

Jeremiah 31:31-34

John 12:20-33

Hebrews 5:5-10

“Lord, do not cast us away from your presence,
restore us with joy and willing spirits.” AMEN!

(Sing!)

“I was a sailor,
I was lost at sea

I was under the waves
before love rescued me

I was a fighter, I
could turn on a thread

Now I stand accused of
the things I’ve said

When love comes to town I’m gonna jump that train

When love comes to town I’m gonna catch that flame

Maybe I was wrong
to ever let you down

But I did what I did
before love came to town.”

I really thought last week's song was going to be the last one for a while, but I couldn't resist this one when it came to my mind during study for the message today.

That, of course, was U2's hit song "When Love Comes to Town," featuring B.B. King.

And we sang it today, because of the context and the setting of our gospel lesson.

You see, we've made a great leap into a text that occurs during Holy Week.

This account from John would have occurred somewhere between Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper.

Love has come to Jerusalem on the back of a donkey's colt.

We will encounter that event next week on Palm Sunday.

The people gave a stirring welcome and applauded his peaceful entry that was reserved for royalty.

The excitement was palpable and
Jerusalem glowed with the presence of Jesus.

As the population of the city
swelled for the festival,
love came to town and people associated
with Jesus sensed the vindication.

Others who had heard of Jesus
wanted to catch the flame of God that
burned so brightly in Him.

Today we learn about a group of these “other people.”

They were Greeks.

We are told they were among those who
“went up to worship,” so they were converts
to Judaism but probably did not
speak Hebrew.

So what do they do?

They find one of Jesus’ disciples
that had a Greek name, Philip.

You might recall Philip.

He was the one called to be a disciple by Jesus

and then Philip told Nathanael about Jesus
and Nathanael asked,

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

To which Philip said, “Come and See.”

Anyway, the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus
knew who to ask.

“It’s not what you know. It’s who you know,” right? :-)

They went to someone they’d know could
understand them and might even be
a little sympathetic to their wish
to see Jesus. (Pause)

We may wonder, what they were pursuing?

Maybe an autograph?

Would they, like Herod Antipas,
wish to see a miracle from Jesus?

We don’t know the answer for sure, but
we do know that people, even today,
come pursuing Jesus for different reasons.

When love comes to town,

people will have differing agendas.

Some will seek a healer,
others a spiritual mystic, others

will be looking for a reformer to
sit as government leader, or

perhaps like a chief executive to encourage
people to be their most excellent selves.

Still, others are sure that Jesus can be
the one to guarantee financial wealth and
life in abundance of material goods.

I wonder what it was that the Greeks
were looking to find in Jesus?

So, the text tells us Philip and Andrew
go to Jesus to tell them of the request.

This is all not much of a surprise but
what is a shock was what Jesus said.

He used the occasion to make
his most serious announcement.

“The hour has come.”

That's John's code language for
the time for "glorification."

For the Son of Man to be glorified, in John,
reveals God in Jesus' death,
resurrection and ascension.

Up until now in the gospel Jesus said,
"My time has not come," but
now the hour is here.

The kairos time.

Jesus was headed to the cross, not
because Greek people wanted to see him,
but because it was time to make clear
his purpose and his expectations of
what it meant (and means)
to follow him. (Pause)

When love came to town, Jesus used
plant language to explain
the way growth, decay, and even
death created more life.

When "the Word became flesh"
(a prominent phrase in John) the Word
came to die, but not just die, but
to bear much fruit.

If these Greeks want to see Jesus,
that's what they'll see.

“If any want to follow me,” he said,
“where I am, there will my servant be also.”

People will always seek Jesus
with differing agendas,

we can come and see, but followers of Jesus
will go where he goes.

Even unto the cross...
a place of suffering and death.

That's what love came to town for. (Pause)

How can we follow him there?

It's enough to trouble our souls.

Like it troubled Jesus' soul.

We might recognize that it involves
continual examination on the way we live.

What sorts of glory do we seek?

What do we pray for?

That's a good way to tell the way
we are following Jesus,
or merely saying, "I am a Christian."

I don't want to say you should never
pray for yourself, but if that is all you pray for,
then you're likely not denying yourself
or "losing your life" to follow Jesus.

(Pause)

But, even plants have a way of teaching us about
resurrection and as we wrap up our sermon
series for Lent, we might recall the way
we've grown since those ashes
were smeared on our foreheads.

What fruits have you and I born?

Let me name some of them for you.

You've made phone calls and written
and sent gifts to people that have
experienced the death of a loved one.

You've made food and set up and cleaned up
meals that have helped people know of
God's love and resurrection.

You've sang, played instrument and
danced in death's face.

You've assisted the hungry, provided shelter
for people without it, given away treasure
that was used for food and the mission of
the church.

There are countless things you've done
to bear fruit that I don't even know about...
but God knows them all.

Even outside of St. Stephen you've born
much fruit because love came to town
and rescued you and me.

AMEN!