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"We Would See Jesus"

Jeremiah 31:31-34 John 12:20-33 Hebrews 5:5-10

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 31:31-34

The prophets looked forward to a day when a Messiah would come and establish a new covenant. This new covenant would not be written on scrolls, but would be written on hearts.

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 12:20-33

This morning's passage from John was spoken during Jesus the last week of Jesus' life. He has come to Jerusalem to celebrate his last Passover. From this moment on the steps to the cross are set in motion. When some Greeks come seeking to see Jesus, it prompts Jesus to speak plainly to his disciples about his impending death.

Let us pray: Open our eyes Lord to see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our hearts Lord to feel your love. Open our souls to sense your touch. Open our minds to receive your word. Amen.

Two men went up in a hot-air balloon one May morning. Suddenly they were enveloped by clouds and lost track of where they were. They drifted for what seemed like hours. Finally the cloud parted, and they spotted a man below them on the ground.

"Where are we?" one of the passengers hollered down. The man on the ground looked around, looked up at the balloon, looked around some more and then yelled back, "You're in a balloon."

The two balloonists looked at one another and then one of them yelled down again, "Are you a philosopher?"

"Yes," the man hollered up from below.

The other balloonist said, "How did you know he was a philosopher?" His friend replied, "No one else could give an answer so quickly that's so logical and yet tells you so little about where you are and where you want to be!" 1

Jesus was not a philosopher. He did deal in paradox which is a favorite tool of philosophers in seeking truth. Yet, he had a way of using the simplest examples from daily life to make plain the truth of his paradoxes. He said, "It is only in giving that you receive." "If you want to be first, you must become last." "If you're going to be master, you must become a servant." If you're going to find your life, you're going to have to lose it.

Maybe it was that kind of talk that made Greeks want to have an audience with Jesus. Greeks loved philosophy. They were seekers of wisdom. In Jesus' view, these Greeks coming and asking to see him on their own is the beginning of his dying.

These Greeks first went to Philip. Philip had a Gentile name and maybe they were hoping to gain access to Jesus through a man with a name similar to theirs. They said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Even though Philip had a Greek name, he didn't know how to respond to their request. So he went to Andrew. Like Andrew did with his brother Simon, he took them and introduced them to Jesus.

The fact that these Greeks come wishing an audience with Jesus moves Jesus to let his disciples and us in on the secret of the gospel. Jesus says that in the same way that a grain of wheat must die in order to produce much more grain, so he must die in order that many more may live forever.

Botanically, we know quite a bit about seeds and how they germinate. We know that a seed consists of a protective seed coat, some kind of storage tissue with nutrient reserves, and a dormant plant embryo. We further know that under the correct conditions the dormant embryo can be "awakened" to germinate and grow into a mature plant. Some Botanists say that in every seed there is an on/off switch that will let the seed grow.

So at some point the seed is turned "on" and it begins to sprout. In time, what was once a seed is transformed into a flower, fruit or grain. Jesus used the illustration of wheat being buried in the ground. For Jesus, planting seeds is what it means to be faithful. 2

I like Eugene Peterson's interpretation of this passage in his book, *The Message*. It reads, "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is, destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."

In the same way that a grain of wheat is just a grain of wheat when it's growing at the end of a stalk outside the ground, so Jesus, as long as he remained alive and above ground he would only be one individual seeking to serve God and others. But when he laid down his life, when he lost his life for the sake of God and others, then his life and vitality would be multiplied and begin to bear much more fruit than he possibly could when he was in the flesh. The small band of believers who saw him die and experienced him as their risen Lord has grown to be the largest group of followers in the world.

Jesus died in order that WE might live. Long before he died physically, though, he died

to all that was rightly his. He left and laid aside his eternal powers to take on human form...the form of a servant.

Jesus lost everything he had in this world, but he lost nothing that was eternal. If we hang on to this life for "dear life" when we die we will lose everything. If all we have is in this life, when we lose this life we will lose all we have. But if we give our life, if we lay down our life, if we spend the gift of life we have been given wisely and unselfishly, we will produce much fruit and reap great reward.

This week our church family lost Nancy Alley, Angie Seaton Stanley's mother. Within a matter of weeks from her diagnosis she was gone. She had those few weeks' notice. As I led her memorial service I could see the fruit of her life of loving others on display.

This week our community lost Mary Pinney. She was camping with her family and a storm came up and a tree fell on her tent where she and her husband Marc and three children under the age of 6 were sleeping. Nancy was killed instantly. She had no notice.

Her husband is in critical condition in a Tyler hospital. The children were not hurt physically. Her husband and her father are members of the Baytown Rotary and this week at our meeting we postponed our planned program and gave the floor to her father Jim Zaruba who shared his grief. After our meeting members came into this sanctuary to pray for their families. Nancy was the founding CEO of Project Blue formed in honor of her brother who was a police officer who lost his life to cancer at the age of 29. In his memory Pinney and the Zaruba family started Project Blue, a nonprofit that supports officers who become sick or injured outside the line of duty.

