

Texts: John 12:20-33
Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B
18 March 2018
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When Jesus, at the beginning of his career, goes to a wedding, and his mother Mary approaches him to help out the bride and groom because the wine has run out, Jesus answers his mother, “Woman, my hour has *not yet* come.” When Jesus, at the end of his career, is approached by his disciples Philip and Andrew to be told by them that some Greeks want to meet him, Jesus answers Philip and Andrew, “The hour *has* come for the Son of Man to be glorified” – meaning, the hour when Jesus will accomplish everything God the Father has sent him to do by dying on the cross – that’s the hour of glory. What causes the difference?

In the story of Jesus told in the Gospel of John, Jesus is a heavenly being who has been sent into the world by God the Father to give us the power to become heavenly beings like Jesus, even while we are still living on earth. The events of today’s Gospel take place on Palm Sunday, which we will celebrate next Sunday. Jesus has just ridden into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey in the days before the festival of the Passover begins. Crowds have welcomed Jesus by stripping branches from the trees and waving them as Jesus rides by. The Jewish religious leaders, who are growing increasingly antagonistic against Jesus, look at the crowds cheering Jesus, throw up their hands, and say, “What can we do? Look, *the whole world* has gone after him.” And it becomes literally true that the whole world has gone after Jesus when, later in the day, some Greeks come up to Philip and ask to meet Jesus. The word “Greeks” means they aren’t Jews – they’re Gentiles, non-Jews, who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover which means they are drawn to the Jewish religion in their personal search for the truth. They seek out Jesus’ disciple Philip because Philip is a Greek name, so they’re pretty sure they’ll be able to communicate with Philip. And when Philip and Andrew go to Jesus and tell him that some Gentiles, non-Jews, want to meet him, Jesus recognizes this as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies. The prophecies that, *in the last days*, all the nations – which is what Gentile means, “the nations” – in the last days all the nations will be drawn to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, because salvation comes from the Jews. With Gentiles – the nations – now coming to Jerusalem to seek him out, Jesus recognizes the last days have arrived. Jesus recognizes his hour has come for him to bring this sinful world to an end

and bring in the new world set free from sin, by going to the cross and dying there. That is Jesus' hour to be glorified. That probably sounds odd to us, but to Jesus it's not his future resurrection and ascension back to heaven that will glorify him and God the Father. It is the hour of his death on the cross that is Jesus' hour of glory, the hour when Jesus will be glorified and bring glory to the name of God the Father, because it is in the hour of his death on the cross that Jesus destroys the power of the devil and brings to an end this world that is under the rule of the devil, so that God the Father can raise his Son Jesus from death and bring him back into heavenly glory with all the earth following Jesus into heaven as the heavenly beings we have become through Jesus' power. Five days after saying this, Jesus is dead.

Jesus is troubled by the thought of dying. But he knows this is the mission he was given; this is purpose he was sent for. Jesus lays it all out for us this morning; Jesus cries out to the crowd, "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, *save* me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I *came* to this hour. Father, *glorify your name!*" Bring me to the cross! This is why, on Good Friday, we always read the story of Jesus' death from the Gospel of John, because in John's Gospel Jesus is *not* a victim when he dies – Jesus is a conqueror, Jesus is a hero. Jesus dies victorious. This is why, on Good Friday, we come forward and kiss the cross, because the cross is the instrument of our salvation. The cross is the means by which we have been brought into glory.

Jesus spells out for us what he is doing on the cross for us. Having asked God to glorify him on the cross, Jesus tells the crowd, "*Now* is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." When Jesus is executed on the cross because Governor Pontius Pilate wants to prevent riots and keep the peace, it is *not* Jesus who is judged; it is *this world* that is judged as having wandered far from God and it is this sin-ruled world that is put to death so that God's new creation can begin. When Jesus is executed on the cross, it is *not* God who is defeated; it is the ruler of the old sinful world, the Devil, who is defeated and driven out, so that Jesus may rule and we may live in the freedom of the children of God. When Jesus is lifted up on the cross, Jesus is *not* being lifted up as a sign of defeat and ridicule, for people to run away from. Jesus is lifted up on the cross in the hour of his glory to draw all of us into the glory that is ours as the heavenly beings Jesus has made us, we who have been reborn in baptism by the power of Jesus to become children of God,

children of heaven, heavenly beings.

Despite all that, it may *feel* day by day that we are only children of earth, rather than children of heaven and children of God. That is part of the obscurity and hiddenness of God as we travel on our journey through this world to the day when we see God face to face. Even in the Gospel today, when Jesus asks God the Father to glorify his name, the Father answers Jesus and Jesus hears his voice- but the crowd only hears the sound of thunder, nothing intelligible. Our identity as heavenly beings, as children of heaven, is always being discovered by us - but usually slowly - and our relationship with God the Father is always growing, so don't be disappointed if sometimes God's voice is hard to hear, his power hard to see. I have been a priest for 39 years, and only this year am I beginning to understand something of the message God is sending us in the Gospel we read today. Maybe I'm a slow learner! Or maybe the glory of God is hidden on the cross of Jesus, the cross we take up every day for ourselves as Christians, and only slowly do we come to understand the glory and power that is ours as heavenly beings, the children of heaven.