

**Sunday 18th March 2018**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (B)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Jeremiah 31.31-34**

**NT: Hebrews 5.5-10**

**G: John 12.20-33**

### **We want to see Jesus**

Given the weather that we have had recently , the Freezing cold of the “Beast from the East” earlier in the month and even yesterday as I sat at my desk writing this sermon watching the snow flurries, it is hard to imagine that at 16.15 on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March is the moment when the tilt of the Earth’s axis and Earth’s orbit around the sun combine in such a way that the axis is inclined neither away from nor toward the sun and for us in the Northern Hemisphere Spring will become , sunrise will be earlier each day ,sunset later days will stretch out and new life will burst forth from the cold hard soils. Well at least that is the theory! Spring is for me the favourite time of the year, the promise of longer days, warm sunshine, new life. Hopefully the cold and dark of winter can be put behind us for a few months but of course we need the dark and cold to bring forward the spring. The flowers that burst forth need to come from the depths of the cold earth. The new life that must come from death.

There is a strong theme of the cost to God of rescuing humanity running through these texts this morning. In Jeremiah, it is hinted at in the fact that God chooses to forgive his wayward people, so that they will have a chance to know him afresh. In both Hebrews and John, the cost is personal and borne by Jesus. In both texts there is a strong focus on his anguish and suffering. Both John and Hebrews allow us behind the curtain into the psyche of Jesus, to get a hint of the pain he endured to rescue us from the darkness of death.

Only John’s gospel tells us about this incident. I am sure this is because John was writing to Greeks in a way that they would appreciate and understand, and it was appropriate that the first Greeks to come to Jesus should find a place in his gospel.

It was not unusual to find Greeks in Jerusalem at Passover time. They were keen travellers, driven by an urge to see and learn new things. They travelled for trade, but they were also the first people in the ancient world to wander for the sake of it and Jerusalem was a natural destination for such travellers!

Not only were they keen travellers but they had enquiring minds, searching for new philosophies and searching for the truth, how had they heard of Jesus and what had stimulated their interest in him?

Perhaps they were in the outer Court of the Temple, the Gentiles' Court, when Jesus cast out the money-changers and sellers of doves. They would want to know more about someone who could do things like that with such authority and Godly wrath.

Whatever the reason; their curiosity led them to approach Philip, the disciple with the most Greek sounding name, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus!"

Unsure about this, Philip consulted Andrew, but Andrew had learned that Jesus would never turn anyone away and so brought them to Jesus.

"Sir, we would like to see Jesus!"

What Jesus said as Andrew introduced them came as a shock to his listeners. It begins with a saying which would excite; and it ends with a series of sayings which were the last things anyone would expect or want to hear.

"The hour has come", began Jesus, "that the Son of Man should be glorified." Things had been building up to a crisis, and that crisis had now come. But Jesus' idea of what that crisis involved was quite different from anyone else's. To the Jews, the Son of Man represented the undefeatable world conqueror sent by God as predicted in the book of Daniel, so the first part of Jesus' statement led them to believe that the Golden Age was about to dawn. But Jesus meant something totally different! He turned their ideas upside down, replacing a dream of conquest with a vision of a cross. No wonder they failed to understand.

So, what was Jesus' shocking revelation? He was saying three things, which are all variations of one central truth at the heart of the Christian faith and life:

I. He was saying that only by death comes life. "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." A grain of wheat will never bear fruit in dry storage, as it were, in safety and security. It is when it is cast into the ground that it will bear fruit. It was by the death of the martyrs that the Church grew. It is only when we bury our personal aims and ambitions that we begin to be of real use to God.

2. Jesus was also saying that only by spending life do we keep it for eternal life. Those who love their lives are motivated by selfishness and by the desire for security and in the end will lose them.

3. Jesus was also saying that only by serving comes greatness. The people whom the world loves are those who serve others. Jesus came to the Jews with a new view of life. They regarded glory as conquest, the acquisition of power and the right to rule.

He looked on it as a cross. He taught men and women that only by death comes life; that only by spending life do we save it.; that only by service comes greatness.

In the closing verses of this passage, John shows us Jesus in distress but also experiencing a sense of triumph. In the company of his disciples and the Greeks, Jesus struggles in his spirit with his human longing to avoid the cross. No one wishes to die at thirty-three; and even less to die upon a cross. There would have been no virtue in Jesus' obedience to God if it had come easily and without cost. Real courage means being terribly afraid, and yet doing the thing that is necessary. That was the courage of Jesus.

But Jesus' crisis does not end in tension, but in triumph and certainty. He knew that by submitting to death on the cross, he would deal a death blow to Satan, the ruler of this world, and break forever the power of evil. Further, he knew that the sight of his upraised and crucified figure would in the end draw all people to him.

The voice of God came to Jesus between the tension and the triumph as it did at other key moments of his life; at his baptism when he commenced his ministry; on the mount of Transfiguration when he set his face to go to Jerusalem and the cross. And it now came to him in his final moments of human weakness.

'Now my soul is troubled,' says Jesus in words that are both unsettling and reassuring. Even Jesus is disturbed by the nature of the task that he has been given. How much more so are we by the difficulties and suffering that are part of human existence? But Jesus knows he must continue on his journey if God is to be glorified.

The voice that speaks from heaven (v.28) is heard as thunder by the crowd.

How many occasions might there have been when we failed to hear God's voice, or to recognise it when it spoke to us? Sometimes the tasks we are given seem too much to undertake, but we will find the strength we need to fulfil God's will for us.

When he gives us a task, he does not leave us to do it in the lonely weakness of our own strength. God is not silent, and when the strain of life is too much for us, and the effort of his way is beyond our human resources, if we listen we will hear him speak, and we will go on with his enabling strength.

How might God speak to us? If not thunder and angels, who might he use? There is a chance that he will speak as he acts – that is, through the most unlikely people! Hearing God's voice requires us to be listening for it at all times.

Fr Bill Addy