The truth is parts of us are dying all the time. You probably just lost half a million or so cells just listening to this sermon so far. We all lose about 100,000 cells per second. Fortunately, just as many cells are being reproduced in a healthy body. Healthy bodies have this constant cycle of dying cells and rebirth of new ones. Some scientists say that we are regenerated every seven years. Apparently, cells that don't die off in the normal cycle are a real problem. These cells are related to diseases like cancer and become problematic because they get in the way and block healthy development of the body.

Todd Weir writes that "This is true in the spiritual and emotional life as well. Our failure to let go and let some things die is a primary spiritual disease, for new life can't come without some death. The failure to forgive leads to death of relationship while anger and bitterness ravage the spirit like a cancer. Holding on to regrets strangles hope before it can lift us to new life. Trying to control events and other people leads to frustration, excessive stress, and exhaustion. Forgiveness and letting go of control are spiritual exercises in the art of dying so that new life may abound. 4

Jesus came into our world to bring a new covenant, and that covenant was secured by Jesus' own suffering. In verse 27 he states unequivocally that he must not ask God to

keep him from the suffering ahead, indeed it was for this purpose that he came into the world.

Here's where it gets really amazing. In the midst of Jesus' statement, a voice from heaven came and interrupted Jesus. This voice was interpreted as thunder by some in the crowd. Others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. John believed that it was the voice of Jesus' Father in heaven.

This is the third time that Jesus' Father in heaven spoke from heaven. The first time was at Jesus baptism when a voice said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The second time was on the Mount of Transfiguration when a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him!" Here the voice answers Jesus' prayer that God will bring glory through the suffering ahead. The voice was one of confirmation. It said, "I have already brought glory to myself through what you have been doing, and I will do it again!"

What some thought the voice of an angel and others thought the thunder of Mother Nature, Jesus says it was the voice of his Father in heaven. He points to the voice as one spoken for their benefit. He then points to how God is going to do it again, how God is going to bring glory out of Jesus' suffering. When Jesus is lifted up, he will draw all men, all women, all boys and girls, all kinds of people to himself.

I think the reason so many people are reluctant to speak of their faith is that they have lost sight of their partnership with God when it comes to sharing their faith. Those who are reluctant to share fear that they are going alone into each encounter and that they must have all the answers and all the right techniques to be successful. But in this morning's verses Jesus points out very plainly that our responsibility is to lift him up. If we do that, He will do the drawing and the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

That's what Jesus' disciple Andrew did. He wasn't an eloquent speaker. He was more of a wallflower content to let others have the limelight. But Andrew knew how to lift Jesus up. He knew how to call attention to Jesus. He brought others to Jesus and let Jesus do the rest.

The key to sharing our faith is to continue to lift Jesus up. In everything that we do we must lift Jesus up, lift him up. We don't have to convince people, we don't have to out argue people. We don't have to collar people. We don't have to force people. We don't have to trick people. If we lift Jesus up, people will want to cross paths with us.

This week I received a free gift in the form of 500 flyers. They came from an organization called www.Encounter.com. I've read them and put labels on them and folded them to make them available for you to take and share with people this week.

Next Sunday Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday. This is one of two times a year

when people are thinking about attending a worship service. Some of you signed on your 2018 pledge card that you would commit to bring someone to become a part of our church family over these next 5 years to celebrate our 100th anniversary. Maybe one of these pamphlets would be a key to inviting someone to do just that. It could be on way of you lifting Jesus up.

Like the man on the ground who told the men in the balloon that they were in a balloon, you don't have to be a philosopher who gives an answer so quickly that's so logical and yet tells you so little about where you are and where you want to be!"

When we lift him up through our conversation, our invitations, our displays of compassion, our taking a stand in the face of opposition, we will lift him up, and he will in turn draw all manner of folks unto himself.

There are people every day whose hearts need a new covenant written on them, who need to know Jesus Christ. So should we speak and act in such a way that we might make Jesus known. So should we speak and act in such a way that our own lives will reflect that we have come to know him. So should we speak and act in such a way that we will share the love of Jesus and lift him up. So should we speak and act in such a way that outsiders will want to become insiders—and maybe even be drawn to Jesus through us so much so that we won't be surprised when someone comes up to us and says, "We would see Jesus."

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, may we lift you up. May we raise your banner, praise your name and show your love. May we trust in you and never lose sight of the fact that as we speak and act that we do so in partnership with you. May we be mindful that as we speak and act you are drawing people to you through us.

We not only lift you up, but also we, through prayer lift up others to you. We pray for those who are hurting, who are struggling, and who are grasping for something or someone onto which to hold. We pray for those who are fighting against disease, poverty, homelessness, joblessness, who feel alone and lost without a friend.

We pray for our church, our mission, our vision. We pray for our church as we prepare to remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious resurrection. We marvel at the fruit that has come from his dying and being planted in the ground like a grain of wheat. May we live our lives after his example until the day that we die, and go to be with him and all the saints who have gone before us. This we pray in Jesus name.

- 1 "On Being Religious", Donald J. Shelby, May 27, 1984).
2. ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by Maxie Dunnam
- 3 Planting Seeds, by Keith Wagner
4. ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Learning to Die, by Todd Weir