

Let us pray. Father God, as I share your word, just like those in our reading, help us to see Jesus. Amen.

I want to tell you about our food waste bin. A strange place to start a sermon, I know, but bear with me. Last week I found in the cupboard a packet of grissini mix- Italian bread sticks. It was a packet of flour and yeast, then another of seeds which are rolled on to the outside. There were lots left over, so I put the remainder of the seeds in the food waste bin. Later in the week, emptying the bin, I noticed these seeds had started sprouting. The seeds had fallen, died, forgotten, thrown away, yet still sprouted. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground...

The setting of our Gospel reading is Jerusalem, just before Passover, tensions are running high. Jesus has just brought his friend Lazarus back from the dead, been anointed by Lazarus's sister Mary in the quiet of Bethany, then entered the holy city in triumph with the crowds shouting 'hosanna' and identifying Jesus as God's promised one. No wonder the Jewish leaders are concerned; if the Romans think there's going to be an insurrection, that could be disastrous.

And it is in the middle of all this that a group of believing Greeks come to find Jesus. They want to see him. What was it that these Greeks come to see? A glimpse of a celebrity? The equivalent of a first-century selfie? No, as saying goes, seeing is believing.

They not only wanted to see Jesus, they wanted to believe. The literal translation of the phrase "we would see Jesus" or "we wish to see Jesus" is difficult to translate. "Sir, we are willing to be perceiving Jesus." We are willing, this encounter is going to change us, we are willing to see – not just to have seen him, but to perceive him, to know him, to understand him, to recognise God in him, to develop an ongoing relationship with him. We are willing to know Jesus personally and fully.

Did you notice that John doesn't tell us whether they did get to see him? They first approach Philip – his name suggests some Greek as well as Jewish ancestry, so maybe they could speak to him in a language they understood; they see something in Philip they can relate to. That's how evangelism works. It's a chain reaction. We experience God's love and share that good news with others we know, people who can identify with us and us them. It's the R number of the kingdom at work.

Back to the passage. The fact that these Gentiles approach Jesus seems to trigger something. In a typical John's gospel sort of way Jesus doesn't encounter these Greeks but instead says something really important. Beginning with the very truly – literally Amen, Amen he makes an announcement – not comforting news at first hearing – his hour has come, and the seed must die, be buried, if it is to sprout and bear fruit. The presence of these Greeks, in Jerusalem but focused not in the temple but in the person of Jesus points that in Jesus is God's rescue plan for the whole of humanity. But what is hard news for Jesus is hard news for us too. Jesus says to gain life we must lose it, and to serve Jesus we must follow him, even that means to the cross. Those close to Jesus would be doing that literally over the days that follow, along that ever-darkening path towards the cross. What does this mean for us, though?

The life that Jesus calls us to live is to shift focus. To move away from the self-centredness and instead be Jesus-focused. One life is doomed to death, and a Christ-centred leads to eternity – life with God forever.

The gospel writer John uses two different words here for the word "life." When Jesus says, "Those who love their life" and "those who hate their life in this world," the word for 'life' refers to our inward being, our sinful soul. But when Jesus talks about eternal life, he uses the word "*zoe*" – which means *a way of living*. So giving up our inward selfishness, dying to sin, as a seed planted in the ground must die, makes it possible for us to experience new life, an eternal way of living.

What's next – a moment of deep significance. In a glimpse of the agony of the garden of Gethsemane, we then see Jesus reveal his deepest challenge- V27-28 we see Jesus challenging himself about what is yet to come, what he now knows is ahead – 'now my soul 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.' Here we see what brings glory to God. Throughout the Old Testament, "glory" is used to describe the evidence of God's presence among his people. God's glory was the pillar of cloud or smoke that stayed with the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. This same cloud of smoke filled the temple to indicate God had moved into his home among the people of Israel. In the culture of the time, name meant all of a person's being, their deepest identity. So when Jesus prays to his Father, "Glorify your name," Jesus is asking his Father to make himself completely known to all humanity, to show that he is present among all people, for all time.

And, in the only time in John's gospel – a voice answers. What does it say? "I have already glorified it, and will do so again' How? Let's finish by seeing what follows.

"Sir, we are willing to be perceiving Jesus," the guests from out of town said to Philip. "This is a sign that my hour has come," answered Jesus. "Father, glorify your name. ... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." All people, you and me, whether we feel worthy or not.

Did you notice what John comments, "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die." In this statement we have the profound mystery of Good Friday. Not the horror of a roman crucifixion, no, much more than the crucifixion. The kind of death that Jesus was about to die was unique. Only Jesus the sinless one's death sets us free from the power of sin and the possibility of life with God The kind of death Jesus was to die was the kind of death that leads to life and eternal victory over death. And Jesus invites us to that same kind of death that defeats death.

The hour has come, said Jesus, time is short – there's a decision to be made?

Have you made that decision, like these greeks to perceive, to know Jesus?

Are we willing to know him in his death, thanking God for the power of the cross, and to accept the promise of Jesus that when he is lifted up on that cross, he will draw you to himself?

Today, for many, we receive Holy communion for the first time since December, if not longer. Here we see and experience Jesus broken body for ourselves; as we receive, can we let ourselves be transformed by Jesus, be drawn to him, and like him to die to self and to live to the father's glory?

I want to invite you to look at the East Window as I lead a short reflection...

Yours, Lord, were the arms outstretched on the cross, a welcome to all in the midst of agony.

Yours were the arms spread in blessing after the resurrection.

Crucified, risen Lord

We adore you in your pain and your victory, your welcome remaining constant,

Gathering us to you and blessing us,

Enfolding us in your loving embrace. Amen.