**John 12:20-29** March 18, 2018

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

*John 12:20Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” 22Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.*

*23Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24I 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. 25The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

*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. 28Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Father, Glorify Your Name!**

So, you kind of want to see a movie, but you really want to know if it is going to be worth your time and money. So you look it up online. You start to listen and the reviewer tells you “Spoiler alert!” They are warning you that they are going to tell you something about the end of the movie. We understand why people give us spoiler alerts. When you tell a story you need a beginning, and a middle, and an end, in that order. If you put the end or give away the end at the beginning, you ruin the entire story. Kind of like, if you knew who would win the final game of the NCAA basketball tournament on April 2nd, how many of the 67 games would you watch? Or let me ask in another way: How many of last year’s 67 games have you watched since last year’s final? That’s what I thought.

Stories need a beginning, a middle, an end—in that order.

Whoever organized our Sunday readings forgot how stories go. Next week is Palm Sunday. Next week we have Bible readings about what happened on the first Palm Sunday. So you would think that the Gospel reading for this week *before* Palm Sunday would be about things that happened *before* Palm Sunday, right?

**I. Jesus, Ready for Glory!**

Wrong. Our readings mix up the story line, and this actually happens a few times in the course of a church year. Our week to week Scripture readings don’t always follow chronologically. I am not going to explain why, it just does.

That is kind of important so that you can understand what happened in today’s reading. What happened in our Gospel reading, actually happened, maybe on Tuesday or Wednesday *after* Palm Sunday.

So this is the chronology: a week or two before Palm Sunday, just two miles outside Jerusalem (that’s like from here to Vine Grove) Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Dozens of people saw it happen. Probably hundreds had been at the funeral, saw the body, and later Lazarus alive. Jesus’ popularity soars! Now, Jesus’ enemies hate not only Jesus, but they hate Lazarus too. They say, “This has to stop!” So the religious leaders meet in their boardroom making plans to kill Jesus. All the while Jesus’ popularity is growing.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover—the day we call Palm Sunday—everybody was now excited to see this teacher who could also raise people from the dead, extremely excited. They threw a giant parade. (More about that next week.) Meanwhile, the religious leaders making their plots up in the boardroom, step away from the table, peek through the closed curtains, and see the parade for Jesus. They say in the verse before our reading, *“See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”* (12:19).

For the next two days, early in the morning, Jesus walked into Jerusalem and taught and performed miracles. From an airborne drone over Jerusalem, you would have seen a mass of people just traveling wherever Jesus went.

It really did seem that the whole world had gone after Jesus. Our reading is right on cue: ***“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the [Passover] Feast. They came to Philip… with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’”*** Jesus was becoming not only a Jewish celebrity, but an international celebrity. You can see those guys in the boardroom clenching their jaws, grinding their teeth, breaking their pencils.

Back on the ground with Jesus and the crowds, the excitement is rivaling the excitement around the feeding of the 5,000. Then, a few months back, the crowds had wanted to forcefully declare Jesus their king. Now, in Jerusalem, Jesus speaks seems, at first, to fulfill that desire. ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*** I don’t know what happened. I can imagine a great shout going up from the crowds. “Yes, time to be glorified! Get the tickertape! Buy the balloons! Roll out the red carpet! Time for the Son of Man to be glorified!”

**II. Jesus, Apparently Not Ready for Glory**

Quiet! Let Jesus explain: ***“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. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it... Now my heart is troubled.”***

Up in Galilee, when the 5,000 had wanted to make Jesus king, Jesus walked away. Here in the middle of fevered excitement in the Jewish capital during their annual independence celebration, Jesus disappoints again.

What is it with Jesus?

Remember the movie, *It’s a Wonderful Life*? Remember when George Bailey is tired of his family building and loan and Mr. Potter invites him into his office and makes George Bailey a deal like a pro ball player might get and George turns it down? A frustrated Mr. Potter scowls at George Bailey, “Man, are you afraid of success?”

Is Jesus afraid of success? Every time the wave of popular opinion reaches tsunami level, he kills it. Imagine a politician riding a wave of popularity like Jesus had going, and then the day before the election he starts talking about death and doubt and tells his supporters, “If you love your life, you will lose it.” Is Jesus more comfortable with people underestimating him? Does he like to snipe at those in authority, but not want to face the responsibilities of authority himself?

