

Prayer: God of suffering and glory, in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life through the path of obedience. Inscribe your law in our hearts, that in life we may not stray from you, but may be your people. Guide us by your Spirit through your written word, and make us new through your living Word, our salvation, Jesus who is Christ. Amen

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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.

31:32 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, says the LORD.

31:33 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.

31:34 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.

God tried to write the covenant upon our hearts, and when that did not work, he sent his Son into the world. Jesus born of flesh and blood came to show us what had been unseen. Jesus, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, came to show us the way and to call us back to God. We pick up today's gospel reading with John 12. It helps to know that Jesus has just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. This is the great turning point in John's gospel for then the council leaders decide that they have to do something about Jesus...

⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place^[a] and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ **You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.**" (John 11:46-50)

John 12:20-33

12:20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

12:21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

12:22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

12:23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

12:24 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.

12:25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

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

12:28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

12:29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

12:30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.

12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

12:33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Proclamation of the Word

I admit when I read the gospel this week, it reminded me of that game we used to play at camp or youth group. Everyone sits in a circle. The first person starts with a sentence like "Susie and Josh went to the park." Each person then whispers the message in the next person's ear until it gets around the circle....the last person reveals what the message he received. Usually, somehow the message has changed as it is passed from one person to another. What started as "Susie and Josh went to the park." somehow became "Susie is a real lush after dark." We call the game telephone tag or the gossip game. Usually there is nice moral lesson tied to it....be careful what you say and how things can be heard differently than they were said...

I thought of that game this week when I read the scripture: Some Greeks come to Philip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus," and then Philip tells Andrew and together they go tell Jesus- telephone tag or the gossip game that works for good.

Word got around about Jesus! Back up a verse and we learn that because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!" (John 12:18-19)

Even the Greeks have come wanting to see Jesus. This was word of mouth, person to person. I know that sounds foreign in a social media world. An it is hard for us imagine, but Jesus' world was a multicultural melting pot of sorts. Greeks and Jews, Arameans and Samaritans, were living in close

proximity, but in their own neighborhoods. The news of Jesus saving love and new life had been spreading beyond those first disciples that from the beginning included a mix- Phillip and Andrew, the Greeks, and other disciples who were Jewish. Jesus was creating a new movement revealing God's mission to the world. Word was getting around about Jesus.

John keeps showing this. Earlier in Chapter 4 Jesus encounters the woman of Samaria at the well. She learns Jesus sees and knows her and reveals that he is the Messiah. She runs and tells the neighborhood and many believe because of her testimony. They respond, "It is no longer because of what you have said that we believe, for we have heard ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world!" (John 4:42)

John the evangelist keeps telling us. In John 10:16 Jesus says, "I have other sheep who are not of this fold."

Jesus is bringing all God's children back into the fold, expanding the boundaries, and revealing God's purpose- to save the world that God loves. Even the Greeks and Samaritans are included.

And the word is getting around...

...which is exactly when it gets dangerous for Jesus!

The powers that be don't like it one bit.

Jesus is in trouble, and he knows it saying,

"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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12:24-25)

The world sometimes kills their prophets preaching peace and love. But this is the truth, the truth that will set us free. I like the way Richard Rohr puts it,

"Before the truth sets you free, it tends to make you miserable."

Jesus knows that there is no way around it. He cannot avoid suffering. He will go through it, all the way through it, in order to rise on the other side. Jesus is a model for us. This pattern of Jesus is the way, the truth, the life....

On a personal level for us, I was reminded this week that this is deeper than the only way is through it by musician Carrie Newcomer. Transformation is about growing, by going into. We begin with looking at something we don't really want to see. We do not avoid it, and even if we did, it would usually catch up to us. The hard thing may be grief or not getting the internship we desperately wanted or unrequited love. So we sit with our discomfort and go to the hard place we do not wish to go. We

consider why this is a hard thing, study our pain, and find its meaning. Newcomer writes, “It is there that we learn that this discomfort will not drown me, but transform me.”ⁱ

Eventually the light comes through the darkness. The weeping that lasted for the night has turned to morning joy. We go to dark Gethsemane in order that our Savior teaches us so to rise, as the old hymn goes. We discover that the thing that almost killed us, has left us new, whole, better.

Frederick Buechner writes, *“Salvation is an experience first and a doctrine second. Doing the work you're best at doing and like to do best, hearing great music, having great fun, seeing something very beautiful, weeping at somebody else's tragedy—all these experiences are related to the experience of salvation because in all of them two things happen: (1) you lose yourself, and (2) you find that you are more fully yourself than usual.”*ⁱⁱ

He likens salvation to the experience of LOVE. When you love someone, you are no longer the center of your own universe. The one you love is. You give yourself, deny yourself, and forget yourself. Logically, it would seem, there would be less of you than there was before. Only by paradox of God's grace do you find you are more yourself than you ever have been. You love as God loves.

God tried teaching us the law in the Torah, then decided to write the covenant on our hearts. When it finally came down to it, God sent Jesus in the flesh to show that love. In this life of saving love, we find we die with Christ, and rise with him, just as Paul describes Baptism.

Buechner writes,

You do not love God so that, tit for tat, he will then save you. To love God is to be saved. To love anybody is a significant step along the way.

You do not love God and live for him so you will go to Heaven. Whichever side of the grave you happen to be talking about, to love God and live for him is Heaven.

It is a gift, not an achievement.

You can make yourself moral. You can make yourself religious. But you can't make yourself love.

"We love," John says, "Because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)ⁱⁱⁱ [Emphasis mine]

I wonder if the Greeks who wished to see Jesus really wanted to see the Jesus they got. I wonder if they were looking for the Jesus hailed on Palm Sunday as a victorious antidote to the rule of Rome. Or maybe they were in need of healing or wanted help. Instead, they would see Jesus lifted up on a cross, in order to draw all people unto him. The cross and a suffering God may not be what we are looking for.

But remember the cross is a human invention, a human response to maintain order and strike fear in hearts. It is a vengeful act- an execution without mercy or grace. God did not invent the cross, we did.

Instead of the crucifixion of Jesus being to satisfy God's wrath and vengeance, it was God's response to satisfy our cry for blood and violence.

God offered himself up to show us the very Heart of God. Jesus sacrifice on the cross, was a response to our wrath, not God's wrath. This is what LOVE looks like.

Jesus said, "I will draw all people unto me." We are wrapped in God's love, so that we can believe in that Hope that is possible through God's mercy and grace. God writes that covenant on our hearts, so that we will know God, know salvation, know heaven.

Instead of spreading anger, gossip or hate, friend of Jesus, spread the good news.

And Jeremiah's words will come true. They will teach one another saying "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.

Seeing is believing, and believing is following, and following is dying to the old life, dying is being born anew.

So many wish to see Jesus, to know that hope and peace that only comes from God. For the person drowning in despair, pain, hopeless, crippled by carrying their own cross, Perhaps you are the person they need to see most.

Let us stand and say what we believe in the Summary of the Law, Glory to God Hymnal, p. 36.

Benediction

Today we are the church gathered, but throughout this week, we are the church, the Body of Christ, scattered in the world. So go, tell the good news about Jesus and his saving love. Perhaps you are the one someone needs to see the most...so go knowing by the love of God you were born, by the grace of Jesus you have been redeemed, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be given enough of what you need to live faithfully.

ⁱ Thanks to Carrie Newcomer's reflection on song "You Can Do the Hard Thing"

ⁱⁱ Beuchner, Frederick, *Wishful Thinking* and *Beyond Words* found at day1.org/8162-weekly_sermon_illustration_salvation

ⁱⁱⁱ Beuchner.