

When I Am Lifted up - I Will Draw All People to Myself

SUNDAY 17 MARCH 2024 : GOSPEL READING: John 12:20-33

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. 21 So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip, and they told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, "**The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.**" 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.

27 "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; 32 and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33 He said this to show by what death he was to die.

SCRIPTURE READING: Jeremiah 31:31-34 31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Meditation: How does God bring us into an inseparable bond of love and unity with himself? God is a covenant-maker who draws men and women to himself in a bond of peace and friendship. God established a covenant with his people when he freed them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to his holy mountain at Sinai. "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). But his people time and again broke covenant with him and did not follow his ways (Jeremiah 31:32) - "each did what was right in his or her own eyes" (Judges 17:26 and 21:25). God, nonetheless, continued to send his prophets to draw his people back.

A new and everlasting covenant

When the prophet Jeremiah was sent to the exiles to offer them a message of hope and restoration, he spoke of a new covenant that would surpass the previous covenant which God had made. God intended to establish a new and everlasting covenant that would wipe away the sins of his people and open the way to God's throne of mercy and grace (his undeserved favour and blessing). This new covenant would be sealed with the blood of the perfect sacrifice that Jesus would offer to the Father when he died upon the cross to atone for our sins. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry John the Baptist prophetically pointed to Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was sent from the Father in heaven to become a man for our sake so he could as man offer the one perfect sacrifice that would unite us with God and give us everlasting life.

Jesus' hour of glory

Shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover, Jesus announced to his disciples that the "hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (John 12:23). The Son of Man is a prophetic title for the Messiah recorded in the prophecy of Daniel (see the Book of Daniel 7:13-14). In Jesus' time the Jewish people were looking for a Messiah who would set them free from the oppressive rule of Rome. Jesus came to set people free from the worst oppression of all - the tyranny of endless slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Jesus came to bring us into a new covenant relationship with God that would not end with death but lead to eternal life.

Jesus announced to his followers that when "he would be lifted up from the earth, he would draw all people to himself" (John 12:32). What did Jesus mean by the expression of being "lifted up" and "drawing people to himself"? When a great leader won a complete and decisive conquest over his enemies and brought freedom and peace to his people, he was crowned and given a new title, as Victor, Savior, and Deliverer of the people. A conquering ruler was robed in royal splendour and raised up and enthroned on high in the sight of his people.

Victory through suffering and the cross

How did Jesus fulfill his mission as the Anointed (Messiah) King who came to bring victory and freedom for his people? Jesus knew that the only way to decisive victory for God's kingdom on the earth would be through his voluntary suffering and death on the cross. Jesus described his willingness to go to the cross as his "hour of glory" (John 12:23) when he would fulfill his

Father's will and accomplish the mission entrusted to him. Jesus saw his death on the cross as triumph over the powers of sin and Satan's forces of darkness. The real enemy that Jesus came to overcome was Satan who tempts the human race to rebel against God and his commands in order to create their own destiny through sinful pride and disobedience. Jesus took our sins upon himself and nailed them to the cross to set us free from condemnation to death and destruction, and the eternal consequence of separation from God.

"Unless the grain of wheat dies..."

How can suffering and death bring life and freedom? Jesus used the illustration of the "grain of wheat" to show how God brings life from death and good fruit through patience and suffering. Seeds by themselves are worthless and lifeless. Only when the seed is destroyed by burying it in the ground, can it rise to new life and bear fruit. What is the analogy which Jesus alludes to in the image of the grain of wheat that must first die in order to rise to new life and bear good fruit? Is this simply a veiled reference to his own impending death on the cross and to his resurrection? Or does Jesus have another kind of "death and rebirth" in mind for his disciples as well? Jesus, no doubt, had both meanings in mind. Jesus' obedience and death on the cross obtain for us freedom and new life in the Holy Spirit. His cross frees us from the tyranny of sin and death and shows us the way of perfect love and readiness to lay down our lives in sacrificial service for the good of others.

A new "creation" in Christ

If we want to receive the abundant new life and the fruit of the Spirit which the Lord Jesus freely offers us, then the "outer shell" of our fallen sinful nature must first be broken and be put to death. In baptism our "old nature" which was enslaved by sin is buried with Christ so we may rise to new life with Christ through the cleansing waters of baptism. Paul the Apostle describes this death and rebirth in Christ as a "new creation" which Christ accomplishes in us through the power of his saving death and resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:17). This process of death to the "old fallen self" is both a one-time event which occurs in our baptism, and it is also a daily, on-going cycle of growth in which the Holy Spirit buries us more deeply into Jesus' death to sin so we might rise anew in the power of God's love, righteousness (moral goodness), and holiness. There is a great paradox here. Death leads to life. When we "die" to ourselves - to our rebellious sinful nature and wilful rejection of God's commandments - we receive God's forgiveness and the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit which frees us to love and serve others and follow God faithfully. It is God's free gift of grace (his blessing and favour towards us) and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to live and serve joyfully as sons and daughters of God.

Pruning and bearing good fruit in Christ

How can I practically "die" to myself so that the Lord Jesus can live in me and transform me into his likeness and holiness? It certainly means that what is contrary to God's will must be "put to death" within me. God gives us grace to say "yes" to his will and the strength we need to reject whatever is contrary to his commands and plan for our lives. The Lord Jesus promises that we will bear much "fruit" for him, if we choose to deny ourselves for his sake and embrace his will for our lives. Jesus used strong language to describe the kind of self-denial he had in mind for his disciples. "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). What did Jesus mean when he said that a follower of Christ must hate himself or herself? The expression to hate something often meant to prefer less. Jesus says that nothing should get in the way of our preferring him and the will of our heavenly Father above all else. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "what is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible" (1 Corinthians 15:42). Do you believe in the power and victory of Christ's saving cross and resurrection? And are you ready to reject whatever is contrary to God's commands and to trust him for the strength and joy to embrace his will for your life?

OPENING PRAYER: - Lord Jesus, let me be wheat sown in the earth, to be harvested for you. I want to follow wherever you lead me. Give me fresh hope and joy in serving you all the days of my life. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER: - "World Peace" Lord, we pray for the victims of the recent Cyclone in Nth. Queensland that they have the resolve to rebuild their lives and homes after the forces of nature have turned against them, also the war in Ukraine and now Israel with Palestine that those effected have the strength to go on and the leaders of these countries find a peaceful resolution to these wars. Also we thank you for Fr Joseph's speedy recovery. Amen.