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We told you during the announcement time that next week is Palm Sunday and we will talk about that important marker in the journey of Christ to His cross then. But if you notice as you marked your bible for the reading of the text this morning that John dealt with that day in the scriptures just prior the words I read for you as my text.

How many times have I told you that the context is so important. John is good at helping us see *the progression of events* that will take place which will lead to his death on the cross. We are well into Lent, a time in many places where sermons often take on that somber note of guilt for our inability to follow the commands of our Christ, and like Peter are reminded that we come up short in our promise not to forsake Him.

In John we have an orderly progression of our Lord to Jerusalem and Holy Week which include the arrest, the trial, the crucifixion, and Jesus' burial in a borrowed tomb. And John suggests in the first few chapters that Jesus knew what he was all about and might actually have even chosen the day that he would make his journey to the city during the festival of Passover. It was not just a one-day affair and there were many people who made the journey earlier than Jesus did.

John helps us see the tension build between Christ and his followers and the religious and political leaders that were leading actors in the drama during those crucial final days of Jesus' life.

So, let's take a little journey with John.

He outlines the account of Jesus feeding the 5000. This is something that one would think would not been that big a deal, but it was because it got the crowds into following this miracle worker and the leaders made a comment about how the crowds had gone after him. This worried them because He was becoming too popular.

John tells us then about a miracle of healing which should be a reason for rejoicing that a person who was blind could now see. But you could get in trouble for even doing a good thing particularly if you did in on the Sabbath. The interpretation of the Pharisees was that healing was work and that was forbidden on the Sabbath.

The Scribes had gone to great lengths to define what constituted work. How many steps could be taken on the Sabbath was laid out. The weight of clothing and jewelry was an important topic. They debated if you could help an oxen out of a ditch on the Sabbath. So, Jesus could not be who he said that he was if he were going to heal on the Sabbath.

But he became so popular with these healings and feeding of the people that the number of those who sought him out and followed him were growing so fast among the Jewish and Gentile populations that the religious leaders became upset and even sought to arrest him on one occasion but he gave them the slip because, as he said, his hour had not yet come.

There is an interesting point to be made here. The word used for "*hour*" in other places in John is not the hour on the clock but rather the word that refers to the "*destined hour of God.*" That time is not avoidable or moveable. It was the time that God had destined that something should be done.

But the word used in this instance is "*Kairos*" which characteristically means an opportunity; that is, the best time to do something, the moment when circumstances are most suitable, the psychological moment. It would seem that Jesus is not saying here that the destined hour of God has not come but something simpler. He is saying that that was not the best moment which would give him the chance for

which he had been waiting to demonstrate his mission in life.

This helps us to understand the conversation he had with his brothers at home, who could not seem to get as enthused about his ministry as one might expect. They knew that a trip to Jerusalem could be dangerous and yet they encouraged him to go at the beginning of the festival and Jesus said he would not go. But the idea of his hour coming might help to explain why after he said he would not go that he decided that he would go. What He was saying to his brothers when he said he was not going to Jerusalem, *because his hour had not yet come*, was simply saying if I go there now, with you, I will not have the opportunity I need.

So, he delayed his coming until the middle of the festival, when the crowds would already be there and that time would give him the opportunity to show the people who would greet him the reason and purpose of his life, what his real mission was—that of giving his life so he might draw, not just the crowds who followed him because of his healing and feeding, but all the world to him.

And we know it got the attention of some folk alright. Jesus arrival caused even more consternation among the religious leaders because on that Palm Sunday there were people who lined the path on which he made his way into Jerusalem, laying palm branches in his path to make it a path of honor. But they also hailed Him as King of Israel.

That, of course, surprised those Roman authorities who assumed they were the ones who ruled over Israel, and it was not liked by the religious leaders because they wanted to keep the status quo with the Romans so they would not march in and shut them all up by closing the Temple. In fact, however, this gave the religious leaders the opportunity to work with the Romans to accomplish both of their purposes.

So, in John's gospel, all of this was prelude to the story in our text for this morning. And it was another story of other people who came to seek Jesus out to find out what he was really all about. It could be interpreted as another sign of the way his popularity was growing when even the Greeks and other Gentiles sought him out. This was a sign of the fact that he had indeed come so that "all the world would be saved."

This text is also a brief prelude to Jesus's lengthy "*Farewell Discourse*" which is in itself a unique aspect of John's Gospel. Just as last week we heard about Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, today we read of some other inquirers coming to worship trying to figure out who Jesus is and what he's up to: "*Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.'*" (John 12:20-21).

And isn't that what each of us wants? Surely this is the reason why we show up at church on a Sunday like this one. We want to see Jesus.

Sometimes, in finding out who Jesus is and what his mission is we find out more than what we wanted to know.

I think one of the things we might learn from this part of the text is that today IT IS OUR TURN to introduce people to the Good News that we are loved by God in a transformative way that can lead to a whole new view of the world and how to live in that world as followers of the one who was the Good News.

When the Greeks came they were what we might call "*seekers*" in the church today. People who are interested in knowing what the Christian message is really all about. So, they find Philip.

We don't know for sure why Philip was sought out. It is suggested that it may have been because of his Greek name or that he came from Bethsaida, a cosmopolitan town with many Greeks living in it. After they explain to Philip that they would like to see Jesus, Philip then goes to Andrew and the two of them go together to see Jesus.

Let me suggest that this could help us see why the Church was founded in the first place and the

only way it will continue today. Those who have not seen Jesus with their own eyes or heard him with their own ears, must depend upon one who has heard the good news to share the story with them. In John we read: *“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us.”*

IT IS OUR TURN—to share what we have seen and heard. Some will say that they have not seen the Lord. But I think each of us have seen the Lord, if we have been paying attention in many of the things we have seen in others that we encounter every day of our lives.

