

John 12:20-33 - Lent 5 “The hour has come”

You're lying in bed, sleeping peacefully. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, an almighty noise rings out; the silence is shattered. With a start you open your eyes and realise it's the alarm clock. It's time to get up and get on with the day that lies ahead, whatever it holds in store for you. The hour has come.

Perhaps you're the sort of person who marks dates on the calendar and then counts down the days, eagerly anticipating that special event until the day arrives. The hour has come.

Or perhaps it's a more anxious wait for something you're dreading. The hour has come.

In the gospel today it's as if an alarm clock goes off for Jesus as he declares the hour has come ...

The arrival of some Greeks wanting to see Jesus marks a real turning point in his ministry, it's like an exploding force in his mind, he's deeply moved with emotion and he gives a startling response he says, **“The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.”** The time for his true character and purpose to be revealed.

The disciples had heard him say at many significant times in his ministry - my hour has not yet come. And yet now here it had arrived. The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.

It was Passover time in Jerusalem, everyone came to worship at the festival including non-Jews, Greeks drawn to be there.

They must have heard about Jesus, maybe they'd heard what Jesus had done for his good friend Lazarus there was a lot of talk about Jesus bringing him back to life. Back in v17 of this chapter we read ‘the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word and many people went out to meet Him’.

The Pharisees on the other hand commented, ‘see this is getting us nowhere, look how the whole world has gone after Him.

These Greeks came to Philip, Sir we want to see Jesus, not from a distance - they wanted to meet him up close and personal, talk with Him, get to know Him.

Does that express what's in our hearts as well, do we want to see Jesus. We have the wonderful privilege of seeing Jesus up close and personal, he's accessible to us anytime anywhere. We can know him personally.

And what a wonderful thing for Philip and Andrew to do, to introduce others to Jesus. Let's be on the lookout for the opportunities we're given We may not often hear those words, “We want to see Jesus”, but there are plenty of people who hold that desire. And the way they'll see Jesus in our time is through us, the Body of Christ, making Jesus visible. We're all Philips. All we're asked to do is introduce people to the Jesus

we love and worship. He'll do the rest.

The Greeks wanting to see Jesus was clearly a significant and crucial moment. They represented the non-Jewish world coming in search of Jesus, they signified to him that the final part of his mission was about to start.

This was no longer any old hour, but God's hour and his time for glory, his time to confront his upcoming passion and death, the pain and loss that lay ahead.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified - and He talks about dying and bearing fruit, losing your life and servant-hood. And then he gives voice to his anxiety and sorrow, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."

Jesus knew that glory would be extremely costly that it would be through his death on the cross, but He knew he was called to this hour everything was under God's control.

When we're made anxious by the "hours" that are momentous for us, we have a remedy. We can meet Jesus, in prayer, in that place where it's always now, He's always present to us. We can be sure that there's really nothing we can suffer that Jesus hasn't, including rejection and loneliness, misunderstanding and exhaustion. He understands and offers us his gift of peace.

Jesus was called to this hour and ...

Jesus was called to this way. He was to be glorified through all he achieved in his death on the cross, because the cross opens the way, opens that fountain of forgiveness for all who put their trust in Him. It's the great work that Jesus came to do.

The cross is absolutely central to our faith.

His death would bring life to many. Jesus explained this to those around him with the picture of a seed. 'Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.'

The life he gives becomes the source of life for all who believe in Him, He broke the bonds of death to resurrection life and is now seated at the Father's right hand, the place of eternal glory.

Think of the bulbs we plant in the autumn, dead lumps we bury in the ground, but by the spring they burst forth in glorious colours. That's what God's like that's what he does, he brings life out of death.

As Jesus explained that he would be glorified through his death, the voice came from heaven to confirm it. The voice from heaven that thundered at his baptism, this is my son the beloved, the voice that spoke at his transfiguration, this is my son listen to him, the father's voice promised his glory through the cross.

Here then are some important paradoxes we must grasp

1. Life comes through death

We too are like seeds, we're small and insignificant but we have life within us, God's life. We must be prepared to die to self so that God can grow something new and

special in us. It's not easy, it wasn't for Jesus and it isn't for us. For us dying means choosing to go God's way, rather than following our selfish desires or going with the crowd.

We live for Jesus by laying down our lives for Him our calling as followers of Christ is to follow him into the dark, allow ourselves to be broken and transformed from a seed into a seedling, and then a plant that bears abundant fruit. That's pretty much the trajectory of a disciple. Every ounce of energy we spend clinging to what we have, what we love, what we can see, is energy not spent allowing ourselves to be planted, broken, transformed and flourishing."

This is also our calling as the Body of Christ, our calling as congregations: to allow ourselves to be broken open, inconveniently, sometimes painfully; our patterns and presuppositions challenged and changed, so that we can bring life and fruit to hungry people around us.

2. Life comes through spending it

Jesus spells this out in blunt even shocking terms.

"Those who love their life will lose it and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternity."

We live for Jesus by laying down our lives for Him. The odd thing about life is that its only by spending it that we retain it. Many times Jesus said that the person who tries to hoard his life in this world will end up losing it, the person who spends his life will end up by gaining it.

we can seek to hold on to physical life here and now, it can consume all our days, all our desires, all our strength, but the result of such self-centredness will be that we lose eternal life. The way to eternal life is to follow the example of Christ in love and service. As that Sunday school song reminds us Love is something if you give it away you end up getting more

3. Greatness comes through service

Jesus said, whoever serves me must follow me and my father will honour them

The way of the cross, the way of obedience would mean Jesus' death but it would also bring life. Jesus' obedience to the father would bring benefits to many. In our obedience too there are unexpected effects we are assured that the Father honours those who serve, pleasing Him is our goal.

Paradox is never comfortable but in the Christian life it's part of how things are. We have to get used to the fact that some things jar and disturb us and don't seem to make sense initially. How can glory and majesty involve suffering and pain? But the New Testament makes it clear these are to be woven into Christian experience because that was the experience of our Lord himself.

In describing the cross David Watson said it's:

- A picture of violence - yet the key to peace
- A picture of suffering - yet the key to healing
- A picture of death - yet the key to life
- A picture of utter weakness - yet the key to real power
- A picture of punishment - yet the key to mercy and forgiveness.
- A picture of vicious hatred - yet the key to love
- A picture of supreme shame - yet the Christian's supreme boast

This is the wonder and the mystery of our faith: Jesus conquers through self-emptying; he brings life out of death; he overcomes evil with love.

Jesus summed up what this hour meant in the last few verses before us when he said - "Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

The "ruler of this world" he refers to is Satan, the personification of corrupting, life-sapping evil, whose power to tempt humanity away from the love of their Creator earned him that title. This entity, more than the authorities with whom Jesus so often tangled, was Jesus' adversary. He's the one from whom humanity needs saving. His weapon of choice has always been death, and Jesus had to put death to death.

In being lifted up on that cross, the very picture of powerlessness, Jesus exercised all the power that created worlds to break "death's fearful hold." That's why the earth shook and the sun was blocked out when he died. Because he'd broken the power of evil and death, once and for all. For all time; for all people. This was how God would draw all people back to himself and reclaim, restore, renew all of creation to wholeness.

Here we are invited to see Jesus, to see ourselves, to see the world and to see salvation. As we prepare to celebrate these great events of our faith again let's pray that we would see Jesus anew.

Pray

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the death you died and the life you give. We praise you for the reality of your living presence with us by your holy spirit hold us tight to you and give us grace to love and serve you. May we see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly day by day. Amen