

The Hour Has Come

John 12:20-33

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, Series B

Companion Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 143, Hebrews 5:7-9

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (1st Timothy 1:2)

The Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington, DC, was one of the grand hotels of the early 20th century. In its day, the ornate trim of the walls and furnishings of the lobby, ballrooms, and guest accommodations projected an air of regal splendor. Heads of state had passed through its doors. Presidents had spoken in its ballrooms. Dignitaries had slept in its beds and eaten in its dining rooms.

It was a well recognized landmark in the grand European culture and tradition after which it was patterned.

By the late 1970's, it was obvious that such extensive repairs and remodeling were needed, that it would be less expensive to tear it down and build an entirely new structure on the site.

As construction began, the rear of old hotel was torn down, leaving the entire front wall intact. Even the curtains were left on the windows. To a passer-by, the old landmark appeared as it had for over seventy five years.

The new hotel was constructed behind this old wall, out of public sight.

When all was ready --- when the hour had come --- to reveal the new building, a dramatic removal of the old hotel wall was planned. With the use of carefully placed charges of explosives, the wall was toppled to suddenly reveal a work of art and craftsmanship: The Sheraton Washington Hotel.

Our Gospel today is one of those times that God knocks the wall down that had blocked man's view of His plan of salvation. No longer is Jesus speaking in veiled terms about the plan of salvation that God had put into motion, and was close to its conclusion.

Our Gospel today records an incident from the days following the royal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is preserved for us by John, not on account of the Greeks, but because of the testimony of Jesus regarding His death, now so close at hand.

Jesus had repeatedly stated that "[His] hour" had not yet come (7:6, 7:30, 8:20, etc.). The preparation was not complete. People were not equipped to understand the events that were to unfold.

Now, here in our text, Jesus announces that, "The hour has come." Like a vessel that has finally filled up, God's timetable had arrived at this point of completion. It was time to tear down the wall of ignorance that prevented the people from seeing God's plan of salvation. The people would now witness the dramatic revelation of the glory of God.

The dominating purpose of Christ's life was to reveal the glory of God to the people. Virtually everything Jesus did was to reveal the glory of the father by word and deed. The only reason for any of the miracles performed by Jesus was to show the glory and power of God. The only reason that Jesus was on the earth was to seal God's glory with His sacrifice.

Our text today records a very dramatic moment. Jesus prays for the revelation of

God's glory in the events that were beginning to unfold. That prayer received an immediate answer. Our text records:

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

God receives glory every time He reveals Himself to us. His revealing started in Old Testament, through the promise of a Savior. It continued in the Old Testament as He revealed His will through the prophets and the lives of the people. The glory of God is evident from the things said about Him and His mercy.

When Christ was born, the heavens were filled with angelic voices praising God (Luke 2). The shepherds rushed to the stable to see this "glory" that had come into their midst. The wise men were drawn by the light of the wondrous star from faraway Persia. Men were drawn to this new teacher from Galilee to hear --- and marvel at --- his words.

In His ministry, Jesus directed all credit to His Father in heaven. What He said and did was always to give God glory. The people were to see the Father in heaven in the life and action of Jesus. The fulfillment of the promises of God was the focus.

But there was always a wall. There was always a veil keeping the full glory of God partially hidden. Our text today marks the point where Jesus announces that the wall is coming down. Jesus is about to reveal God's act of salvation in all of its glory.

This revelation of the glory of God was all inclusive. It was not just for a few select Jews, who continually elevated themselves in the eyes of the people. This revelation was to show the glory of God to everybody...even these Greek foreigners timidly asking to speak to Jesus. This revelation reaches through the ages to impact each and every person today...right now.

This revelation gives us a picture of a God unlike any god created in the mind of man. Jesus strips away the curtain to reveal a God who is righteous, merciful. Jesus collapses the wall to reveal a God who loves us so much that He would substitute His own Son for the judgment we deserve. Through Christ we see God taking the guilt and punishment for our sins and nailing them to the cross of Calvary.

It is this cross of Calvary that produced God's glory. It is so difficult for us to equate the broken body of Jesus, bleeding to death on this gruesome instrument of torture, as being the focal point of such glory. The scene is so revolting to our senses that we want to turn away. How could a loving God focus His glory on such a scene?

And to willingly go to such a death! How? Why?

Jesus was NOT caught up in a set of chance circumstance that got out of hand and just ended this way. He knew exactly what awaited Him. He could see every detail clearly. There were no surprises.

His humanity made Him want to recoil from this cross. He was a man, with all of the human sensations of pain. According to His human nature, Christ looked dreadful sacrifice with dread and horror. Listen to His personal struggle:

"Now my heart 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!"

Jesus knew that His death would be horrific. He knew that the Father would forsake Him because He would be suffering for the sins of all people...including you and me. His death was a frightfully depressing prospect.

But Jesus knew that his cross had to be experienced in order to bear the fruit of His glory. Jesus knew that this cross must be endured to fulfill the plan of God for the salvation of all mankind. Jesus knew that it was only through this sacrifice that the punishment for sins could be paid.

Jesus compares Himself to a seed that must be planted to produce a harvest. Such a seed must literally die in order to produce "many seeds." It was for this reason that Jesus came into the world. It is for this reason that Jesus was to be "lifted up" on the cross. It was for this reason that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice.

This sacrifice brought salvation to all people. "I...will draw all men to Myself," Jesus said. This sacrifice shows us God's righteousness and mercy. Everything that needed to be said about God, was said when Christ died. That is glory!

It is by faith that we share the cross and the glory. We share the same attitude toward this life that Christ had. We share the same tension created by the apparent contradictions:

- 1) He who loves this life will lose it.
2. He who hates this life will have eternal life.
3. This life is lost in Christ --- lost as far as the world is concerned.

There is an urgency in our Gospel message today. Jesus puts an emphasis on His words that is more than the fact that He spoke them just days before their fulfillment. These words create an awareness in our world today that time is running out.

Now is the time for us to die to sin. Now is the time to bury our old sinful nature. Now is the time to nail our sins to the cross of Christ as it is lifted up on that hill outside the ancient city walls. Now is the time to stand in awe as God collapses the old wall of unbelief to reveal His glorious act of salvation.

Our sinful nature must die to produce the fruit of God's glory. The glory God has --- and shares with us --- could not have happened without the cross.

It is the glory of that cross that has been given to each of us.

Amen. May the peace of God, which passes all [human] understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen (Philippians 4:7)