What is the problem with Jesus? Whenever he gets really popular, really successful, on the edge of truly breaking into the scene, why does Jesus always slam on the brakes? What’s Jesus’ problem?

You are his problem. We are his problem.

**III. Jesus Reveals a Greater Glory**

Jesus came into this world to save a world. You can rightly say that Jesus came to save us from sin, death and the devil. That is what they learn in catechism class. That is what the Bible says. But in another way we can say that Jesus came to save us from ourselves. Sin, death and the devil are problems only because we are who we are.

We have created our own doom through our offenses against God’s holy law. Rarely do we realize that our sins are a stench to God, like sewage or death. But God has created us, he has told us how we ought to glorify him, and yet we do not do it. God made it simple by giving 10 commandments as a basic outline. Do we do those things? Do we know what they are? Do we care enough about what God says to memorize what those Ten Commandments? They aren’t meant to be things that we google, “Hey, Siri, what’s the eighth commandment?”! If that’s how it is, you prove that they aren’t in here. Apparently Ten Commandments are no more important to you that the capital of Guatemala.

But if you can recite the Ten Commandments, complete with their meanings from the Catechism, then you perhaps remember what God’s word tells us in Galatians 3:10, *“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’”* If your hope—and this is a hope I have heard from even Christians from ages 11 to 91—if your hope to accepted by God is on the basis of God’s commands, you will fail. In fact, you already have.

That is the problem that Jesus had with success. He had a mess to clean up. He could not simply sit on a throne. He could not sit and enjoy the honor due to the Creator of the universe. God wanted people in heaven, but they all, like sheep, had gone astray. And so Jesus had to make us sinful people with filthy thoughts, words and deeds acceptable to God.

That is why Jesus spoke the apparent contradiction in our reading: ***“Now is the time [for me] to be glorified… Now my heart is troubled.”*** Jesus’ great glory is his death. In that awful yet awe-inspiring death we see God not just as a Creator, nor even as a wise law-giver, but as a loving Father who would literally do anything for us.

How much it cost him is revealed in Jesus’ words, ***“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!”*** (27). For an instant Jesus reveals his heart to us. The always calm, collected, powerful, wise Jesus says, ***“My heart is troubled.”*** Do not think that Jesus’ work of saving us was some sort of effortless snap of the fingers. Do not dishonor Jesus’ work of forgiving you by taking it for granted. It cost him dearly. That is God’s glory.

**IV. May We Glorify His Name**

I don’t hear it too often, probably because I am a pastor, but often you Christians have told me that you hear people say, “I am forgiven, so I can live however I want to. It’s forgiven.”

Is that how you treat your mother, who bore you, who clothed you, who stayed up through the night when you were sick, who worried herself silly when you were late coming home from school, who gave her strongest years to feed you, to clothe you, and now you tell her to just keep the Christmas and birthday presents coming but frankly she is a silly old lady who doesn’t deserve to be listened to? Yes, there are children like that, and I feel sorry for their parents.

Jesus did more than any parent can, and yet people feel that his gifts and tremendous sacrifice should have no bearing on how they act. “I’m forgiven, why worry?” Such people may well find that their life is a denial of the faith they claim. Like the worker with the one talent who went and hid it, like Esau who had the blessing but sold it for a meal, like the Israelites saved by the blood of a lamb on the Passover night but killed by the Lord’s wrath in the desert, like the branch that Jesus said would be cut off the vine and burned.

Throughout Lent the message is that Jesus had to go to the cross for us sinners. This is the glory of Christ. That is what Jesus meant when he said, ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Father, glorify your name.”*** He was talking about what would happen to him in three days’ time. Good Friday and Easter are the centerpiece of his life. And they are the reason that we glorify him here in His house, and out there in the world.

To underline the point, ***“A voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified [my name], and will glorify it again.’”*** It was a sign that indeed, the most un-glorious things would soon happen to Jesus, and they would be to his glory and to the glory of the Father. May they be our glory.

***“Father,*** through us, ***glorify your name.”*** Amen.