

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Palm Sunday
4-1-07

Ken Peterson
John 12:12-33

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that there is an actual ordinance in Dallas, Texas that forbids

“Walking about aimlessly, with no apparent purpose, lingering, hanging around, lagging behind, idly spending time, delaying, sauntering, and moving slowly about?”

Have you ever been behind someone like that? It always happens when you're in a hurry. While we usually aren't contending with crowds much here in Omak, when you're in a city with crowded sidewalks or in a store with packed aisles and your way is blocked by one of those people Adelaying, sauntering, and moving slowly about, it can be frustrating. Or driving, you can almost count on it when you get on a section of road where you can't pass for a long time to be behind someone who is driving that way.

We have a lot of walking about [or going about] aimlessly, with no apparent purpose. However, a lot of people aren't “lingering” but rushing about with little significant purpose in their lives. I saw a bumper sticker a few months ago that brought a smile to me. It said, “What if the Hokey Pokey is What it's All About?” You remember the little dance done with that, don't you? “You put your right foot in, put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and you shake it all about. You do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself around. **That's what it's all about!**” You follow with different body parts until you get to “your whole self.” Of course what makes us smile at that bumper sticker is that we intuitively know that life's about a lot more than the Hokey Pokey.

Yet, I'm afraid that while we all know life is meant to be pregnant with purpose and meaning, many still are not sure exactly what that is for them. A poll taken by “USA Today” asked, “If you could ask God one question, what would it be?” The number one response was, “What is the purpose of my life?” Well God has already answered that question in the words of Jesus. This morning, Jesus tells us our purpose in life is to glorify God. But, just what does that mean, to glorify God?

This morning, as we come to the beginning of Holy Week in this Palm Sunday triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Jesus, we have opened before us in the words of Jesus, what this life is really all about. It comes after the hubbub of the crowds' exultant praise, proclaiming Him as the Messiah. Jesus gets reflective and says, (John 12:23-33)

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

“FATHER, GLORIFY YOUR NAME!”

We are not given very many prayers that Jesus prayed, but certainly when He's talking to His heavenly Father we are given insight into the heart of Jesus that is especially noteworthy. We remember His agonizing wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in just four days with that distillation of surrender to His Father, *nevertheless not my will, but Thy will be done* (Lk. 22:42). We remember His dying prayers from the cross. But this prayer with which He begins this week is equally deep and profound. He's marched directly into the midst of the plots of the Jewish leaders to have Him killed this week and He knows it. He feels the darkness and heaviness of the Devil's plots all coming against Him and He turns to prayer:

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (27-28).

And, that prayer is answered in an audible voice from heaven, *"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."* This is obviously an important moment.

This is the center point of John's Gospel both in terms of the story and the structure. The first 11 chapters lead up to this and the last 10 deal with the events of Holy Week—a watershed moment. And Jesus reveals His purpose, *for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!* Jesus' purpose is to glorify the name of His Father. But, that four word prayer, *Father, glorify your name*, also defines our purpose. For Jesus has just said, *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be* (26). So, just what does that four word prayer mean for us?

“Glory” and “glorify” are wonderful words, but words I have a hard time getting a hold of in terms of what that looks like in my life. Many of us know that great opening question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. “What is the chief end of man?”

A. “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”

There's that word again, “glorify.” To “glorify God” is to me a vague, spiritual-sounding phrase, but it lacks texture and application in my life. “Glory” is the noun and “glorify” is the verb. This is a great word, a light-filled word, describing something resplendent with beauty as a glorious sunset or a glorious day. It also refers to our bestowing honor and worshipful praise to God. But for all that, the question in the back of my mind is still, “Just exactly what does it mean for me to

Agglorify God? What does that look like in my life? Does it mean I just go through life always praising God? How do I Agglorify God@ in my daily life with my family life, at play, at work, and in my personal time?"

But here, John's Gospel provides considerable help because "glory" or "glorify" is used frequently in this Gospel, some 38 times. Looking at how John uses it gives texture, meaning, and depth to what is being said.

The word first occurs in Jn. 1:14B

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Then, in chapter 2, after Jesus' first miracle in turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, we are told, *He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.* (John 2:11) After the healing of the man at the pool at Bethesda, "glory" (5:44, RSV). At the Feast of Tabernacles, "glory" (7:18, RSV). And then, just before the events of this day, before Jesus returns to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, He tells His disciples that Lazarus' death is for the glory of God, that *God's Son might be glorified through it* (Jn 11:4). Just before Lazarus is resurrected, Jesus tells Martha, *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* (John 11:40). Now, our text begins with "glory" and ends with "glory" and the word is used five times in six verses. And here, it clearly refers to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Recapping what John is telling us is that, the glory of God is revealed in the life of Jesus through His miracles, His healing, His teaching, and through His death and resurrection. In Jesus, God has immersed Himself into all of life and through this One Life shown us what we are all created to be- we are meant to be like and live like Jesus and in so living to glorify God. This places it all in the context of real living.

LETTING GO

As we get to this pivotal teaching in John 12:23-26 that is the perfect summary of the Christian life:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be."

The first level of meaning for this metaphor of a seed Adying@ is of course Jesus= own death. But, Jesus also clearly means it applies to us as well, for He ends that metaphor with, *Whoever serves me must follow me.* So, the seed dying refers to us too. Let's explore this a little more.

