

Sermon. Applecross. 21-3-21. John 12.20-33.

May my mouth and our hearts be opened in the name of the living God; the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.** ✠

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Sometimes, our readings, either by lovely coincidence or the workings of the Holy Spirit blend well with what is happening in the world, the world outside our texts, outside the church. Today is such a day, as it is Harmony Day. Originally instituted by the United Nations, Harmony Day promotes the coming together of people from different cultures, backgrounds and religions for mutual dialogue and support. It is therefore a time of balance, where seemingly opposed ideas are harmonized and reconciled. This is all accentuated within God’s creation today, as it is also the Equinox, the time of the year where the length of the day, the light, is exactly the length of the night, the darkness, held in perfect balance.

And our gospel today presents us also with a seemingly impossible balancing and reconciling of a range of opposed forces and symbols: Greek and Jew, love and hate, master and servant, heaven and earth. These are of course all reconciled in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is human and divine, who once was dead but now lives forever.

As is often the case though, our Gospel needs some context. From last Sunday’s reading we have skipped over huge parts of John, including repeated affirmations by Jesus that his “hour” had not *yet* come, and just before our passage today, his triumphant entry into Jerusalem at Passover.

Watching that entry and the crowds who flocked to Jesus, the dejected Pharisees, say to one another “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”. The *world* has gone after him ...

And this is where our passage today begins, with non-Jews drawn to Jesus and wishing to meet him. The Greeks first approach a disciple with a very Greek name, Philip, but who, the text notes comes from a very Jewish village, Bethsaida, ‘the house of hunting’ – the conjunction of the two names, Greek and Jewish, foreshadowing the reconciliation to come.

Because it is only after hearing that the Greeks wish to meet with him that Jesus now proclaims: ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’

Previously in John, during the Wedding at Cana, in Jerusalem and in the temple, it is made clear the hour had *not* yet come – because in all these situations, Jesus was with his own Jewish people. It the first desire of outsiders, non-Jews, which changes all this, which makes the hour now.

This is because, as we know, here in Western Australia today, surrounded by good people drawn from across the globe, Jesus came to save not just the Jews, not just the Greeks, but the entire world. The world which, as the dejected pharisees note, went after Jesus, the world that still goes after him, as we today still go after him, rising early, getting ready on a Sunday morning and going up to worship at our own festival here at St Georges/David's.

Jesus' time to die has come, because he knows it is only through death that he may save the entire world.

"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."

Though we may have been taught to think in terms of Christ's own life, death and resurrection, and our own *personal* salvation, the mystery Jesus is referring to here is something different. He does not say that the single grain of wheat is resurrected or returns to life. Only that its death bears much fruit. His one death gives rise to many lives, gives rise to *our* many lives.

Christ has died, Christ is risen and he comes again among us, and as us, for we are the Body of Christ.

And since we are made in the image of God, and since through our baptism we partake in Christ's death and resurrection, we also partake of this divine mystery where a single, conscious death for the sake of others, will bear fruit.

Our own little personal "deaths" while alive will also bear fruit.

When we, as living sacrifices, choose to surrender our own ego desires in our families, for our loved ones, or for the world, it bears fruit. When we in a church meeting, or at a lively dinner party choose not to speak, *even though we really want to*, it gives space for others to have their say. Their contribution, their wisdom is the fruit of our single choice.

But conversely, when we choose to surrender that part of ourselves that tells us we should not speak, we should not act or reach out, we have nothing to contribute, that we are worthless - when we let that part of ourselves die, we will live more fully, will be much fruit.

This is the Good News of Christ; life for many through the death of the one. But there is more, as there is always more, because our God is a living, a gracious God, and the truly radical message of the passage today is found at the end, when Jesus says:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

The text is clear here: *all* people.

This universal inclusion of Christ means *everyone* is drawn to him. Not just the Jews, not just the gentiles of the time, or the roman occupying troops. *Everyone*. Not just the righteous and law abiding, not just the sinners and unbelievers. *Everyone*.

In fact, applying this sacred, *living* text today, this means everyone, including those who are not Christian, and even those who are not religious at all.

And when we look at the Greek word translated as “draw”, this radical inclusion makes sense. Elsewhere in the New Testament this word is translated as “drag”, “persuade” or “impel”.

Christ, might be saying, “I will *drag* all people to myself”

So, one reading of this passage, favoured in parts of the early and Eastern Churches, is that Christ will bring to himself, all people, even those who resist him. He will eventually persuade, win over, the hearts and souls of all people. Even those who do not know him. And no one will be lost, all people will be offered salvation.

What incredibly good news this is – good news for the compassionate, self-sacrificing people we know, who are not Christians, but whose lives bear much fruit. What good news it is for those people who through church abuse, neglect or exclusion have rejected the Christian message. What good news for those tribal people in the world today, who have not been contacted by the modern world, who have not even heard of Christ or Christianity.

This view of universal salvation – salvation for all people, including non-Christians, is not one that we hear much in the church. And certainly, different scriptural passages present a different point of view.

The different messages in scripture means that the bible is not easy to engage with. But as Christians, we are required to struggle with scripture, allowing God, through the Holy Spirit to help form our own personal understanding of God’s word alongside our tradition, our reason and our prayer life.

One of the most influential Christian writers of the modern era, C.S. Lewis, the author of the Narnia children’s books, struggled with these aspects of scripture and concluded:

We know that no one can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.

I will read that again ... “We know that no one can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.”

And so, Christ being lifted up, his death given for many, means that our own little deaths, our sacrifices of our ego today and everyday, may bear much fruit, not only for the Christians in our lives, not only for our loved ones, but for everyone, for all people.

In the Name of Christ. **Amen.** ✠