

Sermon Text – Sunday, March 17, 2024 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1st Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2nd Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10
Scripture for Message: John 12:20-33 “The Hour Has Come”**

Scripture reminds us that “the days are coming” and “the hour has come.” The days when God establishes a new covenant, when Jesus’ death on the cross is his glorification and his perfect submission to the Father’s will glorifies God as well. Jesus makes the statement “The Hour Has Come” with full knowledge of his fate – maybe he took the arrival of the Greeks as an omen, the signal that “Now is the time for judgment on this world.”

Jesus uses an agricultural reference to drive home the point that one death, his, is necessary for the eternal salvation of many. He tells them, “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” And, he reminds his followers that they must deny their worldly self for eternal life, stressing service as the way of God the Father. He gave these lessons to them before, now there is urgency, his hour has come.

Jesus knows what is coming and it troubles his soul, but he does not try to escape his fate. Make no mistake, although scripture tells us that Jesus was “sent” to face the sacrifice for us, we know he came to this hour willingly and of his own accord. Jesus considers his suffering, death, and resurrection his glorification and more importantly a way to glorify God the Father. This was not, as our modern day sensibilities could describe it, an abusive sacrifice of human life. This was God through Jesus, in an act of self-giving love, willingly laying down his life so those who believe could have eternal life. Jesus’ death is the very means of God’s salvation.

Maybe you could think of Jesus’ crucifixion as substitutionary atonement, if you take a closer look, it becomes clear that Jesus did not remove sin from the world. Sin still exists, we are still guilty – Jesus took our pain to the cross and paid the price so we could enter God’s kingdom as holy forgiven beloved children of God. Last week we talked about sin and God’s remedy, this was God’s remedy for sin. Not that Jesus would remove sin but through his act of obedience and willing submission, Jesus accepted the punishment for us

The Greeks came to worship at the festival and made a request of Philip – we want to see Jesus. We are not told in our scripture reading whether they got their wish. If we look at Jesus’ response I wonder if they got more than they bargained for when they declared “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” These Greeks probably heard about Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead and maybe they were present to see that triumphal entry through the gates into Jerusalem when all the people were praising God [something we will get to next week] so maybe they realized there is something to this Jesus movement after all. They

however were about to experience so much more, Jesus healing the blind man, Jesus anointed with the expensive perfume, Jesus arrest, his torture, his crucifixion. I wonder if their seeing Jesus meant they also saw the cross and the significance of that symbol, I wonder if they hung around long enough to see the resurrected Jesus. If they saw that it would have been the glorification of Jesus and the fulfillment of their deepest wishes.

We read from Jeremiah that the Lord declares “the days are coming when I will make a new covenant.” It is not written that this new covenant would replace the covenant God made with Moses (or Abraham or David for that matter). Jeremiah expands on that topic and gives the Lord’s declaration that this new covenant would put the Lord’s laws in the minds of the people and write it on their hearts – the people would know the lord and “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Those days are coming.

One danger we run into is to read these words and think that Jeremiah is giving a prediction of what God will do through Jesus. I don’t honestly think Jeremiah perceived anything like that in his recounting of what the Lord says. These words, written to remind the people of Israel that God, while not replacing the covenant given them when they left Egypt, could adapt to the realities of the relationship with the people of Israel. It seems clear, when you read the Old Testament prophets, that the original covenant had its roots in fear and obedience that simply was not working. The people continually fell short, betraying the trust God put in them. However, God, pressing into the future, is great enough to evolve and adapt to human abilities or inabilities. Jeremiah tells the people the days are coming when there will be change.

Those days are coming – in this season of Lent we get closer to the glories of resurrection morning but there is still more territory to cover. We are not there yet, but we may be getting closer to the glories God promises. We run into danger when we look back and think that the “better days” are behind us even when we think that things are as good as they are going to get. What God declares is that “the days are coming” not to be confused with the days are past or the days are here. Jeremiah reminds us that change is coming, a new time with a changed covenant and through that change “all will know God.”

