

Scripture Lesson: John 12:20-33

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 100

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They 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, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. 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 the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

John 12:30-33

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"Philip's Leading"

Rev. Amy Terhune

In February of 2021, Cody Copeland wrote the following words for Grunge Magazine: "Life as a grownup can sometimes be a drag. There's work and bills and the car that's constantly breaking down. It gets hectic and overwhelming, and every now and then you find yourself looking in the mirror wondering what it's all for. But every now in then, something comes along that has the power to cut right through the noise, slow things down, and remind us that there is more to life than the rat race of our overloaded schedules. In this case, it's a song, and it's sung by a frog."

Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher were given complete creative freedom, with the provision that they come up with something that could define the franchise – a song that spoke to adults as well as kids, that touched the heart and gave hope. "The things that is so human about the song, and spiritual at the same time, is that it honors the questions, not the answers," said Williams. "In that moment, Kermit is not the mentor, the teacher, the preacher. He became a seeker with the rest of us." [2 ¶s adapted from <https://www.grunge.com/330243/the-real-meaning-behind-the-muppets-rainbow-connection/>] I think it's worth three minutes of our time this morning to dream along with him:

*Why are there so many songs about rainbows and what's on the other side?
Rainbows are visions, but only illusions and rainbows have nothing to hide
So we've been told, and some choose to believe it; I know they're wrong, wait and see
Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection – the lovers, the dreamers, and me!*

*Who said that every wish would be heard and answered when wished on the morning star?
Somebody thought of that, and someone believed it, and look what it's done so far.
What's so amazing that keeps us stargazing, and what do we think we might see?
Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection – the lovers, the dreamers, and me!*

*All of us under its spell; We know that it's probably magic!
Have you been half asleep, and have you heard voices? I've heard them calling my name
Is this the sweet sound that calls the young sailors? The voice might be one and the same
I've heard it too many times to ignore it; it's something that I'm supposed to be
Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection – the lovers, the dreamers, and me!*

He asks a valid question. Why are there so many songs about rainbows and what's on the other side? Maybe he's thinking of Dorothy in Kansas who'd like to get to Oz. Who knows? Not that there's an answer, but rainbows have fascinated humankind since the beginning of our existence. Almost every civilization on earth has legends and folklore about why they exist and what they mean. You know the Judeo-Christian significance: after the great flood, Noah recognized the rainbow as a sign of a life-giving, life-preserving covenant with God.

Today, we can explain the rainbow scientifically. We know it's created when water droplets in the atmosphere act as miniature prisms, refracting light into varied wavelengths resulting in a visual arc of the color spectrum. If I understand correctly, rainbows are actually circular—they only appear to have a beginning and end at the horizon because of the curvature of the earth's surface. Like a water mirage in the desert, we can chase a rainbow a long way, but we'll never get any closer. They remain forever just out of reach. Hence the fascination, I suppose.

I don't know how many people go chasing after rainbows anymore, looking for leprechauns and a pot of gold at the end—it is St. Patrick's Day, after all—but I know plenty of people who chase the pipe dreams and illusions of happiness. I know more than one person who honestly thinks a pot of gold would solve all their problems. And who am I to say? Maybe it would. But you'll forgive me if I remain skeptical.

In our lesson this morning, Jesus isn't talking about sunshine and rainbows. There'll be no wishing on a star, no alluring sirens to deter his odyssey to Golgotha, no magical solution to the very, very real suffering he's just a week from facing. Which may beg the question: why did I start there? Well, if our faith tells us anything, it is that sometimes the realest things in our world are those things we cannot touch or contain or quantify or predict. Some things must be believed in order to be seen or heard or experienced.

