

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

5 Lent—Sunday, March 29, 2009

The Rev. Mary Haas

I. Understanding the Context

How do we understand a passage in the Bible if we do not know anything about how it related to the men and women, who existed in the time in which Jesus lived.

I believe, unless you have at least some idea of what Jesus was trying to tell people He met, we will never be able to figure out what He wants us to learn from any passage we read today.

Their world and ours are vastly different yet in some ways very much the same. Today travel, knowledge and communication are very different than they were in the time of Jesus, at the same time feelings, desires and hope are still part of human nature and not really any different than they were when Jesus walked the earth.

This passage we heard read this morning, of the Greeks seeking Jesus, is only told in the Gospel of John, it would not have been unusual to have met a Greek in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover they were known for wandering in order to discover new things and learn new ideas. They often came to the feast of the Passover.

It is said that John’s Gospel was written to explain to the Greeks the truth about Christianity in a way they could both understand and appreciate. Therefore, it is not unusual the first Greek known to seek Jesus should appear in it.

II. Greek Seekers of Truth

We don't know why this Greek chose Philip to speak to, but it is suggested Philip is a Greek name and this may have caused the seeking Greeks to think Philip might be sympathetic to them. Greeks were considered seekers of truth and because they had heard about Jesus, they wanted to know more. Philip, however, didn't know what to do so he went to talk to Andrew. Andrew knew Jesus would never turn anyone away who wished to speak to Him so he took the Greeks to Him.

We might wonder how these Greeks had heard of Jesus at least how they heard enough to make them want to seek Him out.

It is said, in a commentary by William Barclay, it is possible that when Jesus drove the money changers and sellers of doves from the temple court, there may have been Greeks there when it happened.

The money changers and sellers of doves had their own stalls in the Court of the Gentiles where anyone could go and unless you were Jewish no farther. If this were the case and Greeks were there and saw the incident happen they would have spread by word of mouth very quickly what had occurred for it would have been a very unusual thing. Not just anyone would chase someone from the temple. They would have done just what most of us would do today if we saw something unusual happen we would ,quickly repeat to all our friends and relatives what we had seen happen. Word of mouth can be a very quick means of communication. If these Greeks heard of this you can easily see why they might want to seek out Jesus and learn the truth.

III. “Time for the Son of Man to be Glorified”

When Philip and Andrew told Jesus who was seeking Him Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you the time has come for the 'son of man' to be glorified."

When Jesus spoke of the son of man being glorified He did not mean what others meant. The Jews thought of the 'son of man' as one who lead a conquering army one who would take away the savagery that filled the world and replace it with a new power, a power that was gentle, humane, and gracious—power that could only be depicted as a man not as wild beasts as nations were depicted up until that time.

To the Jews the 'son of man' stood for the undefeatable world conqueror

sent by God. When Jesus said the 'son of man' must be glorified they thought the might of heaven was on the march, that victory was on the move, and they would be the victors.

Jesus, however, knew better. To Him glorified meant crucified.

When the Jews heard the term glorified they saw subjected kingdoms groveling at the feet of their conquerors. When they heard 'son of man' they thought of the conquest of the armies of God.

Jesus meant the conquest of the cross.

IV. Jesus' Sacrifice and Death Brings New Life

We often think of how little Jesus' disciples seemed to understand what He was trying to tell them. Yet if you look carefully at what Jesus said as opposed to what His Jewish disciples probably believed it would probably become much clearer. It was the dream of the Jews that God would send a champion, a conqueror who would vanquish any nation they thought of as their enemy.

Now here came Jesus speaking not of conquest, but instead of sacrifice and death no wonder they were bewildered For Jesus had turned their world upside down He had changed their idea of lording it over their enemies with armies and power into the requiring of sacrifice, by them and death on across by Him.

Jesus was trying to teach them that only through death do you obtain life.

The grain of wheat Jesus speaks of if kept secure in a box, a jar, or in a safe will be nothing but a grain of wheat it will never become anything but a seed. On the other hand if it is placed in good soil it will change it will die, in a sense, for it will no longer be a seed. It will sprout and become something different.

Some of us may never have seen a wheat plant but we all have seen corn seed and corn plants. When the corn seed is put in good earth it grows into a tall plant produces an ear or two of corn ~ some is used for food and some is used to feed animals and some we keep to replant so we will have a constant renewable source of corn.

With the death of the corn seed in the ground came a renewal of life in a corn plant. In the death of Christ on the cross came new life for humanity.

As the corn plant grew from the seed that died in the earth to give it life, so Christianity grew from the seed of Christ dying on the cross to give humans eternal life.

The disciples used their lives to spread the word, telling stories Jesus told them. They traveled and explained to all who would listen that Jesus had died to save them and all mankind from death to give them instead eternal life with God.

Jesus was saying when he told the story of the seed, that only by death can one receive life.

The death of Jesus on the cross was the beginning and just as the corn seed grew and produced more 'seed' to continue the process, so did the death of Jesus, in a somewhat different way, grow and produce Christianity.

Many of the disciples also lost their lives, in a horrible way, as they attempted to spread the word as they had learned it from Jesus. They taught the love of God for mankind. They taught man to learn to love God and his neighbors.

Many lost their lives because the authorities did not wish these ideas to be taught. Not only did they die by the hands of others but things which had been a part of them such as greed and selfishness died as they learned of a better way to live.

V. We All Must Sacrifice

What do we learn from Jesus' speaking of glorification, crucifixion and sacrifice? We know Jesus gave up His life, for us, in a terrible way. By allowing Himself to be crucified in order that we could be cleansed of our sins.

I don't believe that just because Jesus died so we could have eternal life that we can live in any way we wish, being mean to our fellow humans, doing nothing to make the life of the poor better. Ignoring the plight of prisoners, doing things we should not. Or any other thing we might do if we are too selfish or too greedy to lend a hand to others.

It is not always easy to do what we know we should do.

Do you really think it was easy for Jesus to allow Himself to be crucified? It

certainly has to be easier for us to be kind to someone we may not particularly like than it was for Christ to accept the cross.

Whatever we may sacrifice in life it can never come up to what Jesus sacrificed for us on the cross. We might wonder what we might do that would be a sacrifice for we don't necessarily think of many things as a sacrifice.

No matter what we do it is apt to have a sacrifice in it however so, slight.

When Elena spends time putting salt and pepper on the table for the community suppers or puts cookies on the desert table she is sacrificing play time to help someone else.

When Conor or Cameron spend time bagging change for the collection as Steve suggested, they too are sacrificing play time.

When our choir practices or our priests visit the ill, they are using their talents and sacrificing their time for the benefit of someone else.

WE all need to learn what it means to sacrifice, for us it probably not be a catastrophic event, such as it was for Christ the chance that we will give our lives for God, as many have, is very slim. It will probably be instead a steady sacrifice of time, talent, and treasure for God and for those God wants us to help.

We are never too young to begin and never too old to give up there is always something we can do. We simply change the type of things we do as years go by and abilities change.

Let us all remember, at least in this part of Johns Gospel, Jesus has let us know sacrifice is expected from us and is necessary. It is something we all can do and we must.