

March 21, 2021

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Do You Remember?
John 12:20-33

Opening words: According to the Revised Common Lectionary, today is the Fifth Sunday in Lent. Years ago, we called the Fifth Sunday in Lent Passion Sunday because it marks the beginning of a liturgical season within a liturgical season, Passiontide. It began today and ended on Holy Saturday. In many Roman Catholic Churches, the crucifixes and statues were covered with purple cloth. Passiontide was recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church, and many western churches, including the United Methodist Church. As late as 1965, The United Methodist Book of Worship included this collect that was read annually on this day:

O God, who by the passion of thy blessed Son hast made the instrument of shameful death to be unto us the means of life and peace: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer shame and loss; for the sake of the same thy Son our Lord. **Amen**

Time changes everything, even the lectionary. The season of Passiontide has faded away. However, the importance of the passion of Jesus has not. It is important that you remember what Christ has done for you.

Our Gospel reading for today comes from the Gospel of John. It is the perfect Gospel for this day because John seems to be preoccupied with the passion of Jesus. Consider this fact with me. The entire Gospel of John is only twenty-one chapters long. The first chapter deals with the identity of Jesus and the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry. Chapters two thru eleven deal with Jesus's public ministry. Chapters twelve thru nineteen deal with the events of Holy Week. Chapters twenty and twenty-one deal with Jesus's resurrection and the recommissioning of the disciples. Do the math. That means approximately 38% of the entire Gospel is dedicated to Holy Week and the passion of Jesus. Our reading for today, John 12:20-33, comes from that section. Let me call this message *Do You Remember?*

John 12:20-33 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.

21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 Very truly I tell you, 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.

- 25** Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
- 26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.
- 27** "Now my soul 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.
- 28** Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."
- 29** The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.
- 30** Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine.
- 31** Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.
- 32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."
- 33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

One of the most beautiful buildings in the world is the cathedral in Milan, Italy. I had the good fortune to go there several years ago. Worshippers are welcomed by three magnificent doorways. Over the first one doorway, is a carving of a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath it is the legend, "All which pleases is just for a moment." Over the second doorway is a sculpted cross, and the words, "All that troubles is just for a moment." But underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle is the inscription, "Only the eternal is important." The message is clear. We should live with our eyes fixed on eternity. How much time do you spend worrying about the temporary? How much time do you spend worrying about the eternal? The only things that really matter are those things that will matter in 100 years. What matters in 100 years? The only thing that matters in 100 years is Jesus. That leads us to our scripture lesson for today.

We find ourselves today in the twelfth chapter of John. The story begins with a group of Greeks. It is a great way to begin a story. When I was a young, I was surrounded by a group of Greeks in school. They were great people, and they were all named Nick. In the Bible story, we do not know their names, but we do know they wanted to see, or interview, Jesus. Their interest in Jesus leads us to believe they were God fearing Greeks. At first, they approach is Philip. He was a logical choice for them because Philip is a Greek name. Philip is uncomfortable going to Jesus directly, so he goes to Andrew. He went to Andrew because both were from the town of Bethsaida. According to verse 22, Philip and Andrew together went to Jesus with the request.

We are never told if the Greeks ever got to talk to Jesus, but we are told the moment had come. Jesus cannot escape the painful truth. He is going to die! Jesus did not want to die nor was he surprised by his death. It was all part of the divine plan to save the world. The death of Jesus shows us the depth of God's love. Comparing himself to a wheat kernel he knew he must die, so others could live. His death would mean life for the generations to come. We stand in the aftershock of Jesus's death. Without the

death of Jesus, there is no resurrection. Without the death of Jesus, we have no hope of eternity. Never underestimate the death of Jesus. It changed everything. If you believe Jesus died, so we can live say, "**Amen!**" It is my experience people are uncomfortable with the death of Jesus. That is why we try to run to the resurrection.

That is one of my pet peeves in the ministry. Everyone enjoys Palm Sunday. It is a great day! Attendance is up and the weather is improving. Everyone is in a good mood because everyone likes waving palms. The traditional scriptures are read, and video is shown of Jesus entering the Golden City. Everyone is looking forward to the great resurrection day. Everyone enjoys Easter. It is a great day! The flowers are beautiful, the traditional hymns are sung, the traditional scripture is read, and the video is shown. Everyone leaves happy because ham is waiting for them. (Who does not like ham?) Please do not misunderstand me. I have nothing against Palm Sunday or Easter. They are both great days, but there is so much more. Most miss the rich days of Holy Week. The crowds of Palm Sunday and Easter are replaced by a small group on Maundy Thursday and a smaller group on Good Friday. I hope that is not your story. I hope you do not just run from Palm Sunday to Easter. I hope you remember what Jesus did every day of Holy Week. Those days are important because they revolve around the death of Jesus. Do something different this year and remember what Jesus did for you each day of Holy Week. So, let me ask you the question of the day, do you remember?