The hour has come – now is the time for judgment on this world – this is bad news that Jesus tells his followers. The prince of this world will be driven out, and when Jesus is lifted up, he draws all people to himself. Due to his charismatic nature and the pull of his message Jesus draws crowds – but he also draws all people to him when that day comes for the final judgment. John writes that Jesus said this to show the kind of death he was going to die – I wonder if Jesus said this to show that he was the fulfillment of God’s promise to establish a new

covenant with the people, the source of God's salvation, the source of eternal life. Through Jesus – "God will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."

Like those Greeks, we too would like to see Jesus. That is why we worship and read scripture to catch a glimpse of the one we call Lord and Savior of the world. Many people seek Jesus just as those Greek strangers who came to worship at the festival that day. But, Jesus is a tough and troubling act to swallow, some are not satisfied with what they see. Jesus isn't just a teacher or healer, Jesus is the sufferer who carries others burdens – even to the point of death. In our desire to "see" Jesus, do we see all of Jesus or just the parts that are pleasing to the eye and hear only the words that do not challenge us.

The trouble a lot of people fall into is that they want to see Jesus until they are shown the reality of Jesus' full personhood. Some are not willing to look at the suffering Jesus, the Jesus who took the burden and pain of our transgressions to the cross. Some don't want to see the Jesus who overturned the vendors tables in the temple, or the Jesus who said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan." Some don't want to hear Jesus tell the rich man that to enter God's kingdom he must give up all his possessions, we don't want to hear that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a "rich" man to enter the kingdom. These are the things that make Jesus' message hard for some to swallow.

It's troubling too for some who want to see Jesus yet are afraid to look on the cross. There is a little bit of paradox in Jesus statement that "now the prince of this world will be driven out." We know that the prince of this world, Satan, is still active just listen to your news reports. Evil exists everywhere and there are people who continue to prefer darkness over light. Those who cannot look at Jesus' cross are stuck in a world that has the cloud of Satan's reign still hanging over it. It is the cross that symbolizes Jesus' victory over the forces of evil that lead to death. Jesus' obedience to God and his confrontation with the Roman armed forces, set in motion a new way to be human and calls into question all claims to power and authority of this world.

Jesus' resurrection indeed does drive out the forces of evil – it means that history is not written only by winners. The resurrection means that those the world tried to silence are not ultimately silenced – the meek have a voice. Jesus' victory over death deprives power of its primary means of persuasion. It defies the well-established rules of the game – that power is the end that justifies the means. Jesus resurrection is bad news for anyone whose power depends on lethal force – death has no hold, Jesus resurrection diminishes Satan's power.

These scriptures point us to the cross – they invite us to think of Jesus suffering, death and his resurrection. They also compel us to think beyond the

cross to the future God promises and to God's determination to see that future come to fruition when "God will be their God and they will be God's people." The days are coming, the hour has come.

Jesus recognized that his time was up and submitted willingly to the cross – the question that begs a response is how should we approach the cross? In this time before Easter, the followers of Christ are asked to recognize the significance of the cross and to realize that the hour has come – time draws to a close and we have limited time left to do God's work in our world. Jesus tells us that God will honor the one who serves Jesus. Serving Jesus means we serve as we have been served – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, putting others before self. Self-giving love is the example Jesus give us for human life. The self-giving love that brought Jesus to the cross. The self-giving love that compels us to say "we want to see Jesus" but also has some of us turning away.

The hour has come – that is what Jesus declared as those who were outside the circle asked to "see" him. Jesus realized that as more and more people clamored for his presence those in control of the power might feel that power slipping. Jesus knew how that would be perceived and what their response would be. Jesus recognized that there was little time left for his work in our world – the disciples needed to be prepared. We need to be prepared for there is little time left in the current culture of our world, our nation, and our community for the people to see Jesus and to complete the work he began when he walked this earth.

Next week is Passion Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week – we journey with Jesus as he takes his final steps on earth, we see his "glorification" in the form of suffering, death, and resurrection. We see the triumph and the tragedy – are we prepared? I wonder if we can think of the cross as Jesus' victory over a death-dealing culture and all that degrades and denies true human flourishing. Are we ready to look at Jesus' obedient submission as the very means of our salvation? Days are coming, the hour has come, mysteries do unfold, nothing and no one goes unchanged.