So some Greeks come, wanting to see Jesus. We shouldn't be surprised by that. Remember with me what's been happening in John's Gospel. John 11 is the account of the resurrection of Lazarus, which understandably wows the crowds, leading many to believe. But according to John, it also threatens the Jewish leadership, and they begin to conspire against Jesus. John 12 opens with Jesus going to eat at the home of Lazarus, whose sister Mary brings a pound of pure nard perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. We heard about that last week. News of Lazarus' resurrection continues to spread through the crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, so that when Jesus goes out the next morning, people hail him as the hero with palm branches and hosannas. More on that next week. The Jewish leadership, exasperated with Jesus' popularity, say to one another in vs. 19: "Look, the whole world has gone after him!"

Which brings us to where our lesson begins this morning in vs. 20: Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks... Mind you, these are not Greek-speaking Jews. These are Greeks—gentiles, non-Jews. According to Gail R. O'Day, who writes the commentary on John's Gospel for the *New Interpreter's Bible*, they could be proselytes to Judaism, which might explain why they've come to worship at the festival, but they serve here as representatives of the world beyond Judaism. So the Pharisees are more right than they know. Indeed, the *whole* world **IS** going after Jesus.

These Greeks want to see Jesus. Who is this person that raises a man from the dead? That makes the blind see and the lame walk and feeds the thousands from a few loaves? They want to know, so they go and find Philip from Bethsaida. Philip, of course, is not a Jewish name. It's a Greek name, and Bethsaida in Galilee is heavily influenced by gentile culture. They find the disciple most likely to be sympathetic to their 'outsider' status and ask him to arrange a meeting. Philip agrees, finds Andrew, and together, they lead them to Jesus.

Now let me pause here to ask you something: if someone came to you and said, "I want to see Jesus" where would take them? To an art museum where there are powerful and profound depictions of Christ in oil and canvas, in stone and plaster? Would you bring them here? Would you take them to your home for a meal? How do you show somebody Jesus?

There's a little boy in kindergarten Sunday School class, and he loves it when his Sunday School teacher takes them to look at the stained glass in the sanctuary. He really loves the one of Mary holding baby Jesus in the stable. But it's Lent, and so the teacher shows them Jesus on the cross. He's not impressed. It doesn't mean anything to him. He doesn't know how to process it. He doesn't understand why Jesus was so hated, or what dying for sin is. He's five. And the teacher is wise. She knows that at this point in his little life, a baby in a manger is what he gets. So it's Lent, and they stop to admire Mary holding baby Jesus. He wants to see Jesus.

Twenty years later that little boy is sitting in a hospital room with his wife, having just miscarried their first child. He gets it now, you know. That cross, the pain, the agony, what God will go through to save his children. He'd go through it all and more to save the infant that's died before it could live. He looks at the cross now. He clings to it. Because he desperately needs to see Jesus.

Twenty more years pass, and he's back in a hospital room, and in the bed this time is that Sunday School teacher that showed him Jesus when he was five. The prognosis that has come down from the doctors is that there's nothing more to be done. They're talking about hospice, and about managing her pain, and about saying goodbye and tying up the loose ends of a life. And she says to him, "how do you tie up the loose ends of a life?" How do you possibly do that? How do you accept that you're dying?" And he doesn't have answers. But he knows in that moment that she doesn't really want him to answer. She wants to see Jesus. And not just in heaven after she dies. She needs to see Jesus in the process of dying. And so he takes her hand. And despite the work and the bills and the car that's constantly breaking down, he stays.

How do you show somebody Jesus? There isn't a 'right' place or a 'right' word or a 'right' image. It comes from the heart.

But back to our scripture lesson. For the past 12 chapters, we've been told time and time again that 'his hour had not yet come.' He tries to duck out of turning water into wine in chapter 2 because his hour had not yet come, and eludes capture in multiple instances because his hour had not yet come. But guess what? The arrival of the Greeks—the gentiles, the whole world—means that his hour has come. The whole world is here, the pieces are in place. Jesus has made a choice. If he will be who he was born to be, then his road from here leads to an inevitable cross.

