

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I tell you the truth, 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. <sup>25</sup> The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

<sup>27</sup> "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. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:20-33)

### The Cross is Jesus' True Glory

What is glory? The highest award that our military gives out is the Congressional Medal of Honor. Usually, the president himself awards that medal. When a soldier or a sailor receives it, is the medal itself glory? Is the ceremony and the speech the president makes praising that service member and the applause of the crowd that gathers that day – is that what glory is? Or is glory really the actions of that soldier or sailor that won the medal and earned the praise? It's really both/and, isn't it? I mean, if a soldier gave his life in a heroic way, but no one ever knew about it, we would probably say that he was cheated of his glory. But if he was awarded that medal and didn't deserve it, we would find the glory to be false. True glory has both parts. Twice in our gospel lesson for today Jesus says that it is time for glory. What's he talking about? The cross. **The cross is Jesus' true glory.**

#### I.

Of course, it's not a medal that was hung around his neck. And sadly, in this world, the meaning of the cross is often confused or denied outright. But on that cross, Jesus did win glory. This morning, he talks about how and why that's true. He begins by talking about life and death. **The cross is Jesus' true glory. It's the glory of life.**

The conversation that we have recorded here took place sometime between Jesus' triumphant entry on Palm Sunday and the Passover meal on Maundy Thursday. Jerusalem was filling up with pilgrims from all over the known world who were coming to celebrate the Passover. Most of them were Jewish. But John tells that there were also some Greeks there. Probably, they had converted to the Jewish faith and now, they too, had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They wanted to see Jesus. Why? Well, if they were there already on Palm Sunday they probably heard and saw all those remarkable events. Even if they weren't, Jesus was the most famous Jew in Jerusalem that year. The people were arguing about whether he really was the Messiah and these converts to Judaism may have wanted to see for themselves. In any event, they went to Philip and he and Andrew brought the request to Jesus.

But we don't know if they ever got to see him because Jesus turned the request into an opportunity to teach what it really means to see him. You don't have to see him with your physical eyes. You and I have never seen him like that. To truly see Jesus, you need to understand who he is and what he has done. You need to see his work as God's work for you. In short, you need to see the glory of the cross. But that's a funny kind of glory. To the people of Jesus' day, the cross did not provoke a positive feeling. We love it as a symbol. My wife and daughter wear cross necklaces. I have ties with that pattern printed on them. But in Jesus' day, it was a symbol of shame. To the Jews, it meant that God had rejected you. To the Gentiles, it meant that you were a slave or a rebel or worse. So when Jesus said, "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,**" he had to explain how glory could come through a cross.

He focused on the idea of dying. He said that unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains one lone kernel. But if it dies, it becomes many kernels. Of course, the point Jesus is making what you do with seeds, right? Now that spring is finally here, the gardeners among us are going to start gathering their seeds. Every year, my wife and kids do what Jesus is describing here. They bury seeds. Of course, the burying of the seed reminded Jesus of what we do with a body. We bury it. Jesus was talking about his own body that would be laid in a tomb. It would die. And only if that happened would Jesus become many. Of course, we are the many. I looked up wheat on the internet this week because I was wondering how many kernels are on a single plant. According to one website, modern strains of wheat have between 150 and 200 kernels per plant. One single seed produces hundreds of new seeds. Jesus dying and being buried produces untold numbers of new children to give glory to God.

Why is that true? Because we are sinners and we needed him to die and set us free from sin. Jesus said, **“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”** Do you love life here? I’m not talking about how happy you are or aren’t at this particular moment. But are you all about your life here? Are you happy or unhappy because of your job or your relationship with people or because you do or don’t have the money to do things you want to? Is the driving force in your life your comfort? Your lifestyle? Your image? How much time do you spend on the things of this life in comparison to how much time you spend hearing God’s word and talking about it with your children and meditating on it through your day? Do you think about Jesus as you live your life or is he something you only remind yourself of when it’s time for church? Jesus was talking about where our heart is. Is it focused on this life or the life to come? That’s what he meant when he said that the man who hates his life will keep it for eternal life. Only one thing can come first in your heart. It needs to be Christ. That means that you need to be willing and able to sacrifice everything that you enjoy about this life if it pulls you away from Christ.

How ready are you to do that? While we’re in here, it’s easy to feel like we put God first in our lives. But the rubber meets the road out there. It’s just so easy to be all about how much stuff we can buy and what people think of us and whether we’re happy or not, and to put Christ after all those concerns. Jesus says that the person who does that will lose his life. Not just physically, but eternally. The person who worships and loves this life and the things of this life is doomed to hell because he has put those things in God’s place. He’s an idol worshipper. If we’re honest, we have to admit that there is a little idol worshipper in all of us. Sinners love themselves first, so they love the things of this life, the things we can see and touch and feel, the things that make us comfortable instead uncomfortable, well-fed instead of hungry, popular instead of lonely.

