

John 12

March 17, 2024

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

PSALM 51:1-13

St. Patrick's Breastplate

JOHN 12:20-33

I admit John is my least favorite gospel. While I believe Jesus is light of the world, and the bread of life, I just don't think he went around saying so all the time. The Jesus of John's Gospel is a little too smooth for me. in control, too theological, and not very much like a real person.

In a multi-faith world where we respect and celebrate a multitude of paths to knowing God,  
Including a real resurgence of interest in Celtic and nature-rooted spiritual practice like that represented by Patrick I do not like John's insistence on Jesus as the only way,

I especially don't like the Gospel of John at this time of year when millions of Christians do what as we have done for hundreds of years-- read John's passion narrative over and over again naming the Jews as the villains

Today's Gospel passage can seem like an odd jumble of bits and pieces spliced together:

But it is really a nexus point between the first half of the book where we come to know Jesus for his actions.

And the second half, "the book of glory"-focused on the crucifixion and resurrection.

Every time you hear 'Glory' in John think -cross and empty tomb

### **Outsiders and "The Hour"**

Today Irish around the world -many of whom were displaced by starvation and poverty celebrate their resilience and resistance with parades of green. Next week Christians all over the world celebrate another parade of green- Palm Sunday.

but today's gospel passage actually comes after that triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Right after. At the end of the description of donkeys, palms and crowds and Hosannas

there is a little close up and some Pharisees, say to each other, "*You see, we can do nothing! The whole world has gone after him!*" and then begins today's passage

*"Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks."*

The word used to describe these people refers to non-Jews, not converts to Judaism or Hellenized Jews from Greece. They represent "the whole world" just mentioned. These Greeks seek out Phillip, a disciple with a Greek name, who approaches Andrew (another Greek name) and then (power in numbers) they both approach Jesus with their request.

The message travels to Jesus like a game of telephone and Jesus then there is a long dense paragraph in which Jesus teaches his disciples and we listen in on him praying and finally he says the words that connect back to the Greeks, the outsiders.

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

Now some commentators have concluded that the Greeks are rejected, that Jesus refuses to speak to them, blows them off as tourists and curiosity seekers

I do not think this is what is happening here. And the key is the word hour. Jesus hears about these outsiders and says:

*"**The hour** has come for the Son of Humanity to be glorified."*

Then a little bit later

*should I say—"save me from this **hour**"?*

*No, it is for this reason that I have come to this **hour**.*

Throughout the gospel we keep hearing hints about this hour.

At Cana Jesus says to his mother "*My hour has not yet come*"

opponents fail to arrest him because "*it is not yet the hour*"

At the well Jesus tells the Samaritan "*the hour is coming when we will worship neither on the mountain nor Jerusalem but in spirit and in truth.*"

The whole of the first half of the gospel has this building tension around the approaching hour. While the rest of it, the book of Glory describe the Hour – the hour of suffering, the hour of resurrection, the hour of confrontation with powers and principalities but also the liturgical hour, the hour of glory, and worship in spirit and truth.

And after 11 chapters of build-up, what catalyzes the hour?

—the arrival of the Greek foreigners.

The affirmation these foreigners, these outsiders is reinforced by the words: *'when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all people** to myself.'*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa says it this way “Jesus Christ said, ‘If I be lifted up, I will draw all, all, all - red, yellow, black and white, rich and poor, gay, lesbian and straight - all will be held in this incredible embrace of God.’” Not that everyone must accept this way but that all are invited and included.

But to be included with the Greeks and Jesus and the Kingdom movement in this hour, this lifting up and drawing-in is not bland politeness, not surface multiculturalism that “sees no colour” or a limp handed welcome on a Sunday morning but a powerful immersion in death and life—Christ is lifted up -- in crucifixion, in execution, in resurrection, in ascension, in community and we are lifted with him.

### **Green Wisdom**

Then Jesus says

*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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

This is an interesting passage, Even though Jesus was all about food and eating and sharing meals, John does not talk very much about agriculture.

Korean American biblical scholar Dong Heyon Jong says that he understands this plant wisdom best as a gardener, that resurrection is vegetal. “We live and die in Christ because, like the plants, we believe in Christ’s promise of renewed life...we are invited to let go of all of ourselves so we can be buried and be resurrected in Christ.”

The second part of this saying “those who love their life will lose it, those who hate their life will keep it” appears in each of the Gospels and, according to historical scholars, goes back to the core of the Jesus tradition, things that we can be pretty confident that Jesus said (rather than what his followers said about him)

Here in the Gospel of John is a glimpse of the historical Jesus and what he says about life and death.

Between the arrival of the Greeks and the green wisdom of the seed. Just for a moment John’s serene and in control Jesus admits:

*“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”?”*

This half verse is John’s version of Gethemene, we see Jesus as frightened, human and facing death.

## **Conclusion**

Jewish biblical scholar Meir Sternberg says:

the Bible habitually generates ambivalence... Characterization is complex, the motives mixed, the plot riddled with gaps and enigmas, behaviour unpredictable, surprises omnipresent, the language packed and playful.

This is certainly true of today’s Gospel

The exclusive Gospel waits for the outsider.

The theological Gospel connects to the historical tradition

The God-like Jesus shows his fear and humanity

And death and life, and us and them, and glory and shame are hopelessly entwined.

So here we are approaching the end of our Lenten journey, ambivalent, unsettled, troubled. Like those Greeks, looking for life and looking for glory, The hour has come, catalyzed when the divide between insiders and outsiders is broken. And we know it most deeply when we trust the green wisdom of the natural world.