I came across an interesting illustration for what we're really talking about here. I think I've told this before, but I'm going to use it again because it's works. "On the way to the top of the highest peak in the French Alps there is a small inn – a respite for mountain climbers. "Imagine coming off a day of climbing in the icy, windy French Alps," says Dr. Jay Strack. "The cold has seeped into your bones. You're exhausted, and every muscle in your body hurts. At the Inn, you find a hot meal and a warm bed. You begin to relax, put your feet up, soak in the Jacuzzi. Who wouldn't like that? But success is not found in rest and comfort. Success—reaching the top of the mountain—requires going back out into the cold and wind the next morning. It requires stretching and straining and working towards the goal.

“The English name for the Inn is ‘the Half-way Inn’, but about 80% of climbers never go any farther than that Inn. It doesn’t mark half-way for them. They get too comfy. In French, the Inn bears the same name. The French word for half-way is ‘Mediocre’. The Mediocre Inn. Its name has nothing to do with the quality of service, but rather, with the quality of climbers. 80% are mediocre. They are content with half-way. [2 ¶s cited by Pat Williams with David Wimbish, *Secrets from the Mountain* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2001), p. 221; adapted here from “Resting at the Mediocre Inn” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] Sadly, you don’t witness the full splendor of the sunrise over the peaks from the Mediocre Inn.

Jesus does not spend time in the Mediocre Inn. He will return to the cold, to the wind, to the strain and the suffering and the agony. He will climb up that mountain all the way to the cross. God doesn’t settle for half-measures or partial gains. God will go the whole way to save the whole world.

“Dr. James B. Lemler tells about a couple of parents who had gone home from his church and during Sunday lunch were talking about his sermon. In the midst of their conversation, their second-grade daughter sitting at the table chimed in. “Oh, Father Lemler’s sermons, they’re always the same,” she said, “You know ... blah, blah, blah, ... love ... blah, blah, blah ... love.”

“That story got back to Dr. Lemler, and far from being offended by it, he thought to himself, “Hey, this little girl really got it: the message, the repetition, the core, the redundancy. That’s the gospel. “And so it goes,” says, Dr. Lemler, “. . . Over and over again . . . blah, blah, blah, love . . . blah, blah, blah, love...” [originally from http://day1.org/1094-blah_blah_blah_blah_love; as used in “Yada, Yada, Yada” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com, adapted here]

Except, of course, that to actually live it—blah, blah, blah...love—well, it’s the hardest thing you’ll ever do. It’s the part of your identity you’ll joyfully struggle to live out the rest of your life.

Before I bring this to a close, there is one misconception out there that we need to address, and that is this: that Christianity advocates suffering and denial simply because it’s good for us to suffer. But you know, I can’t find any evidence that Jesus advocated suffering or denial merely for the sake of suffering and denying oneself. Jesus wasn’t an old curmudgeon. He suffered because he believed in something greater than himself; because he had something worth suffering for—namely, love for you and I. Hear his words: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.... Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come!” Jesus was a lover and a dreamer. And he calls us to be that too. He calls us to be ready to suffer or to deny ourselves when the alternative is to lose ourselves. There are things worth suffering and dying for. There are things we need to deny ourselves, lest we forget who we are. There are dreams for which it is worth risking everything. So yes, we are called beyond mediocrity to whole-hearted commitment. We are called to let the sinful nature within us die in order to let our best selves live.

And a final observation from the text this morning is this: we are called into relationship. Says Jesus, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He says this to indicate the kind of death he’ll die. But I think he also says it to indicate the kind of Kingdom he’s building. One that draws all people – the world.

Maybe it’s not a rainbow we chase. Maybe it’s not mythical or hypothetical or inconsequential. Maybe it’s not a world away. Maybe it’s not over there. Maybe it’s right here, right now. Maybe there’s evidence of an intangible reality—a place where love and life squash hate and fear—a place that has to be believed in order to be seen (to quote U2). It is no illusion. It is here among us. In the light of the cross, we can see it. We can taste it. We can smell it. We can feel it deep within. We can live it. And it lifts us to new life – Lovers; Dreamers; You; Me. Thanks be to God. Amen.