Because we all have that sinner inside us, we needed Jesus to die. That hour had come. It was Holy Week and in just a couple of days, he was going to be nailed to that cross and suffer hell itself there in our place and give up his spirit and die. When he died and was buried, he became the seed that all our eternal lives spring from. Through his death and his resurrection, God has taken our sin away and led us to trust in him. Now, we are all like he is: we are all children of God. That gift of life through death gives the cross its glory.

## II.

But it wasn’t an easy glory to win – no true glory ever is. It cost Jesus more than you and I will ever understand, because he suffered so we don’t have to. So there’s a lot more to it than just dying. Unless Jesus comes back first, every one of us will die. But we won’t suffer hell. We won’t feel God’s wrath over our sin. Most of us probably won’t even endure the kind of physical pain Jesus felt, even if we do suffer some terrible disease. That willingness of Christ to go through all that is also a major part of his glory. **The cross is Jesus’ true glory. It’s the glory of love.**

When Jesus said that it was the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified, he revealed something about himself. He said, **“Now my heart is troubled…”** Jesus knew how close the cross actually was. I often have a prayer with members of our church when they go in for surgery. Quite often, they tell me that they had real trouble sleeping the night before. We feel anxiety and worry over pain that we know is coming. Some of that is due to the imperfection of our faith. Jesus had a perfect faith. And yet, he was a real human being. What he was going to endure was going to be so much worse than just the physical pain of crucifixion. He was going to endure the agony of hell on the cross. So his heart was troubled.

So Jesus asked, **“What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’”** He answered, **“No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”** What does he mean by “for this very reason”? Isn’t it the suffering that he was already starting to feel? Isaiah says that Jesus carried our sorrows when he carried our sins. As the

perfect Son of God, he knew what had to be done and he had no fear or doubt. But part of what he had to do was suffer all the kinds of things that sin does to us. That includes fear and anxiety. That includes terror of death and hell. Now it was going to reach a climax in the garden, but already Jesus is enduring what sin does to us, the emotional torment that we have to go through every time we know that something bad is going to happen to us. Jesus was enduring the anxiety that a sinner has knowing that he has to face a holy God who punishes sin.

And he never backed down, not even for a second. He said, **“Father, glorify your name!”** Then came that answer from heaven, **“I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”** That voice was so astounding that the people who heard it wondered what it really was. But why was the Father glorified in Jesus’ suffering? Because the Father sent him. Because the Father loved us enough to do whatever it took to save us. Because the Father loved his one and only Son and still he sacrificed him so that we will live. God the Father was willing to pour hell out on his beloved Son so that we don’t have to face hell. God the Father was willing to accept his Son’s life in place of ours and to give us Jesus’ perfect life and call us holy. God the Father glorified his own name when he sent his Son into this world. That was the glory of Christmas, the glory of Bethlehem. And he was going to glorify that name again on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday when his Son died and rose so that we will live with him forever.

The Son was glorified, too, because he is the one who was willing to go through all the physical and emotional and spiritual pain that it took to set us free. It is the greatest example of love in all of history. Sometimes, we see examples of love in this world. You read about husbands jumping in front of cars to push their wives out of the way. You hear about parents giving everything for their children, sacrificing their hopes and dreams to make a better life for their kids. We sigh when we hear those stories. We see the love. Jesus’ love was even greater. It paid the price for all of us.

That love was so great that it extends to all the world. Jesus said, **“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth,”** – that is when he was crucified – **“[I] will draw all men to myself.”** Jesus died for us all. His love is that great. There is no one on this planet that he didn’t die for, no one who will ever be born that he didn’t die for. He died for us all. That means he died for you and for me. When he died, he drove the devil out. He broke his power over you and me and he sent the gospel out to claim untold millions. When we know that, we can’t help but be moved by his love. It’s what leads us to be where Jesus is, to live for him. And in another amazing example of undeserved love, Jesus says that when we are with him, when faith rules our lives, our Father in heaven will honor us. The love just never stops. And it all finds its center in the cross, where the glory of love reigns supreme.

Glory is the reason Jesus died – to give glory to his Father. His death, his love, the life he won here, that is the greatest glory of God. And that glory is given when we know it and sing his praises, when we tell the story and share it throughout the world. The angels and the saints in heaven will sing of that glory forever. But the glory was won at the cross where Jesus laid down his life for us. Give glory to God. Amen.