

March 24, 2024

John 12:12-36

THE JOURNEY TO LIFE ...

“Glorious Death”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever seen something that isn't there? No, you're not crazy. Without thinking about it we often seek out patterns in random information. Ask people to look at a picture of lightning and they may see a puppy or a bird or a dragon. A common example is a 1976 image of Mars from the Viking 1 Orbiter. When people looked at that picture, they saw the so-called "face on Mars." Subsequent spacecraft have revealed that the "face on Mars" was due to simply the play of light and shadows.

What we see can be far from what it really is because our minds may interpret it based on our own point of reference, or assumptions, or ignorance, or misinformation. Sometimes we see what we want to see, because we know that to accept it for what it really is could be life altering. It could change everything in who we are and how we live, and this can make us uncomfortable. Many people did this with Jesus when he walked the earth. They saw him, that is, they experienced him and then tried to discern who he was and what he meant for them and others. Most got him all wrong.

Some people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets raised from the dead. The 5,000 saw him as a bread king to fill their bellies. The religious leaders of the Jews mostly saw him as a threat to their position and power - especially on Palm Sunday as the crowds were ready to embrace him as their king. The man who was paralyzed and healed by Jesus apparently saw him as a facilitator to live a life of sin, for when Jesus sees him later after the healing, he says to him: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you (John 5:14)." On and on it goes. The question that our Gospel lesson poses for us today is this: What do you see when you see Jesus?

We are told in our gospel lesson: "Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So, these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" They wished to see Jesus! Now, from what we can tell from the text and the rest of the gospel, these "Greeks" were Gentile converts to Judaism and had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover. Solomon had referred to such as these in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8:41-43,

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.

It wasn't that these Gentile converts wanted to see what Jesus physically looked like, although we might be sympathetic to the idea. They wanted to experience and discern who he was and what he meant for them and others. They had heard of him. And not many days ago he had raised Lazarus from the dead and the news of this astounding miracle was traveling like wildfire. They desired to speak with him and perhaps ask him if he was the Christ, the Savior of the world, and whether they would be received by him as his own. Philip tells Andrew what's going on. And the two of them went and told Jesus.

These Greek converts to Judaism wished to see Jesus and they asked to do just that. We are never told if the meeting ever took place. It is irrelevant by the judgment of the Holy Spirit as he moved the apostle John to write. What is relevant is the response of Jesus. In his response we are brought to the core of what one is supposed to see when one sees Jesus. Listen carefully to our Gospel lesson:

And Jesus answered them [Philip and Andrew], “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him ...”

The fact that these Greek converts wish to see Jesus signals that “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” This hour, in which Jesus speaks, is for the Greek converts as well as all other nations - and that’s you and me. In this response of Jesus, he is explaining what one is to see when one sees him. All are bid to see Jesus in his “hour.” With a double “truly, truly, I say to you ...” Jesus underlines what is the most important thing to grasp and defines the hour as his crucifixion and death for the sins of the world. This is emphasized by our Lord when he speaks about a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying so that it may bear much fruit.

The seed is Jesus. He must fall into the earth and die alone. This is the hour of which he is referring. Falling into the earth is death and burial. Yet, in his death lies the intent of God to give life to the world, including those Greek converts who are wanting to see him. There will be a great harvest from the one seed that dies. Therefore, the dead seed sprouts and bears much fruit. It gives life to the world. For Jesus to be glorified is understood in the gospel of John as the revelation of his death and burial. In his death is a shining revelation or light to all nations that they may see who he is and what he gives to everyone who believes in him. He gives eternal life.

Thus, the glory of Jesus is not that he is a great moral teacher who promises a better society if you follow his good rules. His coming into the world is not a social gospel where bellies are filled, and pockets are loaded with cold hard cash to provide a happy time on earth. Jesus did not come to give us a license to sin against the love of God and our neighbor. There is no permissive Jesus who defines love as doing whatever you want. What do you see when you see Jesus? The glory of Jesus was to suffer and die for our sins that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. We see his **Glorious Death** which is our *journey to life!* Christ is the heavenly grain of wheat who dies for us that he might bring us forth as his fruit to be with him in heaven forever.

Moreover, Jesus goes on to relate what it means to be the fruit that springs to life from him. As fruit from Christ we are like the original seed that went into the ground. We die with him and live - **Glorious Death**. Thus, Jesus makes the observation: “Whoever loves his life *loses* it, and whoever hates his life in this world will *keep* it for eternal life.” As people who see (believe in) Jesus for who he really is and what he has done, we not only glorify him, but we have the hope and assurance that we share in his glory.

However, as Jesus makes it clear, we walk the same road that he walked. We must pass through rejection and death before we can enter glory and life - **Glorious Death**. Whoever inordinately loves his sinful life and makes it his everything, delighting himself with pleasures and treasures rather than delighting in God and his gospel, will lose true life. But whoever hates his life, that is, who hates “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16)” will find it.

Like Jesus we are a dying grain of wheat. But as we die with him, we also rise with him and similarly bear fruit as he did. Jesus says in John 15:5 and 8, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing ... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” And the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, “... we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Jesus continues to bear fruit in us whenever we apply his death and resurrection to others and witness to what he has done for us. What a blessed thing it is when they come to faith in Christ as we did by grace. Fruit abounds!

We at Pilgrim have been called to see this reality. What we see in Jesus is so powerful that it changes who we are and what we do. In this life, Jesus gives us the honor and privilege to apply his death and resurrection to others so that they may also be fruit from him and with us. This is what Jesus meant when he said: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. It would be a fruitful death - an abundance of fruit - life to you, life to me, life to others. So, what do you see when you see Jesus? Hopefully, if you weren't seeing Jesus clearly before, you can see him clearly now! **Glorious Death**. He dies on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins and gives us eternal life. With him we die to sin and live in righteousness - his righteousness. And we invite many to join us on this *journey to life*.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott