

Lent 5-March 17, 2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 51:1-13, John 12:20-33

"This Reason" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Jesus has done a lot in his ministry by the time we get to this gospel reading in the 12th chapter of John. Jesus had called all his disciples. Jesus attended a wedding and performed his first sign by turning water into wine at the request of his mother. Jesus taught the religious teacher Nicodemus about what it meant to be born again through the waters of baptism. Jesus had met the woman at the well and taught her about how she could receive living water when he was able to reveal everything about her past without her saying a word. Jesus healed the paralyzed man simply by telling him to take up his bed and walk while onlookers criticized him for healing on the Sabbath day. Jesus miraculously fed the multitudes of people with five loaves of bread and two fish and had baskets of leftovers. Jesus walked on the water. Jesus healed a man who was born blind. Jesus condemned the religious leaders who wanted Jesus to condemn the woman they caught in adultery. Jesus taught his disciples what it meant to be his followers. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus after he had been dead for four days. Jesus by this short time in his ministry had put together a pretty impressive resume of what he could do. The word about the many things Jesus could do was spreading. If you needed something, Jesus was the person to go to.

As the gospel for today begins, we are told that there were some Greeks, which means they were like you and me, they were not Jews, who came to Jesus. They no doubt had heard about all these things that Jesus had done and must have had something specific in mind to see Jesus about. They should have been able to find Jesus themselves, but since they were not Jewish, they decided to hopefully increase their odds at meeting Jesus by going through one of Jesus' disciples instead. They may have chosen to go to Philip because Philip's name was Greek, and he might be their best choice among the disciples to set up an appointment to see Jesus. You are more likely to get a pizza from someone named Stephania or a burrito from someone named Carlos rather than asking someone with a name like Randall if you wanted Italian or Mexican food. They hoped to get what they wanted from Philip who had a Gentile name like theirs.

You might think that Philip would have been honored to have been asked to introduce these Jesus seekers to Jesus. But Philip was not excited about this opportunity. Philip was hesitant. He didn't do what they wanted. Instead, he had to check with his brother Andrew first. This may just have been a reflection of the personalities of these two brothers. Earlier in the gospel of John we learn that it was Andrew that was called first to be Jesus' disciple and then Andrew went and found Philip who followed next. Andrew was the leader of these two and Philip wanted to see what Andrew thought they should do. In any event, the two brothers headed off to find Jesus and relay the Greeks request that they wished to see Jesus. We don't know from the long list on Jesus' established resume what they wanted to see Jesus about. We don't know if someone was sick, hungry for food, hungry for knowledge, or even if someone they loved had just died and they wanted Jesus to perform another, "Lazarus come out." resurrection story. And it doesn't seem that Jesus wants to know or even cares why they wanted to see him. Jesus seems to ignore the request and his answer to Andrew and Philip seems unrelated to the request.

Jesus answers them, by telling Andrew and Philip, that the time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. If Jesus' response didn't seem odd to the disciples at first, it didn't help them much by Jesus next telling them about what happens when you put dead seed into the ground. Jesus turned the request of

someone who wanted to see him into a lesson in gardening. Then, Jesus further tells them that his heart is troubled. Jesus' heart was troubled by all the reasons that people thought he was sent into the world. And none of the things that he had done was THE reason he came from heaven to earth to do. And there is no question that Jesus did all these things. Jesus did all these things while he was alive. But the hour had come for Jesus to do one more thing. And this would be his greatest miracle of all. Jesus would defeat the ruler of this world, Satan, and he would remove the sins of the world. Jesus would defeat death by dying himself. All of this would be accomplished in the way Jesus described the grain of wheat that would fall to the ground and die.

We are surrounded every year with this wonderful miraculous personification of Jesus' death and resurrection as we see barren fields being planted with seeds. Seeds that after going into the ground must die further before they grow. We have seen this so many times that we have confidence that within a few days, something new will emerge from the ground again and be fruitful. This one seed draws a greater number of seeds around it after it has died and risen again.

Jesus declared that it is for "This reason" he came into the world. Jesus doesn't include this as an addition to his long list of things he came to do. Jesus pinpoints this is the reason he came into the world. You can trace this central purpose of the seed throughout the bible. The third chapter of Genesis foreshadows Jesus as the seed that would one day bruise the head of Satan. Later we learn that through Abraham a seed from his issue would be the Savior of the world. And after all these years of tracing the seed through scripture, the hour had now come for Jesus, the seed, to put an end to sin and death and draw all people to Jesus. We'll never know what these Greeks wanted to see Jesus about, but we do know that Jesus had to be seen on the cross for Jesus to forgive our sins.

In the Psalm for today, David had asked only one thing of the Lord and that was to be cleansed of his sin. Like you and me, David could count many ways that the Lord had blessed him. David was known as the man after God's heart, but in the story of David and his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba broke every commandment in the two tablets of stone. After Nathan confronted David of his sin, David knew the only solution for his sin was forgiveness. David no longer needed help to know his sins. His sins were always before him. David confessed that he was a sinner from the day he was born and there was nothing within himself that could take away his guilt for the sins he had committed. David didn't need to get a better heart. David needed to have a new heart created within him. And the Lord gave him just what he needed.

This is the new covenant that you and I live under. It is not like the old covenant by attempting to keep the law to save ourselves. The old covenant was a two-way transaction where God's people attempted to stay on the Lord's good side by good behavior and then the Lord would show his favor. The new covenant is a one-way transaction. Jesus does what we cannot do. All this work was done by his suffering, dying, and rising again. This is the reason that Jesus came down to earth for you.

You have today been given what David prayed for. You have not been cast from the presence of the Lord. Instead, you have been given the joy of his salvation. You have been drawn to the light of Jesus who has forgiven you all your sins. Amen