

Lent 5 21st March 2021

John 12:20-33

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It is one week before Holy Week commences and we are approaching the pivotal moment of the Christian story – everything revolves around this event of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our whole church year revolves around Holy Week - the first part of the year is working towards Holy Week, and the second half of the year is exploring the implications of what it's all about.

In today's Gospel, the Jesus of John's Gospel says,

“Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die” (John 12:31)

In John's Gospel, the whole approach of Jesus to the cross, rather than being a divine tragedy is portrayed as a divine victory. For John, Jesus is not a passive victim who has his life taken away from him as a powerless victim. The whole Gospel of John drives *from* the beginning *towards* the cross. The cross is THE culmination of the story. Jesus says at one point (John 10:18), *“No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again”*.

So we find through John's gospel frequent reference to the coming 'hour' of his death:

2:4...speaking to his mother at the wedding at Cana, *“woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My **hour** [that is the hour of his death] has not yet come”*

7:6 *“Jesus said to them, ‘my **hour** has not yet come’”*

7:30 *“then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his **hour** had not yet come”*

8:20 *He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come”*.

FINALLY in chapter 12:23

*“**the hour has come** for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*.

For John, the cross reveals the glory of God. Why? Because it reveals that God is willing to go into THE most horrific place of human violence and into death itself in order to destroy the power of death over the human imagination. We thought that

death was the end but Jesus reveals the cross to be the doorway into a life which cannot be destroyed by death.

John Behr, who is an Eastern Orthodox scholar and priest puts it this way. There are TWO things which are absolutely shared by all humanity – our physical birth and our physical death. And we have no control over either of them. We have no control over the fact that we were born. And we have no control over the fact that we will die. But one thing we CAN control is the manner of our death. When we chose to die voluntarily, by giving control of our lives over to God in loving union with Jesus...when our EGO dies, we are now born into new life. Death now has no control over us...because it was death that is our voluntarily chosen gateway into life. The cross (as a symbol of dying to self) is a portal into a new quality of life which cannot be destroyed.

In John's Gospel, the cross is like this magnet to which everything points and to which the whole world will be drawn.

The Greek word for "draw" (as in, "I will draw all people to myself") is a very strong word. It has the sense of "hauling or dragging in".

It's the word used to describe the disciples *dragging* in a net full of fish (John 21:6). It's the word used in the Book of Acts (16:19) where Paul and Silas are *dragged* before the authorities. It is used in the letter of James to talk about the rich *dragging* people into court.

John's Jesus speaks of the all people (or all things) being DRAGGED towards him by this cross.

What does Jesus mean??

One author (*John Taylor, or David Wood commenting on David Taylor in "Consuming Passion"?*) says that "the wood of the manger and the wood of the cross open our eyes to a Christocentric world" (as opposed to an ego centric world)...self giving is the heart of God".

So it's NOT that Jesus HAD to die in order to clean up the mess of Sin as if the only reason Jesus died was because we stuffed up. Rather, Jesus died because it is in the *nature of self giving love* to expend one's life for others, AND IN THE ACT of doing so, sin and death and evil are conquered. In other words the cross POINTS to the true nature of God.

Is it GOOD NEWS that God loves the world this much. This is a story which has the potential to be like a magnet for people...to reorient our lives to love, like iron filings get oriented to a magnetic field.

I am more and more convinced that one of the things that screws up people's lives is having a distorted image of God. The point of Jesus's life, death and resurrection is to take the distortions out and to shed light on God's true nature – which is Christ-like.

Christ is the image or window into God.

If we introduce people to consider the story of Jesus, I think we can leave it up to the power of the story to do the DRAGGING. *We* don't have to DRAG – the story has it's own *DRAGGING* or *DRAWING* power. It certainly did for me when I picked up the gospels to read them seriously in my early 20s. The person of Jesus simply wouldn't leave me alone.

If and when we have the gift of an opportunity to talk with people about God, there is just a simple basis to all our conversation – really just one thing for us to keep clearly in mind. God is like Jesus. God is Christlike. God loves you. This is good news and this is what has the capacity to draw people into life.

“the wood of the manger and the wood of the cross open our eyes to a Christocentric world”.....self giving lies at the heart of the universe”.