

Sunday 21 March 2021 - Lent 5

Sermon Notes

Today's Bible Reading - John 12:20-33

- Important passage in John's Gospel: after saying often that his time had not yet come (2:4; 7:6,8,30; 8.20), now Jesus says that the time has come - for him to be glorified (v23). Glorification refers to his being lifted up from the earth (v32), literally on the cross, metaphorically to his throne in heaven.
- The strange trigger is the request from 'some Greeks' to see Jesus, addressed to Philip and relayed to Jesus by him and Andrew. The important thing about these Greeks, whoever they were, is that they were not Jews. When John wrote his Gospel the fledgeling church was predominately non-Jewish and John presumably wanted to show how Jesus died for all nations. Luke described the transition from Jewish to mainly non-Jewish church at much greater length in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Having served their purpose the Greeks disappear and Jesus speaks to Philip and Andrew repeating (unusually for John) sayings from earlier NT writings: the seed (v24) as in 1 Corinthians 15:36; losing life (v25) as Mark 8:35; discipleship (v26) see Mark 8:32.
- There is no account of Jesus in Gethsemane in John's Gospel, but v27-28 sound very much like it: Jesus in turmoil ('troubled' is too tame); praying (or not praying - translations and scholars are divided) to be saved from this hour. But accepting his destiny.
- God endorses this in words heard only by Jesus but with a sound recognised by the crowd as God-sent (v29). This has similarities with the Transfiguration, an event not otherwise referred to by John, but placed by the other Gospel writers at the point where Jesus turns his face towards his death at Jerusalem.

Following the Greeks

- They want to see Jesus. Were they simply curious about him, like tourists about a famous monument? Or did they want to find out about him and his message? Did they actually see him - we're not told?
- Gives an introduction to stages of Christian life.
- Step 1 - Seeing Jesus (this is the thrust of the Diocese of Oxford's Lent programme: Come and See); many people never get beyond it
- Step 2 - Meeting Jesus - discovering what he's like - starting to establish a relationship with him
- Step 3 - Knowing Jesus - spending time with him (eg Martha and Mary - Luke 10:38-42), becoming friends. Note this is not the same as knowing *about* him. Emotional relationship not intellectual understanding.
- Step 4 - Accepting Jesus for who he is - the hardest step. Recognising Jesus as Lord and God. Perhaps experiencing him in a new way (as for example John and Charles Wesley who had been enthusiastic, methodical Christians for many years but who both felt their hearts warmed into the relationship from which their subsequent power-filled lives stemmed). For us perhaps

wanting to say the words of the old chorus 'Come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee'.

- Step 5 - Following Jesus - the necessary final step and the only possible one after reaching step 4. Learning more about his will for us, how to follow him better day by day.
- But, you may say, I grew up in a Christian family; I've always gone to church; I just don't recognise these steps in my own life. That's excellent and you can skip steps 1 to 3 if you like. But in the end every Christian has to do steps 4 and 5 for themselves, and in different ways we have to keep doing them.
- The great thing is we have free access to the greatest helper of all - Jesus himself. If we remember every day that Jesus is the personification of love, how can we not keep wanting to turn to him and follow him. His yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30); he offers life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

One more lesson from the Greeks

- Men and women are made for the company of others - so it wasn't a single Greek who wanted to see Jesus, nor was it a single disciple who carried the message to Jesus.
- The pandemic and resulting lockdown restrictions have deprived many people of the social interaction they previously took for granted.
- So getting back together as congregations may be more difficult than we realise - and may take longer.
- Don't know what we'll be able to reinstate and when, or where we'll need a new start, though of course we'll have a new Rector to help us with that.
- Already tackling the financial effects of pandemic, and soon we hope we'll be able to recover some of the many other things we've lost, including social and other activities.
- May have to relearn together how to be a worshipping community. But we will be able to gain support from memories of what things were like before; our shared experience of the pandemic; and a recovering sense of community, determination and vision for the future.
- But above everything else, as we follow Jesus together, we know we can rely on him: the one we trust (John 14:1); the one in whom we have faith (Romans 3:22); our Good Shepherd (John 10:11); the one who tends our wounds; who washes our feet (John 13:5); who gave his life for us (John 13:37); who God glorified in his death and resurrection (John 17:1-4); the one who reigns in glory now (Ephesians 2:9); the one who cares for us, as individuals, whichever steps we have or haven't taken; as a community; as part of our broken and suffering world.
- In Jesus all things shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well (Julian of Norwich).