To even better understand this, we listen as Jesus goes on to talk about the grain that falls into the earth and dies and because it dies it bears much fruit. And then he goes on to say, *he who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me the Father will honor him.”*

Christ expects those who claim to be His to follow in his steps, to adopt his standards of value, and to put their lives to the same uses he did. For the whole point of Christianity is to reach toward Christlikeness; and its end and goal is that we obtain that Christlikeness to show that we have been near the Master and reflect his ways so that others may see and come to him and know the difference between living in the new Kingdom and still following old patterns.

Isn't it too often the case that for many people Christianity is a theory to be accepted rather than a life that it is to be daily and actively lived out. We have some vague idea of what it tells us that Christ does for us but have not made a decision to cause it to make a difference in our lives. These are those who become one of the great stumbling blocks to the progress of the Kingdom of God. That it is why it has been said that the Indian independence leader Gandhi once stated, *“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”*

Some have said they have never found if it is true or not that it should be attributed to him but you get the point anyway. IT IS NOW OUR TURN to take up our cross and follow the Christ where he leads not where we want him to go. It would be sad if people will say when they see us calling ourselves Christians when we are not taking on the attributes of the one after whom we call ourselves.

It was Jesus who said if you are to follow me you must take up your cross and follow me. And yet when we invite people into the fellowship of the church and they ask us *“if I do what it to be expected of me”* we say just come and you can do what you feel you want to do. That is not what Jesus said to those who would follow him. He said you must be willing to take up a Cross, to accept the distain of friends and family, to do things when it is not easy—even to the cost of laying down your life.

Years ago, when the Betty Crocker Company first began selling their cake mixes, they offered a product which only needed water. All you had to do was add water to the mix, which came in the box, and you would get a perfect, delicious cake every time.

It bombed. No one bought it and the company couldn't understand why, so they commissioned a study which brought back a surprising answer. It seemed that people weren't buying the cake mix because it was too easy. They didn't want to be totally excluded from the work of preparing a cake; they wanted to feel that they were contributing something to it. So, Betty Crocker changed the formula and required the customer to add an egg in addition to water. Immediately, the new cake mix was a huge success. Unfortunately, many people make the same mistake when it comes to *“packaging”* or presenting the Christian religion. They try to make the call of Jesus Christ as easy as possible because they're afraid people won't *“buy it”* if it seems too hard.

But, I have found that not to be the case. We call them to a lifetime, lifechanging, lifegiving commitment to the Good News of the gospel and our willingness to point others to him. People want to see Jesus and multitudes have followed even after they heard what they had to do to follow, yes even

though it was not and is not easy.

Jesus speaks of his cross ironically, when he says to the gathered disciples, *“And when I am lifted up, I’ll draw everyone to me.”* But we have to invite people to see Jesus.

Over the years I have been invited to be the guest preacher in many pulpits. Whenever I preach in a church I haven’t been to before, I am always anxious to stand behind the pulpit to get a feel for it. I want to stand there and look out at the still empty pews and imagine the people I will be preaching to. I want to hold the pulpit to see how it feels. Most of all, however, I want to sneak a peek inside the pulpit – just to see what’s back there.

A lot of you have never looked behind the pulpit, but there are a couple of shelves in most pulpits, and you often find unusual sorts of odds and ends back there. This one only has one.

Let me share with you some of the things in this pulpit--

I can remember preaching in one church and on one of the shelves was a fire extinguisher. Often wondered about that until I remember how fast wood can burn and I see how candles are handled incandlelight services.

I can remember visiting another church and finding, of all things, a telephone. Throughout the sermon my mind kept wondering, *“What do I do if it rings? Stop preaching and answer it? They didn’t tell me.”*

Well on that shelf in the pulpit in the chapel at Columbia Theological Seminary there is a small sign. It is a brass plate with an inscription, quoting the New Testament lesson for today. *“Sir, we would see Jesus.”*

Of course, seminaries have changed a great deal in the past few decades since that chapel was built, and I am told that someone had scotched taped an appendix to that quote, so that the sign now read, *“Sir, or Madam, we would see Jesus.”*

When people ask us to see this Jesus, what do we tell them or how do we live that will reveal who He is?

In the Gospel of John, *“seeing”* means more than simply looking at something. It is believing. It’s understanding the faith, it is commitment to the faith.

They don’t want to learn ABOUT Jesus.

They want to see him.

They want to believe in him.

They want to know him and follow him.

Have you seen Jesus?

The man told his pastor: *“You know me, I’ve never been very clear about the theology stuff,”* he said. *“And I’m not that great a believer.”*

The pastor was having what would be his last conversation with a man who was loosely connected with his congregation. He was in the hospital and in his last days, or maybe hours, of life, laid low by a cancer that was unstoppable.

“All I know about God is summed up in this.” He said, weakly, pointing to a small silver cross that he wore around his neck. *“That’s why, at my funeral, I’d like just one hymn to be sung. ‘Lift High the Cross.’ That’s my favorite. That song sums up everything I know about God.”*

At his funeral, two weeks later, they indeed sang, *“Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim.”* I don’t know if that hymn was written after the writer read this Sunday’s Gospel lesson, but it could have been. Jesus is preparing his followers for his departure.

My friends, if *“we would see Jesus”* we have to have someone tell us about him hanging on the cross, dying for and us drawing all people to him to be his followers and to be changed in so many ways.

