

John 12:20-33 & Jeremiah 31:31-34
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Trinity Lutheran Church – Herkimer, NY
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Drawn Together In Divine Love

Our gospel reading from John this morning begins with more people gathering to see Jesus. This time even the Greeks, the Gentiles who were not part of the Jewish followers of Jesus. This is significant because in order to understand the present moment, we need to be aware of what happened in the past. Prior to the gospel verses read this morning, crowds gathered to see Jesus because he had raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. The religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus and Lazarus because Jesus was becoming a threat to their way of life. He was drawing people to a new way of believing and being. The crowd grew larger and followed him to the festival of the Passover where they threw palm branches before him and shouted Hosanna or “save us.” Next Sunday, Palm Sunday, we’ll celebrate this particular event. But today we pause to look at the gathering crowd. Verse 19 says, “The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!’” Immediately after this verse is where we picked it up today, “Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.” That’s an important statement, because the entire world as they knew it was now going after Jesus. No longer were just the Jewish people following him, but now the Greeks - the Gentiles - were being drawn as well to come and see and know Jesus. The whole world as they knew it was being drawn to Jesus. And Jesus’ response to those who wanted to see him was quite surprising. He didn’t tell the disciples, “bring them over here.” Instead, he spoke to the disciples about death. He spoke about seeds having to die in order to bring forth new life. He spoke about his own death and how through his death everyone would see him and be drawn to him. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” The gathering crowds wanted to see life,

but first they had to see death. Like we read last week, Jesus was saying that we have to look at the cross - look at the thing we are most afraid to look at - in order to be healed, in order to really come alive.

Jesus' use of the metaphor of the seeds may have perplexed the disciples at the moment, but it was then, and is now a perfect image of life and death. Seeds of any kind – wheat, flowers, plants – all have to die to their current form – in order to transform. The seed literally has to break open and be released into the earth so that new life can grow. There is no other way. Without breaking open, the fruit of that seed never comes to life. Jesus said to them, 'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out.' He was saying that the time had come for things to be broken open. Jesus came to save us from sin and death and the only way for that to happen was to break the systems of sin and death open. The systems that oppress and cause suffering, the systems that judge and cause pain, the systems that incite fear and hatred, the systems that kill in order to keep certain powers in charge. Jesus came to end these unjust systems that lead to death so that new life can emerge.

Now, you may ask, but these systems are still going on today. So how did Jesus overcome them? That's the same question the ancient Israelites must have wondered in the time of the prophet Jeremiah when he spoke God's words of promise saying, "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." He said, this covenant would be written on their hearts and that they would no longer need to be taught about God, for they would "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." (Jer. 31:34) Jeremiah prophesied these words from God to a people who were on the verge of being taken over. This was not a story; this was a real historical event. The Babylonian army was surrounding them.

There were real soldiers, real enemies who were about to take them captive for years. It was in this context that Jeremiah spoke to them words of God's promise of hope. How could they believe that at that time?

How do we believe it today? Today, there are countries in the middle of war. There are places where people are held captive. There are people are fleeing from poverty and famine. The entire globe is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, and systems of injustice, and racism, and prejudice are growing out of control. Look at the ongoing racial injustice in our own country, including the recent attacks of violence against our Asian brothers and sisters. This is the context where we hear these words of promise not only from the prophet Jeremiah, but from Jesus, himself. No longer is God's voice saying "The days are surely coming..." but rather "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

This is the promise and covenant of the incarnation. This is the promise of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Through Christ all harmful systems of sin and death, the rulers of this world, are driven out. We may still be surrounded by them like the ancient Israelites were surrounded by the Babylonian army, but through Jesus they have already been cracked open. They have been exposed, and evil will not have the final say.

This is the glorification Jesus was talking about. This was the reason that Jesus willingly allowed himself to be killed, to show that violence does not end violence, only non-violence, only love can destroy violence and the hate-filled systems that exist. The love of God that has been delivering people throughout the ages continues to deliver people and set them free. God did this through the incarnation of Jesus, and does this again through the incarnation of the Church, who is the body of Christ in the world. The love of God breaks open the things that prevent us

from truly living the lives we were created to live. When we allow God to break open our hearts, draw out and let go all that hardens us, the fruit is a community of new life.

This is the promise and covenant of the incarnation, the promise of the cross. It is the promise of hope from a relentless God who continues to draw all people into relationship with Godself. No matter how frightening the situation, no matter how bleak the circumstances, God will stop at nothing to draw all people together in Divine love. What a privilege and a responsibility as the church to be a part of this Divine gathering. Amen.