heart 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. Father, glorify your name!”***

Jesus reveals one of his great mysteries. Jesus, having both a human and a divine nature, could feel his human nature’s reluctance to face death. God did not create people to die. But because of our sinfulness, we die. ***“Shall I say… ‘Father, save me from this hour?’”*** Those discordant notes are resolved as Jesus, proclaims, ***“Father, glorify your name!”*** He would not step back. He would not turn around. He would do his Father’s will and bring glory to his Father.

So may it always be with us. Whatever our gifts from God are, may Jesus’ prayer be ours: ***“Father, glorify your name!”***

*Father, we love you, we worship, we adore you, glorify your name in all the earth,   
glorify your name, glorify your name, glorify your name in all the earth.*

**III. Actually, The Unexpected Ending Is Life**

So while Jesus confounded and confused all the expectations of the politicians and the crowds and everyone else, he revealed the greatest glory of God. What is it? The glory of God is revealed in death. God’s glory is not in the death of the infidels who will not convert. Some religions say that. Christianity is the one religion where the glory of God is revealed in his own death – if I can say it that way – that all who believe should never die.

Think about how different the Christian faith is. In every other faith you have a founder who was great because of the deeds he performed or the teachings he offered. But no other religion says he was great because of his death.

The greatest glory of our faith is not in Jesus’ teaching, though we accept every word he spoke as the Word of God. The greatest glory of our Savior is not his miracles, though they were truly great.

God’s ways are not our ways. His way to glory is not our way to glory. And the worldly ways of building a kingdom do not apply for the follower of Christ. In this time of Lent, especially with Holy Week one week away, we remember that Jesus’ great glory is intimately tied to his death.

So strange is this truth which Jesus propounded – that he would most certainly die and be glorified in that very death. So strange is this truth that it is one of the three times in Jesus’ life where God the Father spoke a word of confirmation from heaven. ***“I have glorified [my name], and will glorify it again.”*** The idea of Jesus’ death being the way to life is such a foolish idea that God must speak from heaven. And so it is in every human’s heart, whether in New Guinea or America. God must work in each of our heart’s believe on this truth of Jesus Christ. *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Cor 12:3).

No tribal traditions can match this. Modern reason looks at it as foolishness. Even the believer’s mind left to itself would reject it. But by God’s grace we realize that the one who died, died that we would never feel the weight of our sins. That way of being saved is God’s greatest glory. Amen.