

# Palm Sunday

John 12:20-43

Grace mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Our text is The gospel from John 12.

John 12:23-26

And Jesus answered them, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”*

Dear Christians, I will tell you that this text is particularly challenging for me on this day. Our Lord is talking about his death. The conversation takes place during the days after his triumphal entry and leading up to his crucifixion. There are some Greeks who desired to meet Jesus and they came to seek an audience through his closest disciples. Jesus heard of their inquiry and he said, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

Jesus’s words are somewhat surprising. The Greeks who came to talk to Jesus were likely drawn by his celebrity. Jesus was famous. At this time, the city of Jerusalem was packed in anticipation of the upcoming feast of the Passover. Jesus’ entry into the city was accompanied by much fanfare and it created quite a stir. These Greeks observed Jesus’ popularity with the crowds and they wanted to be a part of the action. Jesus was *“where it’s at”*. And, let’s be honest, that is where we all want to be too. So these Greeks came to jump on the “Jesus bandwagon”.

They wanted to jump on Jesus’ bandwagon and Jesus started talking about his death. He said, *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

None of that really bothers me all that much. We all know that Jesus came to die. We even celebrate the fact that Jesus came to die. Why? Because we know he came to die *for us*. What is troubling however is what Jesus said next. Jesus said, *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*

Jesus said that in order for me to keep my life... to receive it for eternal life, then I must **hate** my life. I must **hate** my life in order to receive eternal life. Now, of course, I want to receive eternal life. But **hating** my life? Hating this life? That is a little more difficult.

In the end, there are two things that bother me.

The first thing that bothers me is the fact that I hold onto this life too tightly. In that sense I am probably a lot like those Greeks. They came looking for Jesus because they were looking for notoriety. They valued their place in the world and they wanted to make that place more secure. The way to do that is to align yourself with other people who are more secure than you are. We do that all the time. We are drawn to success. We are drawn to successful people. We hope that being associated with someone who is successful will somehow rub off on us. We hope that we can learn from their success, that we can borrow their success, that we can somehow ride their coattails and therefore also be successful.

In my own life and in my own way I feel proud of the success that I have achieved. I feel proud of where I am in my life and what I have done. I suspect maybe you are the same. This is not to say that I am the most successful or have achieved the greatest, but what I have achieved I enjoy, and I would like to keep it. I suspect you are the same. We like our lives. We like the things we have achieved. We want to hold onto them. Along those same lines, we don't like it when those things are threatened. Maybe that's one reason why this whole "coronavirus thing" is so difficult. It threatens to disrupt the lives that we have built and take away those things we have achieved.

Jesus instructed his disciples that if they were to truly be his disciples it was necessary for them to hate their lives. That is to say, it was necessary for them to look on their own success and see it only as something that would keep them from truly following him. This is exactly what Paul means when he says that he counts everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.<sup>1</sup> The more we hold onto ourselves, our success, our established way of life, the less we hold on to Jesus. Jesus said that it was necessary that we die. Die to ourselves so that we might be wholly devoted to following Jesus.<sup>2</sup> This challenges me. And I do not like it.

I said there were two things about this text that challenge me. That's the first. Here's the second. While it is true that there is a part of me that selfishly values my own success, there is at the same time a part of me that loves Jesus sincerely and desires to follow him. I desire to give him my life. I desire to lay down my life in his service. I desire to be his servant.

Yet, what if, in my desire to follow and in my effort to lay down my life... what if I fail to do enough? What if *my* efforts to live my life for Jesus and to love my neighbor don't go far

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:7-9 *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*

<sup>2</sup> Luke 9:23-25 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

enough? What if there are people who are not loved? What if there are people who do not receive care? What if there are people whom I fail to serve? What if, in my efforts to lay down my life and give myself to the service of God and my neighbor, I don't do enough? This text has me fearful of this as well. Perhaps you can relate.

So this is a funny mix of emotions I have going on inside of me – I am selfish and prideful and I don't want lose the life I have worked so hard to build. And at the same time I love my Lord and because I love my Lord I love my neighbor and have become fearful that I might not love my neighbor as much as he or she needs to be loved. And what is true, dear Christian, is that both of these grow out of the wickedness of my own heart. So what am I to do?

As always, the answer is that I run to Jesus. I run to Jesus because he has the solution and he has the cure both for my love of this life and for my fear that I might somehow fail.

How so?

In our text, Jesus says to his disciples, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** and then again, Jesus prays to his Heavenly Father, **“Father, glorify your name.”** The gospel writer tells us that in reply to Jesus' prayer, a voice came from heaven that was heard to say, **“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”** Our text talks about the glory of Jesus.

Now, for you and me, when we think of glory we think of recognition. This again is the error of those Greeks who came searching for Jesus. We think of glory as popularity and fanfare, a book deal and a movie made with Brad Pitt playing the part of me. That's how we define glory. God has something different in mind. In fact later on our text talks about a glory that comes from men and a glory that comes from God. Our Heavenly Father has in mind the glory that comes from God.

So, what kind of glory comes from God? Well, this is the funny thing. Because on the surface and in the eyes of men it doesn't look like glory. In fact, it absolutely looks like failure. If the glory of men is popularity and books and movies, the failure of men is shame and then obscurity – no knowing your name, no one caring about what you've done. Everyone overlooking you and calling out your accomplishments and pointing out your failures.

Isn't that what happened to Jesus? “He saved others. He can't save himself. Let God save him if he wants him.” ...even the fellow criminals on the cross beside him piling on and adding insult to injury. Yet somehow, this failure and shame is actually Glory. This is precisely what Jesus has in mind when he says that he will glorify his Heavenly Father. This is exactly what the Father has in mind when he says that he will glorify his Son. Jesus' shame is his glory. Jesus' failure is his honor. His weakness is his strength. Jesus' death on the cross is his victory over

the devil. It is his victory over death. It is his victory over me and my sin. Jesus overcame my sin on the cross.

And here's how he did it: In my own sin and wickedness, I love my life and I am afraid that it will be taken from me and I hold on to it too tightly. I fear love and trust in this world more than I fear love and trust in God. This is sin. And Jesus died for that sin. Jesus died to overcome that sin. He came to put that sin to death. My love of this world. My love of this life. My longing for earthly glory is all put to death at the cross. It is all accounted for when Jesus took onto himself the indignity of hanging naked and exposed before all the world as they screamed out and insulted him. My desire for earthly glory died with Jesus at the cross. Yours did too.

And likewise my love for my neighbor. Jesus loves me. Jesus love my neighbor. Jesus wants my neighbor to be served and loved and he has invited me to do it. This is a joyous gift. Yet in my pride and the wickedness of my heart, I assume that the only love and service that matters is mine. I assume that the only way that Jesus can possibly accomplish the love and service of my neighbor is if I am the one to do it. Hogwash. This is Jesus' work. If he wants it to be done, he will see to it that it gets done, with or without me. I am not necessary. Neither are you. But you are invited. And encouraged. And promised to be blessed if in fact you do. The salvation of the world isn't up to me. It is accomplished by, you guessed it, the man hanging dead on the cross. His love is the love that matters. His service is the service that matters. You just get the privilege and the joy of working with him.

In the end, the glory belongs to Jesus. He receives the glory for overcoming my sin and selfishness. He receives the glory for dishing out generous helpings of love and service to me and to my neighbor, and yes dear Christian, even to you. It's like we pray every time we pray the Lord's Prayer: *For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.