Sunday, 3/17/24

**John 12:20-33**

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.

27“Now 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.

**Sermon**

Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover when a group of Greeks come looking for him. His outspokenness has already attracted attention: crowds of followers are forming around him and the religious authorities are looking for opportunities to get rid of him. Jesus knows that he’s going to the cross soon. This story makes it seem like Jesus has become a celebrity: The Greeks want to see him, so they approach Philip, one of the disciples, who finds Andrew, one of the first disciples and apparently part of Jesus’s innermost circle, and Philip and Andrew go to Jesus to see about getting an audience for the Greeks. Word of mouth is an important part of how Jesus has gained followers. John the Baptist tells his followers about Jesus, and some of them (including Andrew) start following Jesus. Andrew goes and tells Simon about Jesus, and Simon follows him. The Samaritan woman at the well tells other people in her village about Jesus, and they come to check him out. Faith doesn’t come immediately in any case, but the initial “coming and seeing” suggested by someone else is often a starting point.

People are still trying to see Jesus. Even those of us who grew up in the church have trouble seeing him sometimes.

* World problems: war (Ukraine, Middle East) continuing and threatening to get worse; climate change; our leaders don’t act in good faith; mass shootings; racism; women’s health politicized
* Our own personal doubts: we get old, get sick, lose loved ones, struggle to get by—where is Jesus? He’s kind of an abstraction
* Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, Open the eyes of my heart. I want to see You, I want to see You: To see You high and lifted up, Shinin' in the light of Your glory, Pour out Your power and love, As we sing holy, holy, holy…
* We want to sing this, but like Jesus, our hearts are troubled. We say with a man in Mark, “I believe. Help my unbelief.”

We are just as likely as those Greeks to find Andrew and Philip and ask to see Jesus.

Jesus’s response to the request for an audience is strange: he doesn’t even seem to answer directly whether he’ll see them or not. Instead he says that the Son of Man’s hour has come to be glorified and talks about seeds.

* 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.
  + A grain/seed is a small thing that can’t be eaten—without being planted in the ground it doesn’t grow or feed people
  + It falls into the ground, grows into a plant, can spread, or be harvested and feed people
  + In your hand a grain of wheat does nothing; in the ground it germinates, grows, turns into a living plant
* Jesus is talking about his impending death and resurrection
  + Jesus being lifted up from the earth
    - On the cross, also in the ascension to heaven into God’s presence
    - This isn’t being glorified in the normal (human) sense—but by falling into the ground (death) he makes God’s presence available to all of us (imagery of the vine that we are all connected to)
  + If he chooses not to do this, he remains one man who lived a sinless life; without dying and rising this amounts to little other than an inspirational story
  + If he does die and rise, he “germinates”
    - He spends three days dead, and rises to new life
    - We receive the Spirit, Christ “abides” in us and germinates—his influence grows in our lives
* Seeing Jesus
  + Our own hearts are troubled by what we see, what we go through
  + Jesus’s heart was troubled because he knew what was coming: he knew the suffering he would go through, the evil of people who could do that to him
  + Jesus knows our suffering—he’s with us now
  + He “germinates” in our hearts; we first hear about him from others, as we follow “the way” we see him more clearly in ourselves and in the world