

Sermon for Lent 5, Year B

The text: John 12:20-33

The setting for the Gospel reading is after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus entered the city on a donkey, the Pharisees weren't happy with all the attention He was getting! In the verse just before our Gospel reading, verse 19, the Pharisees actually said: *"Look how the whole world has gone after him!"*

Ironically our reading kicks off with an example of that – some Greeks going after Jesus! They said to Philip, *"Sir, we would like to see Jesus"*. Then Philip and Andrew went to tell Jesus.

Near the end of today's Gospel reading Jesus says, *"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* Here's the tie in with the Greeks, who represent *"the whole world – or all people"*. People from every nation will be drawn by the Cross.

The Cross is the glory of God. Jesus said: *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."* And He went on to explain his glorification this way: *I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* The Father's voice from heaven affirms that he will glorify Jesus in this way—just after Jesus says: *"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!"* The Father says: *"I have glorified it and I will glorify it again."*

The Father's glory is the Cross, where His beloved Son pays for the sin of the whole world, and drives out the prince of this world by the death of the Holy One on the Cross!

So maybe what Jesus is saying to Andrew and Philip who are passing on the request of the Greeks is: "Do you want to see me? Then look at the Cross. There you see who I am and what I'm all about. My love and mission and glory are in my death there!"

To see Jesus in the essence of His character and to see His heart revealed, we need to see the Cross! Now of course it's impossible for us to go back in time to around 30AD and see the actual event!

But we have seen the death of Christ by receiving his body and blood he serves from the altar. As we read in 1st Corinthians: "*Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" Through this Holy Supper, the Cross is declared and the benefits Jesus secured there are given! When Baptism buries a sinner with Christ into death, the Cross is enacted through water and the word, and the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the Cross is applied to the one baptised.

There's no forgiveness without the shedding of blood that happened on the Cross. And through the Word and Sacraments this forgiveness is made real for us! So we see Christ and His Cross here, in this House. Here the glory of God unfolds for us.

Through the Cross, Jesus the sacrificial Lamb fulfilled his purpose and the Father's plan, and in doing so he revealed the glory of God. Our natural inclination is to think that the victory, success and glory is the Empty Tomb! But the Cross is the victory, success and glory of God! God considers nothing more glorious than paying the price for salvation for all humanity, no matter how painful that price was for him.

Our natural inclination when viewing our own lives is to view pain and sorrow and death as failures, defeats or setbacks. But we shouldn't! In our weakness, God is glorified, for his grace is sufficient

for us! His grace that leads to newness of life and ultimately resurrection!

Our new life is given to us in our baptism, and every day we live in our baptism. Because Christ died for us we have new and eternal life. While we may have suffering and trouble in this world, God will walk with you always.

Jesus who says: "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world!" says to us in today's Gospel reading: "I tell you the truth, unless a grain 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 for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me."

Jesus says in Matthew, Mark & Luke: *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* By the power of the Holy Spirit – by the power of the Cross at work in our lives through word and sacrament—we patiently endure! And we trust that even in our weakness, the glory of God – the glory of the Cross—is being revealed.

The world can't see it! Occasionally we can with the eyes of faith! God definitely does! Friends, God does nothing lightly or carelessly. His love for you is unending! It's greater than any of us could imagine. Every pain and every tear is known by Him.

God sends us suffering, trouble and death so that, like Christ, we can pass through it to new life and ultimately eternal bliss and comfort! If we reject Jesus and the Cross in order to live an easier life here, we'll spend eternity in suffering. God's promise to us then is we'll share in God's different glory in the world to come.

For now our identity is in Jesus and it's connected with the Cross. So, although we struggle and fall, really we're full of life and glory. Because of our identity, because of our baptism into Jesus we can say with St Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

God reaches out to us in all the stages of our life, and because Jesus suffered and died we have new life now, with God through Christ. With the Holy Spirit's help we can be content with that, even though it will hurt at times, because we have the certainty of God's promise—He is still with us! The Father still speaks His approval of us from heaven, since we, too, are His beloved baptised children! And when He looks at us—covered in Jesus' righteousness, listening to Jesus, receiving Jesus—He sees the glory of the Cross at work in us, and through us! Amen!