

Dying to Bear Fruit? 5 Lent B

Jesus' fame had reached the ears of the Greeks. They sent out a search party and they found some help in Jesus' disciple Phillip. A relay of messages was sent out and finally Jesus gets word that some non-Jews are looking for Him. What did they want? They asked Jesus a question and His answer was to a query we don't have written. We can only speculate what the Greeks wanted from Jesus' answer.

Jesus' answer brings a turning point in His ministry. He will face the toughest time in His life – arrest and execution at the hands of His own people. Jesus answers the Greeks first with His comment about the time for Him to be glorified and then with an illustration from farming. With the illustration He points to His death, and the fruit that will come from it. With death a single grain of wheat brings about a lot of food for others. One wonders whether the Greeks understood His words any better than Jesus' disciples.

Our Savior's time in the flesh was nearing to an end. His “**hour had come.**” This phrase is repeated throughout much of John's gospel for a reason. Jesus knows His destiny from at least His baptism forward. At the wedding at Cana in Galilee, He tells His mother that His “**hour** has not yet come.” In John 4:23 Jesus speaks of time again and says, “The **hour** is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” In John 7:30 it is written, “Then they tried to arrest Him, but no one laid hands on Him, because his **hour** had not yet come”. John uses this word 24 times in his gospel. What's the lesson here?

Time is more focused now for Jesus. “**Hour**” refers to God's timing not chronological time. The Bible distinguishes God's time from clock time. “**Hour**” refers to a fixed and definite time, natural seasons and the time when things are brought to a crisis.

The watch was invented by man. It keeps us on track for things that must be done according to a human schedule. Jesus is not on man's time but on God's time. God's schedule allows Jesus to become like a grain of wheat that dies. Like the season for planting that is upon us, John's gospel is telling us that everything thus far in Jesus' life has been building up to a crescendo. The entire ministry of Jesus done thus far has been a cultivation of human soil for the feeding of the world. Jesus is the bread of life and unless he dies like the grain of wheat the world can not benefit fully.

There is more than Jesus' death at stake here. Jesus tells the Greeks that the lesson of the wheat is the same lesson for all of us and not just for Him. The more one tries to hold on to the wheat and keep it from the ground it desperately needs, the less likely it can feed the hungry. When “the **hour**” has come for the wheat to be planted, time becomes crucial. The window of opportunity must not pass! The Greeks realized it was their opportunity at the Passover. Jesus realized it was His time. The world's moment of crisis was at hand and the ruler of this world was about to be driven out. The Adversary knew his time had come.

Timing! When it comes one must act or miss the open window of God's will.

A church member told me this week that there were 150 applicants for 50 positions at a local business. Obviously, the time was right and the call for action had come to be considered for a scarcity of jobs. He jumped on it.

When the “hour” or “time of decision” comes we can not wait... *we must not wait* or it may never come again for us. And so much depends on acting and making a decision when God’s timing is at stake.

But how can we willingly make a decision that may alter our lives forever? Do not the scriptures say we should love life and be joyful? Who does not love some aspects of their life? Loving life would seem to be a given. However Jesus throws us a curve ball. He says that to love your life you must be willing to lose it; and if you lose it, you will then truly find it. (John 12:25) That statement goes against the grain of our survival instinct. It also flies in the face of wanting to preserve what one has earned and should rightfully keep! He astounds us with these statements. The Greeks might have said, “Jesus, you’re killing us with these hard words! Who can bear them!?”

Jesus compares life in this world with eternity. But it just does not compare. If only there were a glimpse of eternity within us that we could recognize, we might then be able to say, “Yeah! Eternity is far better, and whatever this world could offer pales in comparison.” That would make it far easier to let go of worldly things to follow Christ. Why would Jesus say to people who are happy with their lives, and are comfortable and have enough, that it’s better to hate your life in this world?

I come up with one possibility from this gospel. Perhaps there are others as well. Not loving this life can help prepare us to die and follow Christ in His death. Being less attached to this world opens our hearts to see the gifts of the world to come. “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” “Where I am...,” Jesus said. He refers to both an attitude and an activity. The attitude is being willing to connect serving Jesus with following Him. The activity is literally following His example. Jesus implies in this verse that the two are irreversibly connected. One cannot serve Jesus without following Him. Following Jesus will always bring us to where He is.

To “be where Jesus is” appears to require two commitments. First, is the commitment to live as He lived. The second he referred to is not so pleasant. It was the cross. To say we must follow Jesus to the point of sacrifice and perhaps death does not seem to be loving life.

I don’t see Jesus as loving this life – do you? How could He have?! The “hour” to which time had arrived, could not be avoided – not for Jesus. He had taken on the responsibility of saving the world. To bear fruit for the world by His death, He would need to let go of His mother, let go of His disciples, and let go of this world. As His servants we are called to follow Him. And whoever serves the Savior, the Father will honor. Is it worth the price? Are we sure we want to be the type of Christian Jesus expects? Are you “dying” to bear fruit?

Let us pray: Father, we remember the words of Paul: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by*

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20. In your mercy, help us in our time of decision. When the hour comes to choose and this world beckons us may you give us strength to love you and follow you. Help us to find our fullness of joy in serving you in this life so we may follow you into the next. Forgive us when we fail. Guide us in the hour of our decision. Amen.