Do you remember what Jesus did on Holy Monday? According to the Bible, two significant things happened on that day. The first event of Holy Monday was the cleansing of the Temple. It had nothing to do with fundraising to help some good cause but had everything to do with using the faith for personal gain. The Temple was a place of prayer, not profit. The church is a place of prayer, not profit. The second significant event of Holy Monday is the cursing of the fig tree. It was the only thing Jesus ever cursed. Like the bald eagle symbolizes America, the fig tree symbolized Israel. The cursing of the fig tree was an act of judgement upon Israel. God was doing something new. Do you remember what happened on Holy Monday?

Do you remember what Jesus did on Holy Tuesday? According to the Bible, Jesus went back to the Temple, where he was challenged by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It was also there that he taught about the Kingdom of God. Two great stories came from that day. He taught about paying taxes to Caesar and he noticed a widow's slim donation. He also told the parable of the two sons, the parable of the tenants and others. Then, he went to Bethany, near Jerusalem, where he was anointed. He was being prepared for death. Do you remember what happened on Holy Tuesday?

Do you remember what Jesus did on Holy Wednesday? Some call it Spy Wednesday. It was on that day the plan to trap Jesus was conceived. One of his own, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Some say, he did it because he was greedy. Some say, he did it because he had grown tired of being an outsider. He was the only non-Galilean of the twelve. Some say, he did it to force Jesus' hand. He never dreamed

Jesus would not fight back. We do not really know why he did it, but he did it. In the end, Judas Iscariot regretted his betrayal and committed suicide. There is nothing else to say. Do you remember what happened on Holy Wednesday?

Do you remember what Jesus did on Holy Thursday? We call it Maundy Thursday. That was the day Jesus washed the disciples' feet, showing true servant leadership. Then, they observed the Seder. It was a meal with a message. Everything they ate and everything they drank reminded them of their ancestry. After all, they were God's Chosen. During the meal, Jesus changed the words and created a new memorial, Communion. The bread is his body, and the wine is his blood. After the meal was completed, Jesus comforted the disciples and went to the garden to pray. It was in the garden Jesus was arrested. Do you remember what happened on Holy Thursday?

Do you remember what Jesus did on Holy Friday? We call it Good Friday. It was good for us, but bad for Jesus. He had two trials on that one day. The first trial was in front of his own people. It was a "kangaroo" court. Jesus never had a chance. He was found guilty. They wanted to execute Jesus, but they lacked the legal authority. For this reason, they sent him to the Roman Governor, Pilate. He knew Jesus was an innocent man, but he feared the mob. The crowd rejected Jesus and accepted Barabbas, an insurrectionist. The order was given that Jesus must die. It was a public affair. It was a way of deterring crime. First came the whipping. Then came the crown of thorns. Each step came with ridicule. Finally came the cross, a Roman way to execute. Jesus was not tied to the cross; he was nailed to the cross. He was hung between two common criminals. His death came quickly, and they put his body in a tomb. The sky grew dark, and the people wondered. His family and friends cried, because he was dead, and their dreams were gone. Do you remember what happened on Holy Friday?

Do you remember what happened on Holy Saturday? Some call it, Silent Saturday. Others call it Black Saturday or Easter Eve. There is nothing to remember about that day because Jesus was dead. The people who loved Jesus, both family and friends, struggled with his death. Some of them were in shock. Some were in denial and some of them cried. Their great dreams of a bright future were over. Jesus was dead! How comfortable are you with the death of Jesus? You know what happened on Sunday. It is the worst secret in the history of the world. It is also the very foundation of our faith. It changed everything. What do you remember?

It has become the tradition of this church to go to the local cemetery to remember the death of Jesus. We are joined by other United Methodist congregations in the area. The truth be told, the group is always small. I really do not care. It is the right thing to do. The traditional scriptures are read, and the candles are extinguished. The service ends with the same words annually, *May God have mercy on us because Christ died for us.* I am always spiritually spent once the service is over. The reality of Christ's death is hard for me to accept.

One year, on Easter morning one of the saints from this church wanted to talk to me about his experience at the cemetery. He had a bad experience. He could not hear because the woman next to him kept talking. He could not see because he sat in the back. He did not like his seat because it was uncomfortable. He did like going to the cemetery because it reminded him of his own death. He did not like the music because it was too depressing. As he went through list of complaints, I stayed quiet. It was a great way to spent Easter morning. When I finally got a word in, I said, "Good! If Christ hung on the cross for your sins for hours, then you can handle a few unpleasant minutes." May we never forget Christ died for us! Reformed theologian Richard Allen Bodey (1930-2013) once said, "*He drained the cup of God's wrath bone dry, leaving not a drop for us.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"