On these spring days, those of us with gardening in our blood are itching to get out in the soil. In a few weeks, we'll be out there putting seeds in the ground. Use your imagination a moment and think of a lettuce seed talking to us and saying,

"PLEASE let me stay in this packet with all my friends. This is comfortable, it is safe, and it is all I know. What will happen to me if you put me into that ground? I'll be alone,

in the dark, and the water will dissolve my protective shell. No way!”

And, you try to explain,

“Yes, but the result will actually be more life than you can imagine. Look at the picture on the package. That will be you in a few weeks. But first, you have to let go of the only life you know. The results will be glorious, beyond what you feel now or can even imagine. Your shriveled little self will look like this wonderful, leafy creation. But it can only happen if you let go and let me put you into the ground. Trust me.”

The end result looks nothing like the seed, does it? But isn't the result wonderful?

That's what Jesus says we all must do to experience the miracle of His life within us. We need to let go, surrender to His purpose, trusting Him to bring forth the glory of the life He has designed for us. As my brother says on this, “The good news is that we don't have to wait until we die to die. We don't have to wait until our funerals before we know what's going on” As Teresa of Avila said, “The pay begins in this life.” Elsewhere Jesus refers to this as “life more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). This life is eternal life that begins right now in this life.

To glorify God in our lives means total surrender to His purposes in everything. The Christian life is not merely an addition, a helpful power we add to help us do what we're already doing. It is death and resurrection. It is an entirely new life illustrated by the seed's death in order to rise again. It is a life reconfigured to reflect the glory of God.

Here, on this day, Jesus in the midst of the glorious acclamation of Palm Sunday and even the Greeks now want an audience with Him- a whole new territory for evangelism. Jesus knows the Father's will is for Him to die in a few days. So, Jesus prays this powerful prayer of relinquishment,

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (27-28).

Right here, Jesus is laying down His way to be absorbed into the glory that God has designed. And, in Jesus' resurrection and our salvation it is indeed glory beyond anything we could ever begin to imagine.

Even in this life, we know the laying down of our lives reveals the greatest glory. This past January there was that marvelous incident in a New York City subway station. A 19-year-old film student, Cameron Hollopeter, suffered a seizure while waiting for a train. As his body convulsed out of control, he fell off the platform onto the tracks in the path of the inbound train. Fortunately, a 50-year-old construction worker named Wesley Autrey saw the situation and immediately made a decision to risk his own life to save Cameron. Leaving his two daughters behind, Autrey jumped down on the tracks to pull Cameron off. Then he realized he didn't have enough time to get him off the tracks. So, with only seconds to spare, he rolled Cameron into the drainage trough between the tracks and lay on top of him. An instant later, the train thundered over both of their flattened bodies with only inches to spare, above Autrey's body.

Doesn't a sacrificial action like that reveal something of our glory? Contrast that to a self-

absorbed life that continually looks out for number one. The glory that we are created to be is most fully revealed in sacrificial love and service to others. Giving, not getting is the way of Jesus. In it we have a call to continually lay down our plans and ideas to enter into His way-- a life that is bigger, more fulfilling, of greater worth, and indeed, glorious. Contrast a Mother Teresa with the Hollywood stars our culture goes wild over. In which life is glory truly revealed?

In Matthew's Gospel, this teaching is given in terms of the cross itself:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matt 16:24-25)

This "saving our lives," protecting, keeping control of things, doing it our way, is the opposite of the way of Jesus. Paul interprets this further when he says,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

Yes, giving up our way so God can do things His way often feels like crucifixion. But in doing this, we do find real life.

A TROUBLED HEART

Note also that Jesus' prayer here of relinquishment begins with the statement, *"Now my heart is troubled."* The answer to a troubled heart is not deliverance on our terms, but letting go of our lives to God's purpose. How often we try to use God for our purposes and that has to do with sparing us pain, difficulties, and making life work well for us. Jesus knows the road ahead is going to be incredibly difficult. Apparently He even has some choice in this. But He doesn't ask for deliverance but only to be used by God for God's glory.

Some here today may be thinking, "Yes, my heart is troubled." Many things trouble us, don't they? We can be troubled about our marriage, our children, or a major health issue facing us or someone we love. Thoughts of our future, our past, and our present circumstances can trouble our hearts. We can be troubled about global warming, about politics, about terrorism, and about Iraq. We often try to give one another assurance in these times saying, "Everything's going to be all right." That may be our hope and ultimately, for the believer, after all is said and done, we know all things will be made right. But in the meantime, there can be a huge amount of trouble. Jesus is marching right into the teeth of trouble with a capital "T" for this final week. And, we often find ourselves facing trouble that can't be avoided. Following Jesus and being obedient to Him doesn't mean the road will be smooth. But this prayer of Jesus, *Father, glorify your name*, changes everything. It is saying, "Lord, if your glory can be revealed in my sickness, or what ever other trouble I face, then I accept it. Be glorified!"

I don't know how many times in my ministry I've been with people as they've struggled in the midst of trouble and finally come to the place of making that prayer of surrender to God, accepting whatever He can use for His glory in their lives. But, I've never seen this prayer sincerely prayed when and it didn't bring peace. The heart that was troubled is no longer troubled.

CONCLUSION

A few chapters later, in John 17, this word “glory” is used nine times in that great prayer Jesus prays for himself, but also for us. In it He says, *The glory you have given me I have given them...* (17:22). That is a prayer for us. He’s given us His glory. Let us live lives that express that glory. That indeed is what it’s all about.