

Jer. 31:31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,^a says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

John 12:20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

John 12:27 “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. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for

mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Our Lenten Journey: A Different Kind of Glory

Our Lenten theme this year has been “a different kind of glory” and we have explored this theme since February 21st. There was the glory of Jesus affirming his Divine calling after much praying, fasting, and testing in the wilderness (Mark 1, Feb 21). There is the glory of the disciples who heed Jesus’ call to take up their crosses and follow him (Mark 8, Feb 28). There is Jesus upholding the glory of God’s temple against money changers, merchants, and shrewd temple administrators (John 2, March 7). There is the glory of Divine love that Jesus proclaims to all the world: that God loves the world deeply in the midst of all that life can bring, including times of hardship, struggle and loss (John 3, March 14).

Today we hear about glory after Jesus has entered Jerusalem and makes his journey to the passion and the cross (John 12:20-33).

What is glorious in our gospel lesson this morning?

One glory lies in the sweet irony of what the Pharisees had said in the verse just before the beginning of our passage, “*You see, you can do nothing* [about the crowd that witnessed to Jesus as the one who had raised Lazarus and that cheered him on with palm branches when he came to Jerusalem, John 19:12-18]. *Look, the world has gone after him!*” (John 12:19). Surely the Pharisees spoke these words in frustration, probably with some disdain, but how true they were!

And so our text begins with reference to Greeks who had come, not just to be part of the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, but

also to see Jesus. Notice that the Greeks approach Philippos and Andreas, two disciples with Greek names from Bethsaida, which is an area in Galilee that today we would call bi-cultural, and the two disciples were most likely bi-lingual.

I want to emphasize this hint of diversity in our passage, especially this week when we had the targeted, awful murders in Atlanta of Asian American women. Let us remember that the Bible is filled with stories of people coming from many different areas of the Ancient Near East; stories of them migrating far and wide in search of grazing lands, food, and water; stories of them journeying to worship God in a certain way and in certain places; stories of them racing to escape slavery and fleeing from personal or political threats. So the people we read about in Scripture move around and are from various tribes and languages and backgrounds. In today's passage, the race and skin color of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (all three were from Bethsaida) are not recorded, but any exposure to a different language and culture does make for diversity and multiple perspectives.

So the Greeks "*wish to see Jesus*" (John 12:21), and they express that desire to those disciples who have Greek names and could converse in that language. Their request affirms the worst fears of the Pharisees and also foreshadows what will happen later, after Jesus has been sown into the earth in his burial and has borne fruit like a sheaf of wheat rising from a single grain (John 12:24). And so Jews and Greek, Roman soldiers and people around the Mediterranean sea in Asia, Africa, and Europe will become followers of Jesus, and eventually even people in the new world will know him. So there is glory in the ironic truth of what the Pharisees said, "*Look, the world has gone after him!*" (John 12:19)

Another bit of glory in our passage is Jesus conversing with the Heavenly Father. Jesus says, "*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" (John 12:27).

Surely these words remind us a bit of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42). And then comes Jesus' remarkable statement of surrender and acceptance, "*'Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'*" (John 12:28). It is astounding that in the gospel according to John, the cross is something to which Jesus is lifted up (John 3:14, 12:32), as if he were enthroned upon it; and the cross is the place of glory, the glory of God's name and the glory of Jesus, the unique son of God.

How could anyone say that the cross signifies glory? That is really a strange statement, and when we as Christians speak about the cross that way, many people turn away in disbelief, shaking their heads.

So what does the cross signify? We know: Naked power; the Roman empire's ability to coerce and subdue anyone; fear and terror among the population; collusion between the local Jewish authorities and the Roman occupying forces; manipulation of the legal system and miscarriage of justice; suffering and death. That's what the cross stands for in the minds of people at Jesus' time, and it is important that we remember today the full impact of the cross.

So how can we then say that taking up his cross and dying on it glorious? Might it be because Jesus' death on the cross exposes so clearly what is wrong with a world that oppresses so many ordinary people, that retaliates against those who call out corruption and collusion, that seeks to silence those who strive for justice and inclusion of all, that executes people who uphold the values of God's reign and kingdom? The cross of Christ is brutal for Jesus and a brutal mirror for us, because it forces us to look at what human beings do to one another, then

and now. The cross truly symbolizes the sin of the world, the sin of society, the sin of our systems of inequality and injustice. Jesus died on that cross, and we still have those kinds of crosses all over our country, all over the world. But Jesus, the Son of God who endures great injustice and great pain, shows us up, and in a sad way, that is good and glorious.

Finally, there is the glory of God's promise as it comes to us through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34).

How glorious it would be if God's law was indeed written on our hearts; how glorious it would be if each one of us, and our entire community, and our entire society would live by the commandment to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength, love God alone, and not go after any idol of gold or fortune, of power or populism, of fame or notoriety.

How glorious it would be if we had written on our hearts the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, all neighbors without exceptions: those who speak Aramaic and Greek, Latin and English, Spanish and Japanese; those who worship God as Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus; those who come from Navajo County, AZ, and Honduras, from Ireland and China; those whose skin color is black, brown, yellow, and, as my dermatologist has told me, too pale for California with too many freckles.

As this Lenten season moves towards Palm Sunday and Holy Week, we may wonder: What would happen if we truly had the commandments of God written in our hearts, and if we truly lived by the law of God? Wouldn't that make all symbols of naked power and brute force superfluous, be that the cross or assault weapons or the electric chair? Wouldn't that abolish all inequality between people of different backgrounds and races, languages and religions? Wouldn't that transform how we live

in the world and engage with one another, namely in love, grace, justice and kindness?

And wouldn't that, for us humans and in God's eyes, be glorious?

May God bless all of us as we continue our Lenten journey and grant us glimpses of God's glory.

Amen.