

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷Now 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. ²⁸Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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It's hardly ever just what it seems in the Kingdom of God ... and our text has lots of examples of that truth.

For starters, those "Greeks." We wonder how folk from Greece got hooked up with Jesus in Palestine. But it's not what it seems. Already the Jewish community had become fragmented ... some of them speaking only Hebrew, others Aramaic, and – if you came from an urban center with international trade and commerce thriving – you'd be speaking Greek as well, if for nothing else but business reasons. I guess it's a pattern in middle eastern cultures ... ancient and modern ... to divide themselves into sects and clans. Markers of what is different between them, not common among them. And by the end of this text, Jesus did something about that as well.

And then there's their request: "We wish to see Jesus." Perhaps it confused even the disciples who wondered, "Do they want to speak with him?" or "Do they want to know where to find him?" or "Are they the kinds of skeptics who want to put Jesus to the test – see whether he lives up to his reputation?" So they tried to figure it out and checked first with one another, and finally with Jesus himself. But Jesus knew it wasn't what it

seemed – their request. It was the moment – the “God’s right time moment” – that would lead to his being glorified as the Son of God. But the route to that glory would be one that seemed anything but “glory filled.” It was **“to indicate the kind of death he was to die.”**

And even that wasn’t what it seemed – what seemed so clear on the surface. About there not being some sort of divine disclosure and maybe a coronation as the national and political superhero many faithful Jews had been expecting for generations. And even the **“voice ... 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.”** seemed to make that expectation likely.

So Jesus answered those “Greeks” initial request - **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”** – with what seems no answer at all, but is, in fact, the absolutely direct and eternally true response. **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** And for those who didn’t have eyes to see or ears to hear, they might have thought that it was simply “show time” to display to those doubting Greeks who he really was. But it wasn’t. Even that was not what it seemed, but meant much more.

“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.” Now that was pretty impressive. Especially to skeptical Greeks who expected profound, prophetic, wisdom-laden seers and exceptional leaders to speak with riddles that only the wise could hear.

But again it’s not what it seems. Jesus points out that the question they raise - **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”** – wasn’t to be answered in speaking only about him, the person, the individual. Oh, at one level it was. For those with “ears” and “eyes” it’s a clear foreshadowing of Jesus’ death ... on the cross and the Friday that we’d ironically call “Good” with the death so real that even the most faithful disciples were teetering on the brink of mortally-wounding doubt.

But it was more than it seems. **“ ... it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** The promise is not simply about the “seed that falls into the earth” – do you remember Bethlehem’s stable and the thirty plus years of Jesus’ life and ministry between then and now? – but about how God’s promise of Jesus’ presence and power in the world would continue until the end of time. **“... but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”**

Now that’s something our 21st century scientific minds can grasp. Plant a seed into the ground, dead as it is – at least “dormant” for us smart folk – and give it a little time to grow and some favorable circumstances – like water and (or?) – and “surprise!!!” ... you’ve got something living again. For those without ears or eyes that work the message is simply that Jesus would rise from the dead.

But it’s more than it seems. The point of the miracle of Jesus’ death and resurrection

was not to prove who he was – the glorified Son of God. It was to show – for all the world and all the future generations with eyes to see and ears to see – who we, his disciples and followers, are and are called to be. **“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”**

We’re called to be those who don’t prize the things of this world and all its truly deceptive if compelling prizes and goals and promises of its own glory as the things to love. We’re those who don’t get snared in love for those fleeting prizes, but focus on the life revealed in Jesus’ death and resurrection. For us. For us not just in the world to come, but in God’s eternal world ... not bound by time limits of our created order but only by God’s eternal will ... **“that all might be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”**

And what’s the truth? We heard it last Sunday. **“For God loved the world so much that he sent his only son that all those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life.”** See, it all comes together – week by week as we [gathered in worship at the foot of God’s Word and nourished at the Table of God’s Grace] give God the clear opportunity to, do what the prophet Jeremiah said God wants to do in today’s first reading. ³¹**The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.**

So we, loved by God eternally and unconditionally, are those who are saved now and forever in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus in whom we believe and trust. And that’s all by the gift of faith given in the Holy Spirit keeping the promise of God the Father in God’s eternal plan. Wow, what a blessing and what a marvelous truth and consummation of all that we could ever hope. Aren’t we the same folks eternally condemned by our own sin and perversity by nature? Right?

Well, yes, but it’s more than it seems. ²⁶**Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.** You see, it’s not just about the gift of salvation, it’s about the call to service ... in the world, for the world ... for the world God loved so much he gave his dearest for it. Yes, Jesus, God’s own Son. But also us, God’s sons and daughters made part of God’s family by the blessing of Holy Baptism. That “baptism” joins us to the death and resurrection of Jesus and all that it promises and all that it calls us to be and to do.

We're called to be Christ's servants in the world not just to be honored by the Father – see, there's always something more – but to lead any and all in this world who and which God loves into the blessed family of God, the blessed Body of Christ in this world, the community of God's presence and mission in the world.

³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." All people. Not just the Greeks who aren't quite sure, not just the disciples – those saints and sinners all at the same time this side of Christ's return who still wonder and doubt and fear and struggle. Not just those for whom faith and trust in God's promise seems so easy. Not just for those who don't seem to care at all if or who God is or might call. All people. That's the mission. That's God's mission. That's our mission.

And God's mission is relentless in its faithfulness. Jesus reminds us again that "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** And the fully human Jesus lets his wondering ... is it a foretelling of his Gethsemane agony? ... come to words. **²⁷Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'?**

But the power of God's Spirit prevails. "**No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.**" "... **Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'** And Jesus – and we, thanks to St. John – said this "**to indicate the kind of death he was to die.**"

And, thanks be to God, it was for life and salvation.

As a concluding thought, let me share these helpful words found on a blog ... the subject being the "seed" that fell into the ground in our text. Kerstin Berkey-Abbott's words ... sister in Christ from Trinity Lutheran in Pembroke Pines.

We might ... think about how that seed could represent our current lives. What part of your life do you need to let die, so that you can be transformed into something glorious? ... We spend much of our lives in the dark, damp earth – and that earth can be a metaphor for many things – what imprisons us? Is it our tendency towards anger? Despair? Does the dark stand for the substances we abuse? Does the dirt represent the behaviors that keep us from fulfilling our true potential as Christians? Before you plunge into sadness about all the ways you've fallen short, take heart. Remember that the dirt is also a nourishing medium. Seeds won't grow without dirt. All that dirt has gone a long way to protecting you for that time when you're ready to bloom.

In the Name of Jesus!

AMEN